

# Planning



Sunday, November 19 – Saturday, November 25 • 2023

## Attitude of Abundance

A parable about three servants encourages us to live more joyfully and generously as we live into the reign of God.

### This week...

#### Ecumenical prayer calendar

Indonesia, Philippines, East Timor (Timor Leste)

As listed in *Pilgrim Prayer: The Ecumenical Prayer Cycle*, edited by Ester Pudjo Widiastih and Karen L. Bloomquist. (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2018). <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/prayer-cycle> offers valuable aids for intercessory prayers, prayer on behalf of and in solidarity with others.

#### Special days ([commentary](#) on p. 160)

**November 24** – Martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur (*Sikhism*)

**November 26** – Thanksgiving (*USA*)

Alternate materials for [Thanksgiving](#) are on pp. 15–22.

#### Personal reflection

It is easier, perhaps, to see all that is going wrong. It is easier to choose scarcity, but what happens when you choose to see God's abundant possibility in everyone and everything? This week, choose one person or thing in your everyday life to see endless possibilities. What might change? How might you change?

*The planning page is provided in text format for copying, adapting, and adding to your bulletin or online worship resources or website or social media (see Text folder, Worship Outline).*

#### November 19, 2023

25th Sunday after Pentecost

Proper 28 (33)

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

#### Revised Common Lectionary (Year A)

Judges 4:1–7

Psalm 123

1 Thessalonians 5:1–11

#### Matthew 25:14–30

the focus in age-level materials



*Seasons of the Spirit™*  
is based on semi-

continuous readings of the

*Revised Common Lectionary*.

**Liturgical colour** Green

The Season after Pentecost is a time to tell stories about God and who we are as Christ's disciples. Use the Storytelling Starters each week as an opportunity to encourage new stories. "[Two Perspectives](#)" on page 161 is suggested for worship, but it might also be used with leadership groups to explore how we welcome multiple vantage points within the work that we share as the Body of Christ.

### Online Resources

#### Lection Connection

Essays and discussion prompts linking current events with this week's scriptures. Use for sermon preparation, Bible studies, and small groups or share on social media at <https://www.seasonsonline.ca/10/>.

#### Nurturing Faith and Spirituality at Home

An easy-to-share, weekly online resource supports the spiritual lives and faith formation of individuals and families at home. It is provided in the [Nurturing Faith and Spirituality at Home](#) folder.





Judges 4:1–7  
Psalm 123  
1 Thessalonians 5:1–11  
Matthew 25:14–30

the focus in age-level materials



Seasons of the Spirit™ is based on the semi-continuous readings of the Revised Common Lectionary.

That there is enough for all to live and flourish,  
Holy One, we thank you.  
We confess that we do not enact this reality.  
Help us live in an attitude of abundance, so all  
may have enough. Amen.

# Attitude of Abundance

When we live with an attitude of abundance, we are liberated from the tyranny of greed into hope. We are empowered to divest some of what we have beyond “enough,” so no one has less than “enough.” That is God’s way of mercy and justice.

**Judges 4:1–7** God works where God will work. When the situation seemed hopeless, God was already at work to provide a leader and deliverance. God judges, and also sees and saves. In the context of God’s power for mercy, the psalmist of **Psalm 123** brings together the interests of a master and a servant.

In **1 Thessalonians 5:1–11**, Paul imagines Christians clothed with the virtues of faith, hope, and love as they resist pressure to conform to society. Living and working as though the fulfillment of God’s reign is imminent, disciples bring the abundant possibilities of God’s grace and compassion to all.

**Matthew 25:14–30** The first-century church in Antioch was striving to forge a united community of Jewish and Gentile members. First addressed to this community, the gospel of Matthew portrays Jesus as a new Moses, providing Torah-like wisdom. Matthew includes five main sections of Jesus’ teaching. Today’s focus verses are from the final section (Matthew 24–25) and Jesus’ response to the disciples’ questions about the “end of the age.”

In Jesus’ day, owners of large family enterprises often travelled to protect their business interests and increase their wealth. Carefully selected inner circles of servants managed affairs in their absence. To such trusted servants, the master in Matthew 25:14–30 entrusts large sums of money. For the first hearers, this money metaphor to describe God’s reign likely would have been surprising and controversial.

