



# GRAVITY

A PRINCIPLE THAT CHANGES EVERYTHING

*Series Devotional*



# *INTRODUCTION*

Every year, the church budget starts again at \$0. Every year, I have the opportunity to assess my giving to the church and recommit. Every year, giving is a challenge. How can I predict my upcoming financial year? What if something unexpected happens? What if I need every penny I earn? It is easy to stress about finances, even when things are going well, because we all know how quickly things can change.

And yet, God calls us to give. Our understanding of that call is so crucial for the development of our faith and our becoming deeply devoted followers of Jesus Christ.

Taking the time to really consider our giving is so important that we are going to be talking about this as a whole church for several weeks. I hope this curriculum helps you enter into that discussion. I hope you think about your giving, and I hope you talk about it with your families, small groups, Sunday Morning Classes, play groups, mission teams, and Bible studies. I hope you commit or recommit to give to the church, not for the sake of the church as an institution, but for the sake of your relationship with God and for the sake of the church's mission for the kingdom of God.

We are all in this together as the one body of Christ that is Highland Park United Methodist Church. And as we begin to celebrate our first 100 years and look forward to the future, we can do so with gratitude to those who have gone before us, and with a willingness to help shape the church for future generations. What we do today, including what we give, matters not only to us but also to those who will come after us.

May all that we do and give be in the name of Jesus Christ and for the sake of the kingdom of God, now and forever.

Blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Paul Rasmussen". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending from the end.

Rev. Paul Rasmussen

# *THE GRAVITY OF THE SITUATION.*

There is a force that is all around us, that is necessary for our very existence, that affects everything we do, but that we don't often think about and that we usually take for granted. That force is gravity. Now, before we go any further, let's agree to leave physics to the experts. A very humble and basic understanding of gravity reveals that the gravity of an object is always proportional to the mass of the object. For example, the gravitational pull on earth depends on the earth's mass. The bigger the object (like a planet or a star, like the sun) the greater the gravitational pull. The sun is 333,000 times the mass of earth, and therefore has more gravitational pull than the earth does. If the earth were to increase in mass (and stay the same size) then the gravitation pull would increase (as would how much we see when we step on a scale).

Make sense? The pull of gravity is directly proportional to the mass of an object. The more the mass, the more the gravity. And the harder it is to escape the pull.

Gravity isn't the only force that acts like that in our lives. Money, wealth, and accumulation also impacts us that way: the more we have, the stronger the force is that makes us want to keep it. Just like the relationship between literal mass and the force of gravity, the more money, wealth, and stuff we amass, the more difficult it is for us to let it go. And unfortunately, research seems to back this up. Studies show that people who earn at least \$200,000 give a smaller percentage away than do those who earn closer to \$50,000 per year.<sup>1</sup> **The more money we have, the stronger the pull of our money on our lives.**

In his book, *How To Be Rich*, Andy Stanley makes an excellent point when it comes to having money. He says that “simply possessing wealth doesn’t make you good at managing it.” In fact, it can make it harder to manage. The reason this is such an excellent point is because it doesn’t put a minimum amount on what it means to be wealthy. **It doesn’t matter how much wealth you possess, you need to manage it well.** If not, the gravitational pull of however much wealth you do have will get greater and greater, and will ultimately be a trap impossible to escape.

Think of the television show *Hoarders*. While many of these people clearly struggle with mental illness, it is a hyperbolic example of how having some can often lead to not being satisfied and constantly wanting more, to the point of horrible, detrimental, and sometimes life-threatening situations. It makes sense then that Jesus would warn listeners of the dangers of letting possessions, including money, take over our lives. Powerfully, Jesus gives us this advice in Matthew 6,

*“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Matthew 6:19-21)*

Jesus does not say NOT to “store up” treasure. The issue for Jesus is *where* we will store our treasure. And where we store up our treasure, will reveal where our heart is. In Hebrew, the word for “heart” means “oneself.” So, this statement is about where we find our whole selves. Jesus is saying that the location of our treasure is a matter of our entire identity. So, will we store our treasure and invest our possessions in things that are temporary, conditional, and will fade away? Or will we store it in things that are eternal and that will always be? Will we find our identity in those things that won’t last, or in the things that last forever?

