Let Gratitude Show You The Way
A Season for Generosity

The Church has various seasons it celebrates throughout the year where our gaze is momentarily encouraged in a certain direction and we spend time in meaningful reflection and preparation. We spend four weeks during Advent focusing on joy, hope, love and peace in preparation for Christmas, reminding ourselves not to get lost in our material and physical preparations. As we journey toward the hope of Easter, we observe a 40-day season in the wilderness of Lent reminding ourselves of Christ's journey toward the cross and of the hope that is found in the resurrection.

These seasons are not meant to be a burden or a distraction; instead, they are about preparation, focus and being intentional. So why do we not have a season for generosity?

To make an intentional tithing commitment to the church we need the same preparation, focus and intentionality. We cannot be expected to respond on a weekly basis dependent upon how much money we have in our wallets at that moment in time. We need to stop, reflect, discover and then respond.

Let Gratitude Show You the Way is not fundraising – it is a spiritual discipline. It is an invitation to discover the deeper joy in discipleship through intentional stewardship. What follows over the next 21 days is the beginning of a journey towards practicing whole-life stewardship and living a life of Christ-like generosity.
A Word About

gratitude

“Listen to the testimonies of those responding generously. follow your soul’s yearning to come home to God’s grace and generosity. Let gratitude show you the way.”

Doctrine & Covenants 165:2b

Gratitude is more than being polite and remembering to say thank you. At its most basic form gratitude is a feeling we experience. When we receive a gift, we experience gratitude, we feel thankful, we feel grateful. However, gratitude is not just something that we experience and feel it’s also something we practice, live and do. It’s a noun and a verb, a feeling and a choice, an emotion and an action, something we experience and something we express.

Gratitude is also a Spiritual Discipline, something we can cultivate and grow with practice. It’s a spiritual disposition, a virtue, a way of seeing and being in the world. It’s a condition of the heart that recognizes that all our blessings have been received and not earned. Living from a place of abundance reminds us that everything we have is a gift, a gift of grace that is freely given by a loving and generous God.

Gratitude shows us the way because it acknowledges that God gave first and that we are the recipients of God’s lavish grace every day. That’s why when we read about generosity in the scriptures, it always starts with God’s generosity toward us. So, when we are generous we’re not giving in order to receive; we’re giving because we’ve already received.

Our generosity is a response of gratitude to grace, not for grace. When we fully embrace this our generosity will develop naturally and joyfully.
Gratitude as a Spiritual Discipline

However, gratitude often doesn't come naturally or intuitively to us, so the spiritual discipline of gratitude has to be intentional and deliberately chosen and practiced. Like everything else it takes time, intention, and practice in order for us to get better at it.

Gratitude has been practiced as a Spiritual Discipline in the Christian faith for centuries. However, in recent years the science of gratitude has also been extensively researched revealing many personal and societal benefits to practicing gratitude daily (see page 27 for an infographic about the science of gratitude).

The 5 Minute Gratitude Practice

Set aside an intentional time every day to:

1. Read a daily reflection,
2. Prayerfully reflect on your day (or previous day)
3. Ask the question “What am I grateful for today?”
4. Write it down

Expressions of gratitude don’t need to be sappy and tearful, just sincere and heartfelt. It can be for the little and the big things in life, it can also be for the ordinary and the mundane.

First thing in the morning? Middle of the day? Last thing at night? It doesn’t matter when. It matters that you make it the same time every day and you’re consistent.

The object of this practice isn’t to create a list; it’s to provide space for you to acknowledge God’s gifts in your life. Think of just one thing you’re grateful for, hold that it in your mind. Let gratitude grow. Then write it down listing 3-4 reasons why you’re grateful for it.

Don’t worry about spelling or grammar. The most important thing is to that you establish the habit of intentionally paying attention to gratitude.

Take your time. Become aware of the depth of your gratitude. Don’t hurry through this like it’s just another item on your to do list.

Go for depth over breadth. Elaborating in detail about something carries more benefits than just a superficial list of many things.
“Then their eyes were opened and they recognized Him” Luke 24:31

Our lives can become so familiar to us that we stop noticing the generosity of God that is all around us and are unaware of the giftedness of life. We take so much for granted, focusing on what we are lacking, choosing to count our problems rather than our blessings.