By the time of Jesus, money coined by governments was the accepted form of payment for goods, services, and taxes. Banks served the business community by exchanging currencies and lending money. Banks paid interest on funds deposited with them. Most citizens had little money to save and probably hid what they had for safekeeping.

The exact value of “a talent” is not clear. In ancient Israel, one talent was equivalent to 3,000 shekels – about 34 kg/75 lb of gold or silver. In ancient Greece, a talent was the amount of silver needed to pay a crew of 200 rowers for one month.

As with any parable, Jesus’ teaching is open to multiple interpretations. The reference to “after a long time” in verse 19 can refer to the time when God’s reign will come in its fullness. So, for some, this parable is a mandate to take risks for the sake of following Jesus’ mission. For some, it is a warning against living one’s life of discipleship in a maintenance manner, waiting for the fulfillment of God’s reign and not making the most of the gifts that God gives.

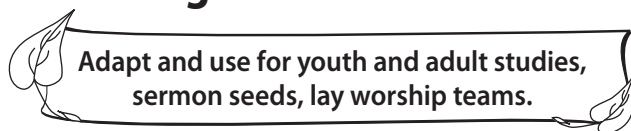
Some scholars, notably William Herzog, suggest that the third servant is a hero. This servant stood up to a demanding boss who encouraged his employees to increase their wealth and bank accounts by making loans or investments that charged exorbitant interest rates. Burying the funds kept them from being used for such corrupt purposes. The third servant embraces God’s reign of justice and equity by refusing to take action that would have oppressed others.

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The realm of God is here, in part, and we are signs of that radical, upside-down way of life. Taking the third servant as our example, how might we resist the pull of greed and enact God’s radical, abundant generosity this week?



## Reflecting on the Word



### Connecting with life

Elite sports people, movie stars, and other high-profile people are growing more vocal, in some places, in opposition to practices of greed that lead to exploiting vulnerable workers and the earth. Some applaud the use of their voices in this way; others, however, offer critique. Such critique may reveal a person's fear of losing power, wealth, or comfort.

- **Where have you witnessed voices raised in support of fairness for all?**
- **What was the response? What is your response?**

### Scripture

#### Matthew 25:14–30

Theologian William Herzog suggests that the third servant is a hero. This servant stood up to a demanding boss who encouraged his employees to increase his wealth at the expense of others.

- **What do you think of Herzog's suggestion?**
- **If God is not the landowner, and the realm of God is counter to this cultural valuing we still see today of "more," where is God in the parable? Or, is God in the parable?**
- **How do you feel when you encounter the image of the so-called lazy servants in this parable and the bridesmaids being condemned to a place of "weeping and gnashing teeth"? Might it be that here, now, the "weeping and gnashing of teeth" is the sorrow of the exploited by the world's greed and injustice?**
- **Is this an anti-parable – the way things are, to which the realm of God offers an alternative?**

#### 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11

- **Is the realm of God imminent, coming soon? Or is it (be) coming now?**
- **How do we encourage practices of paying attention to where the realm of God is unfolding around us, here, now?**
- **What are the signs of that realm that we can identify?**
- **How might we encourage our community to share stories of what we are seeing of faithfulness, hope, and love in the world?**

### Connecting scripture and life

For John Dominic Crossan, the prayer Jesus teaches his disciples, narrated in the gospels of Matthew and Luke, prays a kin-dom of "enoughness." Those celebrities who use their platform to raise a voice for the oppressed in creation are, perhaps, not divesting themselves of all their power in a system of unjust distribution of wealth. However, when we acknowledge that we have more than enough and trust in that abundance, we are liberated from the tyranny of greed to divest some of what we have beyond "enough."

- **What are the invested interests of your faith community?**
- **How do you imagine you and your church are called to participate in God's reign?**
- **In what ways are you as an individual called to further love, justice, and freedom by taking a risk? What is the risk you need to take?**
- **In the weeks to come, how will you use God's abundant gifts in faithful and extravagant ways, serving God and neighbour?**

## Focus for Worship, Learning, and Serving

In the opening words of her poem "The Parable of the Talents" Ann Weems reminds us that the talents in Jesus' parable might not be money but the many obstacles between us and real joy. "[Two Perspectives](#)" on page 161 and "[An Upside-Down Story](#)" on p. 162 both invite us to seek a fresh interpretation of a familiar parable with so many possible meanings. We are invited to dig in and wonder what might be hiding.

