

Transformed by Grace, Faith and Love

Grace, faith, and love are the focus for this stewardship emphasis. These three spiritual pillars are foundations for the steward who has received these gifts from God. As sinful and selfish people, we have done nothing to deserve or earn God's grace, faith, and love, but we receive them with joy and gratitude. These three pillars transform our hearts so we become "God-centered" rather than "self-centered" people. We have a new direction and purpose for our lives. Through his gifts of grace, faith, and love, God transforms us into responsible stewards who seek to please him. Our faithful stewardship is evidence that we are people transformed by grace, faith, and love.

Grace Engenders Gratitude

Webster's New World Dictionary defines grace as "the love and favor of God toward man." Grace is God's unmerited favor. It is unmerited, unearned, and undeserved. Grace is not ours to earn; it is God's to give. As the Apostle Paul wrote, "*What do you have that you did not receive?*" (1 Corinthians 4:7). As Christians, we understand that all we are and have are by God's grace. "*And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace*" (John 1:16). God lavishes us with his grace. Each day we celebrate God's gift of life. We bask in the beauty of God's creation. We receive blessing after blessing from our wonderful, giving, and gracious God.

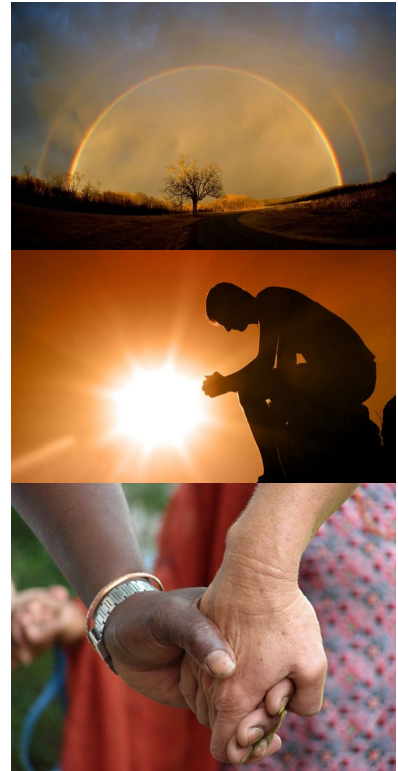
The zenith of God's grace is the gift of his Son, Jesus, who gives us the gift of salvation. As the acronym for grace so aptly states, we have "God's Riches at Christ's Expense." Even though we are sinful and undeserving, God sent his Son, Jesus, to die on a cross, and we are given eternal salvation. God was not bound by necessity to give salvation. It is the result of God's gracious will. Salvation is a gift. Many strive to earn this gift, but none of us is capable of doing so.

By God's grace, God calls us to be his stewards. Rev. James Ryle, founder of Truth Works Ministry, wrote, "Grace is the empowering presence of God enabling you to be who he created you to be, and to do what he has called you to do." God's grace gives us both the desire and the power to do his will.

Knowing that God has graciously given us our physical and spiritual lives, we seek to show our gratitude by how we live and what we do with our lives. An important way to show our thanksgiving is to be God-pleasing stewards. Faithful stewardship expresses our love and gratitude to God, and our faithful stewardship gives evidence of God's grace in our lives.

Faith Produces Works

Faith is the most precious gift anyone can receive from God (Ephesians 2:8-9). Faith is "*more precious than gold*" (1 Peter 1:7). It is dependent solely on God. By his grace, he gives us faith.



The writer of Hebrews defines faith as follows: *“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen”* (Hebrews 11:1). Faith enables us to place our trust in Jesus. By grace through faith, we are saved from our lives of sin and ensured that we can live with Jesus forever in Heaven.



Stewardship is faith in action. Stewardship is a whole-life response to God’s acts of creation and redemption. Through faith, we understand that our stewardship is God working in and through us. Our new life in Christ finds expression in Christian stewardship through the work of the Holy Spirit. It is not what we do, not what we give, not how we serve—but what God does, what God gives, how God serves. Stewardship is our response to his love and gifts to us. Through faith, we are empowered to be God’s hands, feet, and mouth to the world.

In Ephesians 2:10 Paul wrote, *“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them”* Through faith, we are saved, and that same faith energizes us to live out our faith by doing the good works that God has planned for us to do. Our good works as stewards are evidence of our faith. *“So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead”* (James 2:17).

Love Prompts Action

In 1 John 4:19 we read, *“We love because he first loved us.”* Because God loved us so much that he would give his Son for us (John 3:16), we, too, can love. And just as Christ’s love for us led him to labor for us through his passion, his death, and his victorious resurrection, so we, too, are prompted by our love for him and others to labor.

God expects that the love he “lavishes” on us will naturally flow out of us into others. Real love is evidenced by action, both in labors of love to fellow believers and to our neighbors as well (Galatians 6:10).

Christian stewardship should never consist of only occasional activities, but is rather a steady and increasing outflow that shares God’s love in us with others. Jesus said, *“Freely you have received, freely give”* (Matthew 10:8, NIV). By grace, our giving, helping, and serving are joyful expressions of gratitude motivated by love because of what God has given to us and done for us.



The love of Jesus strengthened in us by the Holy Spirit, through Word and Sacrament, flows through us so we can show love to people around us.

Through faith, we understand that we exist only out of God’s love and grace, and we are enabled to see God’s love at work in our lives. With God’s strength, we are empowered to live lives worthy of his love.