Gratitude opens our eyes and helps shift our focus, like putting on a pair of long-needed glasses for the first time, we discover what we have been missing. Now we start to see the world through the lens of abundance rather than scarcity, recognizing the good that is present in our lives that might otherwise have remained unseen, hidden and ignored.

We cultivate this awareness when we take time each day to intentionally pay attention to moments that invoke a feeling of thankfulness by asking the simple question, “What am I grateful for today?”

Answer the question “What am I grateful for today?” in the space below, but do not simply state it, instead give 3-4 reasons why you are thankful for it.
2. Everything Is a Gift

"Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above" James 1:17

Practicing gratitude as a spiritual discipline is about intentionally taking time to see that which is hidden in plain sight and becoming increasingly aware of the divine love that flows through all things.

Gratitude helps us learn to live with a heightened sense of awareness that everything is a gift that was first given to us. We did not earn it, buy it or achieve it; we just simply received it. That breath you just took, it was a gift. The entire universe is a gift – you and everything in it. When we see everything as a gift, we realize that life doesn’t owe us anything.

Where in your day, or life, might God's divine love be "hidden in plain sight"? What does the last sentence mean to you? How is it challenging? How is it affirming?

What are you grateful for today?
3. The Present Moment is a Gift

"This is the day the LORD has made; we will rejoice
and be glad in it." Psalm 118:24

Gratitude is about exploring the depths of the life you already have. It’s not about creating a vision of who you want to be or imagining someplace you want to go. It’s about focusing on the life you have right now and who you are today.

Your experiences matter. So if you want to feel grateful, look for the good you are experiencing in the present moment. Do not reserve your gratitude for the big, life changing conditions such as your health, economic circumstance or for loved ones. In every moment your life is being impacted by all sorts of small and often ordinary ways: the color of the sky, the shelter of your home, the peacefulness of the neighborhood, the taste of your coffee, the softness of the chair, the sounds of nature or the alertness of your mind right now.

Take a moment during your day to be present and remind yourself that everything is a gift. Listen attentively to everyone you meet today. Be slow to speak and generous in listening.

What are you grateful for today?
4. Gratitude Not Indebtedness

"Do not turn away in pride, fear, or guilt from the one who seeks only the best for you and your loved ones." Doctrine & Covenants 163:9

Receiving God's grace and love liberates us to share them. Generosity is a virtue rather than an act. Our ability to be generous emerges from a spirit of thankfulness and not debt. When we open ourselves up, God blesses beyond measure. God's blessings transform us and we want to respond. We respond out of gratitude and not out of indebtedness.

With God’s generosity there is no “debt of gratitude”. God is not keeping track of the blessings provided with expectation of return. God does not want us to respond because we feel like we have to respond. God simply blesses. When we are vulnerable to divine grace, we are open to receiving these blessings and we become more generous like God. When we respond out of gratitude we keep the gift moving as we pass on what we have received.

In what ways does your view of generosity change when it stems from a place of gratitude rather than a place of indebtedness?

What are you grateful for today?
5. Christ is a Gift

"For God so loved the world that he gave..." John 3:16

Generosity is something God wants for us, not from us. No expression of God's generosity is as complete as the gift of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, God's son freely given to us all. In Christ the giver became the gift and the ultimate example of God's grace and love.

Christ showed and taught us that God’s grace and love are equally available to everyone. God's love is unwavering and not dependent on our good behavior or good works. The gift of God's son, Jesus Christ, revealed God's grace and love. We become whole when we receive Christ and recognize that all that we have is a gift from God.

Take care to notice moments during the day when you pass unfair judgement on yourself or others then remind yourself that Jesus shared God's love with everyone without exception.

What are you grateful for today?
6. Obstacles to Gratitude

"Do not turn away in pride, fear, or guilt from the one who seeks only the best for you and your loved ones." Doctrine & Covenants 163:9

Gratitude doesn’t require a certain amount of money, any special equipment or even a stress-free life. However, just because gratitude is good, positive, and freely available doesn’t make it easy. There are many obstacles that get in the way of gratitude, such as busyness, negativity, envy, greed, fear, entitlement and forgetfulness.