There is space to linger with all this possibility in the prayers as the community finds their own words and images for what can feel so hard to claim in the kin-dom come.

In all you do and share this week, may there be room for joy in the stories you share and the songs you sing. May there be space to dance and laugh because we never know what is coming, and there is joy in being alive.



# Attitude of Abundance

## Prepare

NOTE: The following suggestions are mere starting points; adapt, delete, and add according to your local needs and context. If a community is gathered in person, they may speak the **bolded** lines. If worshippers are not all physically present, consider having a different individual say the bolded responses. Instructions are *italicized*.

- ❑ Recruit volunteers needed for worship: a woman for the monologue that follows the reading from Judges.
- ❑ Choose an option for hearing Matthew 25:14–30. For the Bible story, arrange for a storyteller to present “[An Upside Down Story](#)” on p. 162. Alternatively, for younger children, arrange for a storyteller to present “[A Parable of Three Workers](#)” in Exploring Our Faith at the end of this week’s materials. For the reading from two perspectives, invite four people to introduce themselves using the resource sheet “[Two Perspectives](#)” information on page 161.
- ❑ Bring items for setting the worship space: place a large clear bowl surrounded by many smaller bowls on the worship table. Have coloured sand in the smaller bowls for the prayer of confession. For the prayers of the people, set an array of candles on the worship table or around the worship space.
- ❑ You might choose to print [Desert Dancing](#) on or in your bulletin (in the Images to Project and Images for Printing folders). See “[Connecting with the Art](#)” on p. 8 for background to the art and artist.
- ❑ Bring song such as “May the God of Hope” (*Seasons Songbook*, vol. 6, #24 on *Seasons Music CD*, vol. 6. Printed music and recording are also available for purchase

and download at [https://www.seasonsonline.ca/order\\_products/](https://www.seasonsonline.ca/order_products/)).

- ❑ Set stations as described on pp. 163–164.



## Music Suggestions

### A World of Difference

Monica O'Brien, Gina Ogilvie; *Seasons Songbook*, vol. 9

### As Long as We Follow/Na Nzela Na Lola

Joseph Kamemba; *Seasons Songbook*, vol. 9

### Be God's

Danielle Rose; *Seasons Songbook*, vol. 9

### Fill Us, God

Gerry Holmes; *Seasons Songbook*, vol. 9

### Joy for You and Me

Maria Millward; *Seasons Songbook*, vol. 6

### May the God of Hope

Argentine folk melody; *Seasons Songbook*, vol. 6

### The Heart of Your Dreaming

Kevin Bates; *Seasons Songbook*, vol. 5

### Everything We Got

Robin Mann; *Seasons Songbook*, vol. 3

### This Joy

Traditional; *Seasons Songbook*, vol. 2



A chart that shows the licence holder(s) for each song in each of the 9 *Seasons of the Spirit* Music Volumes can be found at [www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca). Click on Library; Seasons Music Information. Please contact a licence holder for permission to duplicate.

## Gather

### Call to worship

Running on empty. Drained. Overscheduled and overworked.

Listless. Hopeless. Just plain tired.

When we can't see another way,

**We come to worship.**

We come to be renewed and restored,  
to feel our attitude shift.

Together, we will find our way into joy.

**We will be filled with God's love and grace.**

*Sing together the refrain from “Fill Us, God” (*Seasons Songbook*, vol. 9. Printed music and recording are also available for purchase and download at [https://www.seasonsonline.ca/order\\_products/](https://www.seasonsonline.ca/order_products/)).*

### Opening prayer

We joyfully receive your abundant gifts, God.

We pause to feel the power of life within us,  
the potential for compassion around us,  
and your steady ground of hope beneath us.

### Prayer of confession

We come together, lifting our eyes to the One enthroned in the heavens, to find mercy and grace.

Our souls have had more than their fill. We are weary from all that we are carrying.

We come together to share in our burdens.



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## Worship Outline • November 19, 2023

You are invited to come forward and pour sand from various containers into a clear vessel (layering the different colours), and asking God to remove the burdens of worry, if even for a short time, and to hold them in God's heart. As you pour sand in the bowl, use these words to voice your prayer, "I have had more than my/our fill of \_\_\_\_\_"

*Soft, gentle music might play as confessions are shared.*

## Words of affirmation

There is joy in knowing that we are not alone.