Jesus then says, “No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth,” further emphasizing his point about our being. **His statement presupposes that we will serve something, that we will find our identity in a relationship with something, and what that thing is, is our master. For the people Jesus was talking to, as for us today, it is all too easy to yield to a culture that says our identity is wrapped up in what we possess, instead of in who created us.** It is too easy to orient our lives around what we have or don’t have; in other words, it is too easy to serve our wealth rather than have our wealth serve us and God.

The more money we have, the more the pull of that money, and the less we are able to manage our money. The less we manage our money, the more our money manages us, and the more our identity is found in our money. The more, then, we serve our money, and it becomes our master.

<sup>1</sup><http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2013/04/why-the-rich-dont-give/309254/>

## ***REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:***

How much time, energy, thought, and/or worry do you expend in dealing with money?

What do we personally receive from our wealth?

Are you content with your level of wealth?

Do you feel like your understanding and relationship with money is healthy?

Do you compare what you have to others?

Do you have a monetary goal in mind for where you are in life right now?

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Do you think your relationship with money is more reflective of your beliefs as a Christian or the culture in which you live and work?

Do you think that Jesus was anti-money or anti-wealth?

When Jesus challenged the wealthy, do you think he was questioning the morality of being wealthy or the priorities of the wealthy?

Do you think that Jesus had any ulterior motives when he taught about money? Do you think folks in your culture have ulterior motives when teaching about money?

Is there anything wrong about being a “consumer?”

# ***FAMILY CORNER***

## **Activity:**

*Experiment with Mass & Gravity*

## **Materials:**

- clothes hanger
- yarn or string
- paper or plastic cups (same size/shape)
- hole punch
- tape (optional)

Punch two holes in each cup, string with yarn, and tie to the hanger keeping length of yarn equal on both. Use tape if needed to keep string from slipping from ends of hanger.

Hold the hanger by the hook and experiment placing various coins in each cup. Place one quarter in one of the cups. What happens to the cup? What happens if you place a penny in the empty cup? Does it have enough mass to outweigh the quarter? Now try adding a dime to the penny cup. What happened to the cups? The more mass (or coins in our case) the cup has, the more weight, or pull of gravity upon it.

## **Discussion:**

If the greater the mass, the greater the gravitational pull, what happens when we keep adding coins to only one of the cups?

Read Mathew 6:20-21 together as a family. Write on a notecard to memorize this week Matthew 6:21, “For where your treasure is, your heart will be also.” Discuss as a family what this verse means to each person. How can you tell what you truly treasure?



## This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

# *IT'S ALL ABOUT BALANCE.*

What is a star? There have been many poetic, romantic, and spiritual attempts to explain the tiny dots of light that we can see at night if we're lucky enough to be in a place where we can actually see them.

However, let's get scientific for a sec. Just a sec. Stars are actually spheres of different gases held together by their own gravity. And here's the key factor: that gravity is exerting a constant force to collapse the star in on itself. The only thing preventing that collapse is the nuclear reactions happening in the middle of the star, causing energy to be pushed outward. This is called hydrostatic balance or hydrostatic equilibrium. The gravity of the star must be perfectly balanced with the energy output from the star in order for the star to exist in any sort of stable way. If the star's gravity were to increase, or the energy output

were to decrease, the star would collapse. When a star collapses, it can burn out, essentially, and become a cold, dark mass called a black dwarf. Or if it is a rather large star (15 times larger than our sun) it will collapse, explode in what is called a supernova, and then become a black hole, the gravity of which would be so strong that not even light could escape.

There are definitely some more details to stars, but our scientific sec is over.

So, if, like mass and gravity, the more money and possessions we accumulate the harder it is to let them go, and we can easily fall into the trap of making our possessions our master and potentially turning into a cold dark mass floating around in space or, even worse, a black hole, how do we prevent gravity from taking over?

