

# 14-DAY DEVOTIONAL JOURNAL

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LAKE TRAVIS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

#### **NUMBERS 13: 27-28**

They gave Moses this account: "We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit. But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large. ..."

We're doing what? Haven't you read the headlines? Haven't you seen the news? How can we even think about having a stewardship campaign in this kind of an economy? You must be nuts. It doesn't require a great deal of imagination to think that some of the same comments. were being made to Moses after the return of the spies from their visit to the Promised Land. Even without headlines screaming disaster and 24-hour news trumpeting crisis after crisis; one can almost imagine the people of Israel saying some of the very same things. You want us to do what? You expect us to go into that land with those giants and those walls and forts. You're crazy!

Then, as well as now, the issue is the same: Faith or Fear. There is the voice of the great tempter shouting to us words of fear; you can't, you mustn't, what if. But that is not the only voice. If we take the time to be quiet, to turn off the news, to put down the newspaper we will hear another voice, the voice of One who owns all of the cattle on the hillside; the voice of One who is the great I Am, not the small and insignificant what if.

The question, of course, becomes, which voice will we listen to? One wise pastor said that every church has two basic committees; a Back-to-Egypt committee ruled by fear and anxiety and an Into-the-Promised-Land committee ruled by faith and hope. Which committee will you serve?

Remember, God isn't asking for a decision about giving today. You are only being asked to listen for God's voice.

Then have I listened to the voice of fear over faith? What were the results?
Then have I listened to the voice of faith over fear? What were the results?
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# **PRAYER**

Thank You, God, for Your calming voice of faith and hope in the midst of a world filled with fear and anxiety. Help me in the days that lie ahead to take time and listen for Your voice. Give me the courage to stand on the side of faith and hope rather than fear and doubt, Amen.

#### **EXODUS 3: 3-4**

So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight — why the bush does not burn up."
When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look,
God called to him from within the bush,"Moses!
Moses!" And Moses said, "Here I am."

A murderer, a runaway, a shepherd, yet called by God to be oneof history's greatest leaders. As this stewardship adventurebegins there may have been no burning bush or voice from God, unless you count the call from your pastor, one of the directors, or an invitation to a campaign event. And yet make no mistake, no matter your background; you have been called by God to bepart of this exciting adventure of faith. Just as God chose Moses, you have been chosen. Can you imagine that possibility? Can you begin to even consider that your participation in this adventure is not simply random chance, not simply a last gasp attempt to raise money? Can you believe God chose you; God called you?

Her name was Brenda. She was not the first choice of anyone for her particular position on the campaign leadership team. By all accounts, except God's, Brenda was a "last resort." As the campaign developed Brenda became a driving force, not due to influence or power, but simply due to her quiet willingness to listen to the voice of God. As Brenda listened and opened her heart to God she became a powerful witness to God's love and mercy. And, out of a profound sense of gratitude, Brenda made one of the lead gifts to her church's capital campaign.

Do I believe that	God has called me to be part of this adventure?
Will I take the ti	me to listen to the voice of God in the midst of this adventure?
Will I be willing	to say yes to the call of God?

# **PRAYER**

Thank You, Lord, for calling me to be a part of this adventure in faith. Help me to be open to Your voice, to listen to Your call and to finally discern Your will for my life. "Take my life and let it be consecrated Lord to thee." I now pray for the rest of my church family, help us to be open to Your voice, to listen to Your call, to discern Your will for our lives. I pray in the name of Christ, Amen.

#### **EXODUS 4: 10**

Moses said to the LORD, "Pardon your servant, Lord. I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue."

Even though called by God, even hearing the voice of God from the midst of a burning bush, Moses was filled with doubts and questions. In chapters three and four of Exodus, Moses offers to God no fewer than four questions or doubts: Who am I to go; who shall I say has sent me; what if they don't believe me; and finally, his slowness of speech. In each case, each question, each doubt, God provided the way. God provided the answer.