Possibly the most significant obstacle is pride, believing we’re 100% self-sufficient and we got where we are today entirely on our own. We’re never comfortable asking or admitting we need the help of others, to do so would hurt our pride. The reality is self-sufficiency and independence has its limits. We didn’t create ourselves, or pave the roads we drive on, grow the food we eat or make the clothes we wear.

Think of a time when you allowed your pride to refuse a gift or refused to receive the generosity of others? What could you do differently?

What are you grateful for today?
7. Accept or Reject

"Do not turn away in pride, fear, or guilt from the one who seeks only the best for you and your loved ones. Come before your eternal creator with open hearts and discover the blessings of the gospel anew. Be vulnerable to divine grace" Doctrine & Covenants 163:9

God's grace and love is freely given, but it is still ours to accept or reject. As disciples, we yearn to receive God's grace and love in our lives. When we receive God's gifts, we allow God to touch our souls deeply. Allow yourself to receive God's boundless grace and unending love in whatever form it comes.

“Sometimes in that moment a wave of light breaks into our darkness, and it is as though a voice were saying, "You are accepted. Accepted by that which is greater than you... Simply accept the fact that you are accepted!" If that happens to us, we experience grace.” - Paul Tillich, You Are Accepted

How do you experience or understand grace in your life today?
What is the difference between "receiving" and "accepting" God's grace?

What are you grateful for today?
8. Learn to Receive

"You just need to learn how to receive a gift. One of the enduring principles of the church is Grace and Generosity. An important aspect of Grace and Generosity is willingness to receive what others give, whether it is large or small. In fact we could say that the beginning of true human generosity is our openness to receiving fully God's gift of love in Jesus Christ. All other giving is simply our continuing response to that generous gift. Unexpected, undeserved and life-transforming."

Steve Veazey Let Me Tell You A Story

In what ways do you experience "receiving" as an activity?
How might you describe God's generosity, and human generosity to someone younger? To someone older?

What are you grateful for today?
9. The Gift of Receiving

"A woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment, and she poured it on his head as he sat at the table." Matthew 26:7

Typically, we are more comfortable being a giver than a receiver. But learning to graciously receive and accept gifts matters. It is an essential part of generosity, as a gift cannot be given unless we are willing to receive it.

When we receive a gift, whether it is material or just a compliment, we are allowing someone else to express his or her generosity with us. However, if we refuse to accept a gift, the giver is robbed of the joy of giving. By freely and graciously receiving we allow the giver to feel a sense of worth as the flow of generosity continues and expands in an upward spiral.

Notice yourself as a receiver.

Practice thinking about the giver, rather than the gift. Did the giver leave feeling that their gift was appreciated? Did your interaction make the giver feel a sense of value and worth?

What are you grateful for today?
10 In All Circumstances

"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing and give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."
Thessalonians 5:16-18

Giving thanks in all things does not mean giving thanks for all things. There are many things, such as violence, war, fear, oppression and injustice that we should not be thankful for. Instead, we are invited to give thanks in, within and through all circumstances.

Practicing gratitude does not mean ignoring and denying suffering, negativity and adversity, naively pretending that everything in life is perfect. Instead, practicing gratitude is about intentionally choosing to recognize the good because God is good even when our circumstances are not, because God is always there, guiding, giving, and loving us even when life is hardest. A disposition of gratitude helps us look beyond our current conditions toward the hope and peace found in the gift of God's grace and generosity.

Reflect on a time when you experienced a difficult, unfair or unjust circumstance. What helped you get through that time? Is there something about that experience for which you are grateful?

What are you grateful for today?
"Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back. He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. He was a Samaritan. Then Jesus asked, "Were not ten made clean? But where are they?" Then he said to him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well."