An obvious answer would be to not collect any possessions and then you would never be trapped by the gravity of your stuff, and your heart would always be free to worship God. It's obvious, but not practical. And not necessarily biblical. Often misquoted, scripture does not proclaim that money is the root of all evil, but rather that the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil (1 Tim. 6:10).

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, recognized that money is an “excellent gift of God,” but was very concerned with how the people called Methodists actually managed and used their financial resources to the greatest advantage.

In his sermon “The Use of Money,” Wesley says, “[Money] may be used ill...but it may likewise be used well.” So, he lays out three very simple rules for how to use money well: gain all you can (with some guidelines), save all you can (think of this as not being wasteful as opposed to hoarding), and give all you can (out of gratitude and humility because of God's generosity to us).

### *Gain All You Can*

Now, doesn't that sound just like the problem to begin with? If we gain all we can, then doesn't that mean we'll be more trapped by the gravitational pull of all that gain?

Yes. But that's not what Wesley meant. He was a big fan of working hard, not wasting time, and being productive. But he says to gain all we can “without paying more for it than it is worth.” In other words, don't gain in a way that hurts your life or your health; don't gain in a way that hurts your mind or soul; and don't gain in a way that hurts your neighbor. We are called to think through how what we do to earn money is affecting our lives, our hearts, and others. Does earning all we can require that we work grueling hours and ignore our families? That we sacrifice our integrity and cut corners? That we take advantage of the weaknesses and cause the destruction of others? If so, then we shouldn't earn all we can in that way.

**These parameters on how we gain our money mean that from the beginning our relationship to money should be mindful and thoughtful—we should manage our money, not the other way around.** Even in how we *earn* money, we should be careful of how much we serve money as our master. If we can keep those standards in mind, then we should absolutely “make the best of all that is in our hands.”

### *Save All You Can*

It's not about hoarding (of which we've already talked about the danger). It's not about piling up your money. It's not even about saving for the future.

Saving is about being frugal, economical, prudent, and not wasteful in how we live. It's about

being content with what you have, and not constantly wanting what you don't really need. It's about living simply, as opposed to acquiring more and more and more.

Wesley says not to spend more than you need on what you don't really need. And certainly don't spend in order to *keep up with the Joneses*. Because we can never keep up, and the more we try to, the more we end up spending in order to do so.

But we get so many messages every day that tell us the opposite: *if you had more, you'd be happier; if you wore these clothes, you'd be more successful; you need this and this and this in order to be complete*. As we talked about last week, these messages try to convince us that our identity does, in fact, reside in our possessions and wealth. In his book, *Enough*, Adam Hamilton calls this issue "Restless Heart Syndrome." He describes the symptom of "RHS" as always being discontent with what we have and constantly wanting more. We compare what we have with what we could have and with what others have. When we do that instead of being grateful for what we do have, it is harder to find contentment.

So how do we "save all we can" in a way that actually provides contentment? The Apostle Paul offers a suggestion:

*"I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need: I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."* (Philippians 4:11-13)

In order to truly save all we can, we have to realize that what we possess will not last. None of it. Things like natural disasters (think of a sudden fire in your home, or of the tornadoes that tore through Oklahoma recently) can dramatically show the truth of that. It's in Christ that we find strength, contentment, meaning, and hope even in the darkest of circumstances.

**If all we had was lost, and it could be, what would bring us joy and contentment?** The only answer is the peace, grace, and love of God.

### *Give All You Can*

Finally, Wesley says that we can't stop there, with gaining and saving all we can. Like a star, we can only find balance when we also give all we can.

Wesley points out that God created us and placed us in this world as stewards, entrusting us during our lives with various gifts and resources. And, he says, "as you yourself are not your own, but his, such is likewise all that you enjoy."