This same dynamic applies to our call to give. Everyone has a multitude of reasons to not give. There is no good time for a stewardship campaign. There is always something else, a new car, a remodeled house, braces for the kids, college to save for, and

retirement to worry about. And yet as God calls us to give, as God asks us to be generous, if we listen, if we are open, God also provides the way.

Terry wept at the possibility that she might not be able to give what she thought would be a generous gift. She was faced with braces, college and a cut in her husband's pay. As she prayed about how to respond to her church's campaign, she became aware of ways in which she could give with generosity and joy. Terry began with all the reasons she couldn't give but, through prayer, discovered the joy of generosity. She responded out of a sense of gratitude for God's generosity, rather than her fear of scarcity.

When God calls, God also provides.

What are my reasons or doubts for not fully participating in this stewardship campaign?
How has God provided for me in the past, even when I have had doubts?
Can I be open to God and trust that as God calls, God also provides?

#### **PRAYER**

Oh God, You know the many reasons I have for not wanting to serve, for not wanting to be generous. Help me to know in my heart that You have brought me to this time and this place and You will provide what I need to accomplish Your task. Help me, Oh God, to have an open heart, open eyes and open hands. I pray through Christ, Amen.

#### **GENESIS 15: 1, 3, 5, 6**

After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in avision: "Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your very great reward." ...And Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir." He took him outside and said, "Look up at the sky and count the stars — if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." Abram believed the LORD...

As golden sunlight slowly fades into the grayness of twilight, so the promise made years ago seems faded and distant. Abram had believed, had given up his home and traveled to a distant, unknown land all because of a promise. Excitement and enthusiasm have been replaced by questions and doubt.

On this journey of faith there will be times when excitement and enthusiasm are long forgotten; times when faith seems overwhelmed by questions and doubt. How does God respond? What does God ask? "Go outside Abram, count the stars, remember the vision, remember the promise." Just as we affirmed yesterday that this campaign is God's campaign, so too, we affirm that the vision comes not as the

result of a board vote but instead is rooted and grounded in the promise of God. In the midst of our doubts, in the midst of wondering, "Will this really happen?," God invites us to count the stars, to remember thefaces of the children, young people, families and elderly that will be touched because of what we are doing. Remember what this campaign is about; not buildings or bricks, dollars and cents; we are fulfilling God's promise and vision for ministry and mission.

Remember, count the stars!

Iave I lost any of my original enthusiasm?	
o I believe in the vision?	
Vhat does God truly want from my church, this campaign, and my life?	

# **PRAYER**

Dear God, I admit that sometimes I forget.

Sometimes I get so caught up in the work that I forget the promise and the vision. Help me, Lord, to take the time to remember and like Abram to once again believe. In the name of Christ, Amen.

#### **JOSHUA 3: 5**

Joshua told the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you."

Finally, they were nearly there. After forty years of wandering in he wilderness, after being so close and then being told they weren't ready, after so many false starts, and so many disappointments, they were on the verge of their heart's desire - the Promised Land. And yet, even as they stood on the banks of the Jordan, gazing into the Promised Land, their hearts were undoubtedly filled with a mixture of joy, fear, excitement and anxiety. After all, the leader who had led them out of Egypt and through the wilderness; the leader who brought them God's word, the leader who time after time interceded with God on their behalf. their leader, Moses, was now dead. How could they do it? How would they manage? "Sanctify yourselves; for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you."

Perhaps some of the initial excitement of being a part of the campaign has evaporated. Perhaps, like the people of Israel, we wonder, "How can we do it? How will we manage?" Or perhaps the question is more personal, "How can I do my task? How can I give a generous and sacrificial gift?" God's response is the same. "Sanctify yourselves; for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders." To sanctify simply means to set apart for a holy purpose. We are called to set our lives, our church, this campaign and ourselves apart for God's use and God's purpose. Can we begin to set apart: our lives, our homes, our families, and our income, to be used by God and for God? If we can, then truly, "tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you."