God hears our prayers and offers compassion and grace.

God offers us abundant life. Let us embrace it, celebrate it, multiply it, and rejoice.

For God's investment in us never ends. Amen.

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## Engage

### Opening the word

**Judges 4:1–7** After the reading, have someone take the role of Deborah and speak the monologue below, linking Deborah's story with the parable in Matthew 25:14–30.

Nothing ventured, nothing gained, I always say. History would choose to remember me sitting under a tree offering sage advice to my fellow Israelites. But I choose to think of myself as a woman of action. Not only did I draw up the battle plan for General Sisera but I was with him the whole way. Anyone who thinks having women in the military is a new phenomenon needs to hear my story! You see, it wouldn't be enough for me to sketch out a plan for the general. I needed to back up my intentions with an investment of my energy, my resources, and maybe my entire life. Fortunately for me, it didn't require such a sacrifice.

That's why if I were to offer advice to you now, I'd say it's not enough to talk about matters of faith – you have to be people of action. Invest yourselves in seeking justice, caring for others, and engaging in acts of compassion whenever the opportunities arise. Ask yourself, "How can I move from pondering the wisdom of faith to offering my resources for ministry?" I guarantee your investment will come back one-hundred fold.

**Matthew 25:14–30** the focus scripture for age-level materials in **ENCORE**

**If gathering in person, invite children, young people, and all who wish to move to the stations. Others will remain seated for proclaiming the word. For those participating at home, you might encourage them to use materials that have been sent.**

Choose from the following.

**Bible story** Arrange for a storyteller to present "[An Upside-Down Story](#)" on p. 162. Alternatively, for younger children, tell the story "[A Parable of Three Workers](#)" (in Exploring Our Faith at the end of this week's materials).

**A story from two perspectives** Invite four people to take the roles of Landowner, First enslaved person, Second enslaved person, and Third enslaved person. Have each person introduce themselves using the information from Perspective A on the resource sheet "[Two Perspectives](#)" on page 161.

Read the passage. Then, the four people take the roles using the information from Perspective B on the resource.

Read the passage a second time.

**1 Thessalonians 5:1–11** Read the passage with the perspective that the times and seasons at hand are in our present. You might play with the language to make it feel like it is not a future event. It might begin, "Now concerning the present times and seasons..." As theologian and scholar Dr. Deidre Palmer has written, "Jesus comes again, and again, and again in acts of love and justice and... Live within the reign now." How might our attitude shift to welcome this possibility in our midst?

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## Respond

**Sing** or listen to a song such as "May the God of Hope" as people gather again (*Seasons Songbook*, vol. 6, #24 on *Seasons Music CD*, vol. 6. Printed music and recording are also available for purchase and download at [https://www.seasonsonline.ca/order\\_products/](https://www.seasonsonline.ca/order_products/)).

### Prayers of the people

If not already heard, begin by reading 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11, where it is said, "Let us shine a light on injustice – for we are children of the light." Then, invite the people to light candles set around the space or on the worship table and name an injustice.





Loving God, we cannot predict when we will be most needed. None of us knows when our gifts and skills will match the needs and hopes of another, but we pray we will be children of the light.

Prepare us, God, to be ready to serve when the time is right and name the injustices in our community and our world. May we be sensitive to the needs and hurts of others. May we be awake to the suffering that remains silent and hidden, which we offer into the silence now.  
*Silent prayer.*

Encourage us, God, and allow us to build each other up, reminding each other again and again that we are called to this. We are called to be witnesses and shine a light on every injustice until your kin-dom come. We need each other in this work, as much as we need your love and grace, O God. Fill us with your hope for this world and bless us with joy in the struggle for love and justice. May we dance and sing into your kin-dom. Amen.

### Invitation to the offering

In the end, it is not about how much we have collected in earthly treasures.  
In the end, it is what we did with those treasures, how we used them to support and encourage others to build the city of God.  
In the end, it is not about us as individuals but about us as a community.  
Our offering is a practical and symbolic reminder that we are in the business of kin-dom building together.