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Speaking through the prophet Isaiah, God claims us. “I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.” (Isaiah 43:1) We are God’s, created in God’s image, redeemed, sustained, and provided for by God. **Everything we are and have is God’s.** Like a child who has nothing of her own but what her parents give her, as children of God, we have received everything from God.

Giving all we can should be a response to God’s generosity to us. We should give out of gratitude for what we have received. When we sit down and really think about all God has done for us, all God has given us, all that God promises us, how could we not be grateful?

This is important. Giving is not because we have to, or in order to get something in return. Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians 9:7, “Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” If giving is required, it becomes less giving and more an act of payment. You might part with the same amount of money, but one is a result of gratitude and generosity, and the other is a mere financial transaction.

If we really find our identity, hope, and strength in God, and not in what we have, then no matter how *much* we might have, giving becomes easier and easier. **When we give, we begin to combat the gravity of wealth that is pulling in toward ourselves.**

Like a star, it is essential that we find balance in our lives so that we do not succumb to the gravitational pull of our wealth and collapse in on ourselves. We must learn to manage our money, and locate our identity in God, by gaining, saving, and giving all we can. And as we gain more wealth, we must be ready and willing to make adjustments that keep all in balance.

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*Mother Teresa of Calcutta: “People are often unreasonable, illogical, and self-centered; forgive them anyway. If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives; be kind anyway. If you are successful, you will win some false friends and some true enemies; succeed anyway. If you are honest and frank, people may cheat you; be honest and frank anyway. What you spend years building someone could destroy overnight; build anyway. If you find serenity and happiness, they may be jealous; be happy anyway. Give the world the best you have, and it may never be enough; give the world the best you’ve got anyway. You see, in the final analysis, it is between you and your God; it was never between you and them anyway.”*

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## ***REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:***

Do you have anxiety about money?

Do you think you maintain balance in your relationship with money?

Do you think the pursuit of wealth is a bad thing?

How does our culture judge the pursuit of wealth?

Are you able to save and, if so, what is your goal with those savings?

If you reach that goal, what will you do with savings beyond that point?

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Read Luke 12:15-21. What is Jesus saying about our concern with saving?

Are you thrifty and careful about the prices you pay?

How do you prioritize what you will purchase?

How do you prioritize what you do with your money? Where on that prioritization list is saving? Giving?

Do you feel limited in how much you can give?

Do you hope to increase the amount that you give each year?

# *FAMILY CORNER*

## **Activity:**

### *Balancing Act*

Use the balance you created last week, and write with a sharpie or marker on one cup: “Gain all you can.” On the other cup, write, “Give all you can” from John Wesley’s sermon “The Use of Money.” Experiment by adding more money to the “Gain” cup, and trying to keep the cups balanced.

## **Discussion:**

What happened to the balance as you gained more money? What did you have to do to help maintain the balance?

Read Matthew 6:24 from your Bible as a family. What is this verse telling us about the importance of money?

If, as John Wesley said, money is an “excellent gift from God”, then how do you view your allowance? Money earned from a lemonade stand? A paycheck? Does this view change how you spend, save, or give?





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# BE RADIANT.

The nuclear reactions that happen at the core of the star produce energy which counterbalances the gravitation force that is trying to collapse the star in on itself. That energy we see as light and, if we're close enough (like from the earth to the sun), we feel it as heat.

It's not just inconsequential output. We see the light of the stars, and from the star that orders our galaxy, we receive life-giving light, as well as heat. The radiance of a star like our sun serves a purpose – a life-giving purpose. Without the output of the energy from the sun, life on earth would not be possible. **Our giving should serve a life-giving purpose as well.**

In 1 Timothy, Paul gives Timothy advice on ministering to the wealthy:

*“As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share.” (1 Timothy 6:17-18)*

Yeah, we think. *What Paul said.* It's easy to claim we believe that, but we don't often act like we believe that. We become good at gaining money and possessions, and the more we have, the better we become at keeping it. (Remember, the richer we get, the smaller the percentage we give away.) To quote Andy Stanley, “We have everything we need. But we lose sight of what we need it for.” **God has given us so much, and has meant us to do something worthwhile with it.**

It is important to give. The simple act of giving shows that we are indeed managing our money well. When we give, we are reducing the power money has over us and are declaring that our hope, our trust, our identity is not in our possessions. The very act of giving allows us to strike the balance we so desperately need in our lives, and allows us to set our hopes not on our riches, which are uncertain at best, but on God. As Adam Hamilton says, "We were created for giving." So, just the act of giving itself is important for us.