Am I beginning to experience any doubts or questions about our church, our campaign, or my involvement?
Are there parts of my life that I am holding back from giving to God?
How can I intentionally set my life apart to be used by God?

# **PRAYER**

Oh Lord, give me the courage and the faith to give my life and all I have, to be used by You. Show me ways, Oh Lord, that I can set myself and my life apart for You, Amen.

#### 2 CHRONICLES 20:15, 17

He said: "Listen, King Jehoshaphat and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem! This is what the LORD says to you: 'Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's. ...You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the LORD will give you..."

Come on, Lord, get serious:
Surrounded by enemies, threatened with destruction and you want us to stand still. Let's be honest, there is something about this story that just doesn't feel comfortable. Many of us would really prefer to "take the bull by the horns." More often than not we are encouraged to be a people of action. Yet this story from 2 Chronicles stands as a powerful reminder that there are occasions when the best thing we can do is stand still and wait upon God.

Over the course of the next month there will be considerable action in and around the church. Many will be feverishly working to accomplish all of the tasks for this stewardship campaign. And in the midst of all of your hard work there will actually be those who will complain about the campaign, about the process, about the project itself and who knows what else. You may be tempted, at times, to leap into battle, to answer all of the complaints, to convert the unconverted.

Remember, this is ultimately God's project, God's campaign, and God's battle. No matter what we do or how we do it, there will be opposition. We will do everything we can to answer questions and deal with criticism, but in the end it is God who will make us successful. In the midst of all the business and activities of the next few months, remember to take the time to stand still.

Do I feel a pressing need to make everything right?
Do I feel a pressing need to make everything right?
Do I feel a pressing need to make everything right?
What might be some ways that I can stand still and trust God?

# **PRAYER**

Teach me, Oh Lord, to stand still and wait for You. Help me to pause and remember that ultimately our success is in Your hands. Teach me to trust, Amen.

#### **EPHESIANS 3: 20-21**

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

How many times do we limit God?
How often do we fail to recognize
the wonderful power that God
gives us through Jesus Christ. Look
again at the words used by Paul,
"abundantly far more than all we
can ask or imagine." Often we find
ourselves saying "yes, but..." There
are always reasons why something
can't happen. We're too small; we
could never do that. We're too poor;
we could never afford that.

During the course of a stewardship campaign, churches often do more than they ever imagined. Individuals, by God's grace, end up being able to give more and do more than they had ever dared dream. Her name was Sally. She was devoted to her church, to their project and to their campaign. There was only one problem; her husband. He controlled the finances, never attended church and seemed not to care at all about

the church's need. Sally worried and worried about her pledge, convinced she would be forced to give a token pledge at best. Sally was encouraged to pray. Finally, the night arrived when the leadership would fill out their pledges. Lo and behold, Sally's husband came with her. As the time arrived to fill out the cards and return them, Sally and her husband were the last ones to turn in their card. As they came forward, Sally was smiling from ear to ear even as tears coursed down her cheek. Her husband had filled out the card and had placed an amount higher than even Sally had dared hope or pray for.

Now to God who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to God be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever, Amen.

Are there ways in which I am limiting God's impact in my life?
Are there ways in which we are limiting God's impact in our church?
Am I limiting God as I consider my gift?

# **PRAYER**

Abundant God, forgive me for the times that my lack of faith has limited what You can do. Help me to believe that together we can truly accomplish far more than we can ask or imagine. Help me to dream with faith and trust. In the name of Christ, Amen.

#### **EPHESIANS 3: 16-17**

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love,...

Evelyn Underhill in *The Spiritual*Life puts it this way: "For a spiritual life is simply a life in which all we do comes from the center, where we are anchored in God..."