### Prayer of dedication or offering prayer

Thank you for this community and for the responsibility of being your people.  
Forgive us for the times when we have tucked away and hidden our gifts and talents from the world.  
As a community, help us support and encourage each other so we can share all of our gifts for and to your glory.  
Bless these gifts, seen and unseen so that they might be a blessing to others. Amen.

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## Bless

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*Jesus' parable challenges us to consider how we invest in the reign of God.  
Send the people out with this Franciscan Blessing:*

May God bless you with discomfort at easy answers,  
half-truths, superficial relationships,  
so that you may live deep within your heart.

May God bless you with anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people,  
so that you may work for justice, freedom, and peace.

May God bless you with tears to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation, and war,  
so that you may reach out to comfort them and turn their pain into joy.

May God bless you with enough foolishness to believe that you can make a difference in this world,  
so that you can do what others claim cannot be done.

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## Special Day Commentary

### November 24 – Martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur (Sikhism)

The ninth of the ten Sikh gurus was murdered on this day in 1675. He believed in the freedom of religion and the right of the Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs to live and peace and practice their own religions.



# Two Perspectives

## Matthew 25:14–30

When Jesus told parables, he used examples from everyday living – things that would have been familiar to his audience. People thought deeply about what each parable meant in their own lives and context, and the parables would have been interpreted differently. Here are two possible ways to hear Matthew 25:14–30.

### Perspective A

**Landowner** I am the rightful owner of the property. I am a good person; I trust my servants and expect them to invest my money at a good rate of return.

**ONE:** I am a responsible person. I recognize the legitimate authority of the landowner. I know that I will be rewarded if I invest the money wisely and well. I have been entrusted with five talents – equivalent to 15 years of average salary.

**Two:** I am a responsible person. I recognize the legitimate authority of the landowner. I know that I will be rewarded if I invest the money wisely and well. I have been entrusted two talents – each talent is equivalent to 15 years of an average salary.

**THREE:** I am a responsible person. I recognize the legitimate authority of the landowner. I know that I will be rewarded if I invest the money wisely and well. I have been entrusted one talent – a talent is equivalent to 15 years of average salary.

### Perspective B

**Landowner** I am a harsh person. I take what is not mine to take. I have no legitimate claim on the property. I am an absentee landowner – profit is all that matters to me. Many rich landowners, like me, live outside of Palestine. I am not concerned about the country and its people. I am more concerned about getting as much profit as I can. The well-being of my tenants is not my concern.

**ONE:** I fear the landowner. If I do not imitate the landowner's practice of exploiting other poor people by charging interest, I will be in danger of being destroyed by the landowner. I have been given five talents – a talent is equivalent to about 15 years of an average salary – with the expectation I will increase the landowner's profits. I know that charging interest is against Jewish law at this time because charging interest exploits people whose families are so poor they cannot help each other.

**Two:** I fear the landowner. If I do not imitate the landowner's practice of exploiting other poor people by charging interest I will be in danger of being destroyed by the landowner. I have been given two talents – a talent is about 15 years of an average salary – with the expectation I will increase the landowner's profits. I know that charging interest is against Jewish law at this time because charging interest exploits people whose families are so poor they cannot help each other.

**THREE:** I know that the landowner is a harsh man who takes what is not his to take. I know that the landowner does not have any legitimate authority. I will resist the landowner's requirement to invest the equivalent of 15 years of an average salary to increase the landowner's wealth. I know the consequences of this defiance. I can resist in two ways: I can bury the money (the respectful and expected action of a free person at this time) therefore challenging the landowner's ownership of me, and also refuse to participate in the exploitation of the community.

■ **How does the parable speak to you about how we invest ourselves in God's reign of justice and peace?**



# An Upside-Down Story

Based on Matthew 25:14–30

One day Jesus told his friends a really strange story. There was a very rich man who wanted to go on a trip. "I need someone to take care of my money," he said to himself. So he called his servants.

"Here," he said to the first servant. "Here are five bags of money. Take care of them until I get back home."

Then the rich man called the second servant. "Here are two bags of money," he said. "Take care of them till I get back home."

The rich man still had some money left over, so he called another servant. "Here is one bag of money. Take care of it till I get back home."

And so the rich man went on his trip. The first servant took his five bags of money and bought a gold mine. The second servant took his two bags of money and bought an oil well. The third servant took his one bag of money and hid it safely in the ground.