Even more important is giving to God. If we recognize that all we have comes from God to begin with, and we give in response to God's generosity to us, it is us declaring our gratitude, honor, and love for God. When we give to God, we are declaring God as our master, we find our identity and contentment in our creator, and we begin to be free from the pull of money.

Jacob, after seeing a vision of a ladder reaching up to heaven, is so overwhelmed by God's glory and favor that he declares, "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God, and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house; and of all that you give me I will surely give one-tenth to you."

How should we give to God? **Giving financially to the church is giving to God.** The church was created and is sustained by God to be the body of Christ: a community, a place to worship God, and a movement to live out our faith and to help bring the kingdom of God to earth. When we support the church with our financial gifts it is a privilege and response to the love of God in our

lives. And when we give in a planned, strategic, intentional way it is an act of worshipping God and of recognizing that our relationship with God is the most important thing in the world.

God's people have always given God a portion of what they had. As it was for Jacob, giving a portion was a way of saying to God, *You gave this to me, and I return this part to you, because I love you and am grateful.* The portion given to God is commonly called a tithe, or a "tenth." **It might be challenging to give 10 percent of our income to the church, but if we continually remind ourselves of what God has done for us, and what God has created us to do, then it does not seem like so much.** We can perhaps then more easily understand the widow Jesus witnessed giving in the temple. She gave two small coins, but had done so more generously than those who gave huge bags of coins, because the percentage was greater. She gave out of humble gratitude to God; she gave to honor God. And Jesus' comments powerfully reveal that the percentage given matters more than the amount given (Mark 12:43-44).

Like the energy from the sun that serves a life-giving purpose, we want our giving to serve a purpose as well. When we thoughtfully and intentionally give a percentage to the church our giving serves the greatest purpose there is.

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*Prayer of St. Ignatius of Loyola: "Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding and my entire will, all I have and call my own. You have given all to me. To you, Lord, I return it. Everything is yours; do with it what you will. Give me only your love and your grace, that is enough for me."*

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## ***REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:***

How do you give? Randomly, as things arise, seasonally, or strategically?

Do you tend to give more when you have an emotional or personal connection to something? Why, or why not?

Is there purpose in your giving?

How often do you see the effects of your gifts?

Do you spend a lot of time devising how much and to what you will you give?

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How often do you evaluate the impact of your giving?

Who do you talk to about how and to what you decide to give? Your spouse? Partner? Children? Parents? Minister? Small group? Financial advisor? How often do you talk about it?

After you save, give, and cover your costs, are you frugal with what's left? Generous? Reckless? Wasteful? Are you the same with extra energy and time?

Is it easier for you to give sporadically, when you can or when there is a need, or to give automatically, regularly and consistently to something?

## *REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS [CONT.]*

Do you tithe? Is 10% a standard that makes sense to you?

If you were to give 10% of your income, what would you have to sacrifice?

Are you satisfied with the amount that you give? What is the percentage?

What would it take for you to increase that percentage?

Have you ever considered developing a giving plan, similar to your savings and spending plans?

[illegible]

# ***FAMILY CORNER***

## **Activity:**

*Making an Impact*

## **Materials:**

- glass of water filled half-way
- piece of white paper

Find a window in your home with direct sunlight shining through. Explain that you are going to separate that light into 7 different colors! Then place the glass half-filled with water in the direct ray of sunlight. Place the white paper on the floor where the rays ultimately end displaying a rainbow! Just as the rainbow is created from light and water, God can use what we have to offer and multiply its effects into something even greater!