Consider the power and awe inspired by watching the mighty Mississippi River. The sound and flow of the river fills us with a sense of peace and joy. Amidst the peace and joy, however, exists a powerful current that must be taken seriously. Imagine beingon the river and losing an oar — and then having an engine that won't start! Looking around, you discover you are without an anchor — drifting rapidly downstream with the current.

In Ephesians 3, Paul speaks of being rooted and grounded; Evelyn

Underhill speaks of being anchored in God. True stewardship begins with the realization that we are called to live our lives being rooted, grounded and anchored in the love of God. How many of us spend most of our lives being swept away by the currents of life, the demands of our jobs, family, education and even church responsibilities? We search in vain for a rope and anchor. We think if only: if only I could make more money, if only I could save more money, if only we had a bigger home, a better car or a faster computer. And still we find ourselves swept downstream. True stewardship begins with a life that is rooted, grounded and anchored in God's love.

Do I hav	e an anchor in my life?
Do I find	l myself being swept away by the demands of society and culture?
	e some practical ways I can begin to be grounded, rooted, hored in Christ?

# **PRAYER**

Oh Lord, I confess that I often find myself being swept along by the currents of life. I put my faith and hope in power, people, and possessions. Forgive me. Help me to turn to You during this campaign that my life would be rooted, grounded and anchored in You and Your wonderful love. In the name of Christ, Amen.

#### **JOHN 3: 16**

#### For God so loved the world that he gave...

The candles cast a beautiful glow about the sanctuary; the choir raised their voices in a magnificent song of praise to honor the birth of the Savior. Yet, in the midst of such beauty and pageantry, tears slowly rolled down his cheeks. David had just returned from his third mission trip to Russia and all he could imagine was the children he had visited in the orphanages; children who would not hear the story of the babe lying in a manger, children who would receive no gifts, no candy, and no Christmas meal.

For God so loved the world that he gave...

The greatest gift the world has ever received was given for one reason and one reason alone — love. It was a love so strong and powerful that God gave God's only son. Our stewardship emphasis is not about bricks, buildings or budgets.

Ultimately, we are about love; a love that desires to reach out and bring people into the family of God. A love so strong, so powerful that we want to give and give and give

some more; not from obligation or guilt but from heartfelt desire that people would come to know the wonderful and saving love of God through Christ.

For God so loved the world that he gave...

We don't need to travel to rural Russia to find those in need. How many children and young people in your own community will not hear the Good News, will never grow up knowing the joy that comes from being a part of God's family? How many families in your own congregation desperately need to hear the good news of God's love in the midst of divorce, death, sickness or unemployment? How many elderly people need to know God still loves them? Think for a moment. of co-workers, family members and friends who desperately need what the church has to offer - love.

For God so loved the world that he gave...
Will you?

hy do I give?
oes my gift adequately reflect God's love for me and others?
ho do I personally know who needs to know the love of God through Christ?

#### **PRAYER**

Loving and Giving God, thank You for loving the world so much that You gave up Your only son that I might live. Help me, Oh God, to give like You. Help me to give with a generous and loving heart. Open my eyes to a world that stands in desperate need of Your wondrous love in Christ. I pray in God's name, Amen.

#### **JOHN 3: 16**

#### For God so loved the world that he gave...

His name is Andre. Director of the orphanage in Kaigorodok, a small rural village approximately 600 miles northeast of Moscow. In 1996, Andre and his children were desperate with little hope of help for the barest of necessities, even food. Through the generosity of God's people in the church, Andre was able to provide for the children's basic needs and see them through the cold Russian winter. The following year, members of the church that provided financial support visited Andre and his children — finding them better fed, healthier, and happier. Andre was smiling from ear to ear. The children performed skits, sang songs and treated them to a wonderful feast: the reason — gratitude. Andre and the children were genuinely thankful and out of gratitude they wanted to, perhaps even had to, give. After working in rural Tennessee with his youth group, a 16-year-old boy experienced this same type of response from an elderly woman for

whom his group had been working. Even though she could afford very little, she had been deeply touched by the work that had been done for her and wanted to give something in return. The woman went to the dollar store and purchased socks for each of the kids. Normally the 16-year-old would have scoffed at such a gift, but he knew this gift was given with profound gratitude and was a real sacrifice.