Luke 17:15-19

During this time, anyone with a skin disease like Leprosy was required to live alone, outside of the community, wear only torn clothes, keep their hair unkempt, cover the lower part of their face and everywhere they went they were expected to shout out, Unclean! Unclean! (Lev 13:45-46)

Jesus tells the one that returns, "Your faith has made you well". The Greek word for 'made well' is SODZO, which can be used to mean restored, rescued, or made whole. That day nine lepers were 'made clean' but only one, the Samaritan, gave thanks and his gratitude made him restored, rescued and whole.

When has your faith helped make you "well?" Who else, if anyone, was involved in your becoming "well?" If others were involved, think of them. In what ways, if any, are you still connected? Why, or why not?

What are you grateful for today?
Gratitude is not an individualistic practice. There is always a giver and a receiver whose lives become intertwined, creating new or deeper connections.

We recognize that we are not completely self-sufficient and independent but instead we exist in a web of interconnected relationships. Through gratitude we begin to recognize the interdependency of everything, helping us to be mindful of the help (both human and divine) that has led us to where we are today and to the help we continue to rely on to sustain our lives. Gratitude allows us to appreciate the generosity of God and affirm the worth and value of the people around us rather than taking them for granted.

How might remembering the giver of a gift differ from practicing gratitude for the giver? How might it be similar? Which is more impactful for you? Why?

What are you grateful for today?
13. Gratitude Unshackles Us

"Break free of the shackles of conventional culture that mainly promote self-serving interests" Doctrine & Covenants 163:9

Dr. Robert Emmons from the University of California at Davis has found that gratitude is not only something that can be cultivated, but it can even improve our health and social relationships. After several years of researching the multiple impacts and effects of gratitude, he concluded that: "Being grateful unshackles us from toxic emotions, as it literally changes the neurology at play in our brains, and it opens the door for us to be more empathetic and forgiving towards others."

Gratitude unshackles us from toxic emotions such as envy, greed, jealousy and guilt. This is simply because we cannot focus on them and be grateful at the same time.

Consider your life today. What aspects might be "toxic" for you mentally, physically, emotionally, or spiritually? In what ways can gratitude become a helpful or healing action?

What are you grateful for today?
"Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up"  James 4: 10

As God calls us to generosity, our generosity is not a reason to boast or gloat. When we give, we give with a humble and open heart as we share generously with others. In the way that God's grace is given freely, so too should we freely give. We need not keep score of how generous we are with what we have.

God has called us as humble servants to love and give compassionately without reserve. By engaging in humble generosity, we invite others to share in God's grace and love as we have known them.

In what ways can you respond compassionately to those in your community needing humble generosity?

What are you grateful for today?
15. Gratitude Takes Time

“*But by the grace of God I am what I am…*” 1 Corinthians 15:10

Grace is a gift that’s meant to be received. And gratitude? That’s something you give in response to God’s grace. Gratitude is an act of generosity; it’s something that you give freely as a gift. No hooks, no conditions., a gift.

Gratitude takes time. It takes time to let generosity make room in your life for giving. It’s something you practice with yourself, and with others, and with strangers. It’s not about having enough money or things or items or time to give away. Generosity is first and foremost an attitude of the heart. A position of grace. Generosity knows that all of life is a gift, and from this position of grace and freedom, it gives of itself as a gift.

Generosity can be confronting. It flies in the face of modern-day systems of owning, consuming, and making our own way at the expense of others. Instead generosity declares that there is enough for everyone.

**What do you need to let go of in order to make more room for God?**
**Where do you need to extend yourself some grace?**

**What are you grateful for today?**
Many people have shaped our faith over the years. Express your gratitude in a thoughtful, deliberate way by writing a thank you letter to someone that has influenced your faith. Someone that has inspired you and affected the faith you have today.

Write as though you are addressing this person directly ("Dear_____") and try to describe in specific terms why you are grateful for them. What did they do? How have they influenced your faith?
17. Can We Calculate Our Giving?

“Give generously according to your true capacity. Eternal joy and peace
await those who grow in the grace of generosity that flows from
compassionate hearts without thought of return”  Doctrine & Covenants
163:9

Can We Calculate Our Giving?
Words By Danny Bellevi

Can we calculate our giving, placing limits on our praise
When the blessings we are given multiply and grace our days?
Let us share from life’s abundance. God provides enough to spare
Shaken down and pressed together, overflowing everywhere.