## **Discussion:**

Sometimes we don't think what we have to offer is enough to make a difference. Read Deuteronomy 16:17 from your Bible as a family. What does this verse mean to you?

If we are called to give God our first fruits (Leviticus 27:30), what then should we do first before we spend our earnings from allowance, doing chores, lemonade stands, etc?

Grab a bag of skittles or m&ms and a cup. Give each family member a handful of candies. Have each person count their individual pieces of candy and figure out what portion would be 10%. Place the other 90% of candies in the cup to be enjoyed. Combine all family members "tithe" and discuss the value of working together as one body.





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# *GENEROSITY FOR LIGHT YEARS.*

Some more science: Look up into the night sky. We can see so many stars (especially on a dark, clear night) even though they might be thousands of light years away. A light year is not a length of time, it's a measurement of distance. It is the distance that light can travel in one year. And light can travel pretty fast (approximately 186,200 miles per second). A light year is 5,878,625,373,183.6 miles. The closest star (other than the sun) to earth is roughly 4.22 light years away. The farthest that we can see without a pair of binoculars is probably the Andromeda galaxy which is 2.6 MILLION light years away. That's 5,878,625,373,183.6 x 2.6 million miles away. WE CAN SEE FAR.

Now, for even more science. The stars that we can see are so far away, that their light, even as

fast as it goes, takes a long time to reach us. The light we see from the nearest star takes 4 years to reach us. So, if that star were to suddenly disappear, or were to burn out, we wouldn't know it for 4 years because its light would still be visible to us. So the light from stars actually outlasts the stars themselves.

Ok, done with science.

When we think about our giving, it's important for us to do it, and it's important for the things we give to. But it's also important to consider the long-term impact of our giving. Will the impact of our giving actually outlast our giving? Actually outlast us?

An article discussing the historical preservation of homes built by settlers in the early 1890s

makes an important point about the struggles of preserving the simple wooden structures: “Things not meant to be monuments tend to fall down.” The homes were built to serve a certain purpose for a set time. They were built for the specific needs and uses of the people who built them, not for anything more. The settlers certainly could never have imagined that over 120 years later their barns, houses, sheds, and even outhouses would still be standing for future generations to appreciate. So the challenge facing architectural conservators is to try to salvage, shore up, and protect the original structures as carefully as possible so they can stay standing as long as possible.<sup>2</sup> And that is hard when things tend towards decay, destruction, and deterioration. The point is that if the buildings had been intended to last, they would have been built more strategically in the beginning.

When we give, we are helping to build something. The question is, are we helping to build something in a way that will last as a monument to the power of God in our world, or are we building with only our own needs and uses in mind? Last week we talked about how we should give with a purpose. Our giving should be intentional and planned so that it can have a big impact. To have the maximum impact, we need to give not just based on present needs and visions, but for the sake of future needs as well. It can be hard to look ahead and always know if what we give to today will last for future generations. But if we don't try, if we don't give with at least considering that sort of legacy, then we are missing out on being a part of something that really is bigger than ourselves.

Highland Park United Methodist Church is currently debt-free. That means that every penny given to the church goes towards active ministries and needs, and not one penny goes to service debt payments. This is incredible. What is even more incredible is that the church has not had debt since the 1940s, for over 70 years. During the Great Depression, the church was almost forced to close due to debt. Barely scraping by, the church continued to see growth throughout the 30s. But by the early 1940s, the total church debt was more than the yearly operating budget. Dr. Marshall Steel, the senior minister at the time, realized that if the church was going to continue to grow and fulfill its mission, it would need to take care of its debt. He called on the church members to give sacrificially, and instead of letting the church's debt prevent the church from doing ministry, the members raised enough money to completely pay off the debt. The generosity of those members has not been taken for granted, and the church has never again taken on debt. If God was calling the church to do something, then the church members would have to be ready to commit their money to it, or else it wouldn't happen. Time and time again, past church members showed their willingness to give to things God called HPUMC to do: start other churches, fund new ministries, create spaces for a growing congregation, support life-giving missions and outreach, care for the congregation in times of need, and raise up the next generation of faithful followers of Jesus Christ.