For God so loved the world that he gave...

Generous and sacrificial giving begins with gratitude; gratitude for what God has done through the gift of God's son Jesus Christ; gratitude for what God has done for us through the family of God we know as our church. For those who make incredible, truly sacrificial gifts, it is an expression of their deep gratitude for what God has done for them through their local church — the family of God.

Do I recognize the blessings that God has poured forth on my familyand me?	
How has God blessed me through the people in my local church?	
Does my gift recognize the extent of God's blessings in my life; is it generous a sacrificial?	and
Is my gift grounded in gratitude?	

#### **PRAYER**

Oh God, I have so much for which to be thankful. You have blessed me in ways that are too numerous to even count. Forgive me for not being always grateful. Forgive me for focusing on what I don't have instead of all You have given me. Fill my heart with gratitude and show me how I can give with generosity and sacrifice. In the name of Christ, Amen.

#### **2 CORINTHIANS 8: 1-2**

And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.

Artyom is a ten-year-old Russian orphan. When the church group visited Artyom, for some reason, latched onto Scott. He took Scott by the arm and led him through the orphanage showing off his room and the place he ate meals. All the while Artyom's eyes were filled with joy and laughter.

In spite of the fact that Scott spoke little Russian and Artyom spoke no English, the two connected. As the church group prepared to depart, Artyom sat beside Scott, pulled a silver ring from his finger and held it out for Scott to take. Scott eyes filled with tears and he spoke the only Russian word he knew — nyet, nyet — no, no. This child, who had nothing in the world to call his own except this ring, desperately wanted to give this ring to Scott.

For Artyom, his abundant joy and extreme poverty overflowed in a wealth of generosity. Like the Macedonians, Artyom desperately wanted to give.

What do we want? For many of us who have so much, we want more. And truth be told, it's never enough. What would happen if, by God's grace, our desire to gain more and have more could be transformed into a heartfelt desire to give more? What would happen if we spent as much time figuring out ways to give as we spend figuring out how to earn, have and keep?

P.S. Yes, Artyom finally convinced Scott to take the ring. He wears it as a vivid and real reminder of what it means to truly give.

Who has taught you about generosity?
Can you recall a time when someone who could least afford it gave you a generous
gift? What was it like? How did you respond? Did it affect you in any way?
Can you recall a time when you were particularly generous? What was it like?
What did you learn? How has it impacted your life?

# **PRAYER**

Oh God, thank You for the examples of generosity You have sent into our lives. Forgive us Lord for being more concerned with how much we can earn, have and keep, instead of how much we can give. Open our hearts, Oh God, to the joy of generosity, Amen.

#### **2 CORINTHIANS 8: 3-5**

For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people. And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us.

It simply makes no sense. The Macedonian Christians, in the midst of their own poverty, in the midst of their own struggles, begging earnestly for the joyous privilege of GIVING. IT MAKES NO SENSE. How could this happen? The answer is amazingly simple. They gave themselves first to God and then to others.

Her name was Michelle. As she considered her gift to the church campaign, she became increasingly upset. She desperately wanted to make a significant gift, but because of her life situation she thought it impossible. She was faced with medical bills for a child, college tuition for another child, and a 35% pay cut for her husband. Like the Macedonians, Michelle wanted to give. Her pastor listened to Michelle's frustration and suggested that she be open to what God may

want, and in fact, what God may do. He suggested that she simply pray. Reluctantly, she agreed. As she gave herself to God in prayer, something happened. She became aware of ways she could give and give with generosity. It wasn't easy. It wasn't magic. It required prayer, faith, and trust. When Michelle arrived at the church on Commitment Sunday, her face radiated joy and peace. She gave herself first to God and then to others.