Great or small the treasure offered, each is equal in your sight;
Fragrance poured from alabaster valued as a widow’s mite.
Bless our Giving and receiving. Each of us can do our part –
Giving for the sake of giving, flowing from a generous heart.

God’s community is living far beyond our walls of faith.
Every tithe that serves creation will be valued in its place.
Be it home or global mission, any cause that strengthens worth
Will be honored in our giving as a blessing for God’s earth.

Is there a word, image, or phrase that stands out to you?
What significance does it hold for you today? What message does it give to you?

What are you grateful for today?
18. Gratitude Leads to Generosity

"Freely you have received, now freely give" Matthew 14:10

Gratitude has such depth and resonance that few fully realize its entirety. Through exploring, discovering, and grappling with gratitude we can evoke a more loving, compassionate, and inspired way of being and living. Do not just dwell in gratitude by recognizing the giftedness of your life, but also recognize the generosity that created such an abundant life. Gratitude is about recognizing and acknowledging the given, the gift and the giver.

True generosity comes from the heart and an awareness of God's love and grace. As you spend time practicing the discipline of gratitude, it awakens your heart to new desires and to freely give what you have received. A profound conversion of the heart leads to natural generosity. When God's love and grace is experienced, we can no longer hold on to our abundance when we see someone else in need.

In which direction do you feel your generosity growing and pulling and how can you act on it?

What are you grateful for today?
"Free the full capacity of Christ's mission through generosity that imitates God's generosity." Doctrine & Covenants 165

When you realize what you've been given, you're more motivated to give back; the more you recognize what others have done for you, the more you want to do for others; the more you appreciate the world, the more you want to make it better. The virtuous effect of gratitude ripples out further as the upward spiral continues.

The purpose of practicing gratitude is to become so aware of God's love and presence in our lives that we are moved to respond in the same way, to love and serve God in everything, in everyone, and in every aspect of daily life.

In what way does a practice of gratitude affect your thoughts, emotions, spirituality, view of others and the world?

What are you grateful for today?
20. Equipped & Ready to Serve

‘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 25:40

Receiving God's blessings leads us to longingly serve God.

Serving God by serving others keeps us connected with God and connects us with each other. We discover that God gifts each one with grace and love and God gifts the whole community. So individually and collectively, we receive and share God's blessings. When we respond together, we give shape and form to God's vision of Shalom through faithful and generous living.

When we extend our lives in service to others, we learn that we receive even as we are giving. Giving and receiving integrates in a cycle where one prompts the other. We receive gifts. We share them with others. Our giving blesses us and creates an opportunity for new relationships. And the cycle continues.

In what ways is your congregation and community ready to be part of the continuing cycle of generosity? How can you respond to strengthen the cycle?

What are you grateful for today?
21. Fully Awake & Ready to Respond

God, where will your spirit lead me today?
Help me be fully awake and ready to respond.
Grant me the courage to risk something new
And become a blessing of your love and peace.
Amen

Generosity is missional - missional because it allows us to not only share the good news of the gospel with others, but to live out its message and bring forth that response from others. We are called to share generously and love abundantly like Christ so others can come to know God's love and grace.

Generosity starts inward and expands outward until it touches everyone around us. As we read the Mission Prayer, we are invited to open our minds and souls to the way our world and community are calling to us in need. Opportunity knocks at our door without preamble or prior notification, we must be "fully awake and ready to respond."

Where are you being led to respond? Do you have the courage to try something new? In what ways can you be a blessing of love and peace? Who needs your generosity today?

What are you grateful for today?
Let Gratitude Show You The Way

I (we) intend to express my (our) gratitude by generously supporting Local and World Ministries of Community of Christ over the next 12 months in the following ways:

NAME: 


Time & Talents

I intend to deepen my discipleship by using my time and talents in the following ways to support mission in my congregation:


Treasure

My Local Congregation The Worldwide Church

$ __________________ $ __________________

“Listen to the testimonies of those responding generously, follow your soul’s yearning to come home to God’s grace and generosity. Let gratitude show you the way.” Doctrine & Covenants 165:2b