<sup>2</sup>[http://www.jhnewsandguide.com/valley/feature/buildings-tell-settler-stories/article\\_1e2909bd-dfbf-5d03-8203-88213f4c1463.html#.VAcop7Ar9pl.gmail](http://www.jhnewsandguide.com/valley/feature/buildings-tell-settler-stories/article_1e2909bd-dfbf-5d03-8203-88213f4c1463.html#.VAcop7Ar9pl.gmail)

Because people were faithful in their giving, looking beyond their own circumstances and the needs of the church at that time; because members decided to build something that outlasted themselves for the sake of the kingdom of God, their light has lasted beyond their own lives and we are where we are today. We have the same opportunity as they had to give in ways that go beyond ourselves, that allow our light to outlast our own time, that reveal the power of God beyond this one place, this one age.

The prophet Isaiah says,

*"If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday. The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail. Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in." (Isaiah 58:9b-12)*

We must give in ways that last, in order that the things to which we give are as monuments to God's active presence in our world for years and years and years to come. Because ultimately, this is not about us, or what we have. It's about God and what God is doing through us, through our gifts, today, tomorrow, and until the kingdom of God is fully recognized on earth as in heaven.

*Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi: "O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life."*

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## ***REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:***

What are the missions and ministries in the church have impacted your life the most? In what way?

What mission or ministry of the church are you the most proud of? Why?

What sort of process do you think HPUMC undertook in order to create those missions and/or ministries?

Do you think those ministries or missions could be self-sustaining with the costs solely covered by the beneficiaries of the ministries?

Are you familiar with HPUMC's budget? (For more information, go to: [hpumc.org/give](http://hpumc.org/give))

## *REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS [CONT.]*

What does one's awareness of the church budget indicate (if anything) about commitment to the ministry of the church?

Have you experienced debt?

Have you experienced the freedom that comes with paying off debt? If so, what did that freedom from debt allow you to do with your resources?

How does your current giving support the missions and ministries that mean the most to you?

What does it mean to give sacrificially?

What are you willing to sacrifice in order to ensure the ministry of the church continues for future generations?

# ***FAMILY CORNER***

## **Activity:**

*Let Your Light Shine*

## **Materials:**

- flashlight
- tissue paper
- t-shirt
- piece of paper
- book
- window

Take a flashlight and point directly at each material. Study the light to see if the light shines through each object/material. If light shines through the object clearly, that material is considered transparent. If only some of the light shines through, it is considered translucent. If none of the light shines through, it is considered to be opaque. Test each material and others around the house for fun!

## **Discussion:**

Read as a family Matthew 5:16 from your Bible. What do you think it means to let your light shine before others?

From our experiment, we see that different materials allow different amounts of light to travel through them. How much light do you think God wants to shine through each of His children to the world?

Discuss as a family different ways that you can use the gift of money to help shine a bright light into the world in God's name.

## ***ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:***

### ► **Financial Peace University**

We all need a plan for our money. Financial Peace University (FPU) by Dave Ramsey, financial guru, is that plan! It teaches God's ways of handling money. Through video teaching, class discussions, and interactive small group activities, FPU presents biblical, practical steps to get from where you are to where you've dreamed you could be. This plan will show you how to get rid of debt, manage money, spend and save wisely, and more!

Classes are held at HPUMC. See website for more details:

**[hpumc.org/life-resources/financial-guidance](http://hpumc.org/life-resources/financial-guidance)**

### ► **For Further Reading**

*Enough*, by Rev. Adam Hamilton

*How to be Rich*, by Andy Stanley

*Why Support Your Church?*, published by the Channing Bete Company

*A Disciple's Path*, by James A. Harnish

*Being United Methodist*, by J. Ellsworth Kalas



## This image shows a full page of white paper with horizontal dotted lines, typical of primary school writing paper. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.











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