In every campaign the goal is the same, that each of us would give ourselves first to the Lord and then to others. If we truly give ourselves to God and then to others, we will raise all the money we will ever need. And far more importantly, lives and hearts — like Michelle's — will be forever changed and transformed.

Have I truly asked for God's guidance in giving?
Am I open to what God would have me do?
What might prevent me from being open and obedient to what God wants from me?

#### **PRAYER**

Oh God, I am frightened to think about coming to You for guidance. I'm not sure I want to hear what You have to say. Forgive me. Help me to lay aside all of the reasons and fears and help me to turn to You in faith and trust. Help me, Oh God, to be open to whatever You would have me do. Fill my heart with the Macedonian spirit of generosity. Through Christ my Lord, Amen.

#### 1 CORINTHIANS 10: 31-33

So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God — even as I try to please everyone in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.

In a wonderful devotional classic, God Calling, the two anonymous authors write on March 16 of the Christian's calling to reflect God to the world and to make God real in the world. Think of those phrases for a moment. Reflect God, and make God real in the world. Another way of saying, as Paul does do everything to the glory of God... not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, so that they may be saved. Do I reflec tGod to the world in all that I do? Do I make God real in all that I do? Do I work that others may come to the saving knowledge of Christ or do I spend most of my time seeking my own advantage?

If I take the time to ask these questions, if I take the time to examine my life, I may not be pleased with the answers. The truth is most of my time is spent in seeking my own advantage. If I look at my checkbook or budget, I am confronted with the same questions. What do my spending patterns reflect? What do they make real? To whose advantage am I working? The

answer is almost always the same, my family and me.

One of the benefits of a stewardship campaign is that it helps us reprioritize our lives according to God's plan and not simply according to our own wants and desires. A young family had been saving for years to remodel their home and make it exactly what they had always wanted. As part of a stewardship campaign they began praying about what God wanted and not what they wanted. They looked at the project, they looked at their church, and they prayed with an open heart. They wanted to reflect to the world the love and grace of God. They wanted to make God's love real to their community. They intentionally decided to put their remodeling money to work for the advantage of others and not themselves. The process was not easy, the answers were not always clear, but as they told their story, their faces radiated joy and peace. Their house had not been remodeled, but their hearts and lives had been.

What does my life reflect?
Am I willing to honestly and openly seek God's will for my life — even my finances?
How can I reprioritize my life in order to better reflect God and God's love?

#### **PRAYER**

Dear God, I confess that I do not always reflect You and Your love. I confess that much of my time is spent in seeking my own advantage. Give me the courage, Oh God, to seek Your will for my heart, my life and even my finances. In all that I do and say, help me to reflect You and Your love. I pray through Christ my Lord, Amen.

#### **LUKE 24: 32**

They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road..."

Two disciples, walking along the road to Emmaus, discussing the many events of the previous weeks; the arrest and trial of Jesus, the crucifixion and burial, and now strange rumors of resurrection.

Along the dusty road to Jerusalem they find themselves in the very presence of their Lord and Savior, the resurrected Christ. Even though Christ was unrecognized, the disciples reported that their hearts were burning while the Lord was talking to them on the road.

For some, this stewardship campaign may have seemed like an endless walk on a long and dusty road. And yet, my hope and prayer for each of you is that, at some place on this journey, your heart has burned with the recognition that Christ is in our midst, that Christ is walking with us on this dusty road.

And so, we conclude this devotional with the simple question. How have you met Christ on this journey? Has your heart burned with recognition that Christ is in our midst?

#### **PRAYER**

Thank You, Lord, for the gift of this journey we call a stewardship campaign. Thank You for meeting us on this road. Thank You for the burning in our hearts that we recognize as You and Your love. Help us now to continue this walk, always mindful You are walking beside us. Thank You! Amen.







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