A whole year later, the rich man came back home. He called his three servants. "I have been away for a long time," he said. "Tell me what you have done with my money."

The first servant gave the rich man ten bags of money. "Wow!" said the rich man. "Where did you get all that money?"

"I bought a gold mine with your five bags of money. I got a lot of gold out of that mine, and so now you have ten bags of money."

"That's great!" said the rich man. "Because you did so well with the five bags of money, I am going to give you a whole lot more money, and you can see what you can do with it."

Then the second servant came and gave the rich man four bags of money. "I took your two bags of money and I bought an oil well. The oil well gave me lots of oil to sell, so that now you have four bags of money."

"That's great!" said the rich man. "Because you did so well with the two bags of money, I am going to give you a whole lot more money, and you can see what you can do with it."

Then the rich man asked the third servant, "I gave you one bag of money. What did you do with it?" The third servant looked up at the rich man. "I knew that you are the kind of man who takes things that don't belong to him... So I took your money and I buried it in the ground. Here is your bag of money."

"What?" yelled the rich man. "...Why didn't you do something with it so I would have more money?"

The third servant was very afraid. "But I did what you asked me to do."

"Get out of here!" the rich man yelled. "...Give me my money and just get out of here!"

And that's the way it is. The rich people get richer, and the poor people get poorer. When Jesus had finished telling his story he smiled at his friends. They all looked worried.

"Did you like my story?" he asked.

"No, I didn't like your story," said Andrew. "The third servant did the right thing. And it isn't fair that rich people keep getting more money, and the poor people keep getting poorer."

"Andrew," said Jesus. "I'm glad you didn't like my story. I didn't like it either."

"I get it," said Mary. "...you were turning things upside down."

"Yes! That's right, Mary," said Jesus. "...my story is about the way things are. But that's not the way they should be. The third servant did the right thing, even though the rich man was very unkind and very unfair. The third servant was living God's way!"

*By Ralph Milton from Lectionary Story Bible, Year A. Copyright © 2007 Ralph Milton, Wood Lake Publishing Inc. Used by permission.*

A recording of this story is available in MP3 format in the Audio Stories folder.



## Bible story

### Materials

- Recording of "An Upside-Down Story"
- Alternatively, arrange for a storyteller to present the story
- Paper or drawing pads
- Basic supplies

## The practice of storytelling

### Directions

1. Listen to the story "An Upside-Down Story."
2. Using the materials provided, draw a picture of what it might look like if everyone lived in God's way like the third servant. How would your world be different?





## Living, Learning, Growing as Disciples

The following stations might be set up around your worship space, or in other places around the church, in your home, or outdoors. Choose one or more practices, depending on your space and numbers. Display the directions for all to see onscreen or in person. Adapt stations for use when physically distancing and above all, follow the safe practices of your congregation and local health officials.

**For your convenience, directions are formatted for printing and available in the Stations folder.**

### Health and Safety Practices

**Basic supplies** pens, pencils, markers, crayons, white glue/glue sticks, scissors, hand sanitizer, wipes placed in a basket or bin, two containers marked "clean" and "used"

**Setting the space** Utilize large spaces where people can maintain a safe physical distance. Spread out chairs around a large table or use tape to mark off the space around stand alone chairs.

**Keep it clean** Wipe down and disinfect places used for stations. Provide enough arts and crafts supplies to reduce sharing and mark containers "clean" and "used." Remind people to use hand sanitizer as they begin and as they end stations.

### What if...

#### Materials

- Basic supplies
- Paper



**Suitable for all ages**

### The practice of imagining

#### Directions

In the parable from Matthew 25:14–30, the servants were given large amounts of money to watch over while the property owner was away. What would you do if you were suddenly responsible for something of great value?

1. Choose one of the following, ponder the possibilities, or talk with a partner about how you might use this gift.

- **What if you have one million dollars; what good thing could you do with it?**
- **What if you were the leader of your country; what good decision could you make?**
- **What if you owned a whole forest; what good thing could you do with it?**
- **What if you could see people's greatest needs; how could you use that special gift?**
- **Imagine your gifts; what good thing could you do with them?**

Albert Einstein said: "Your imagination is your preview of life's coming attraction."

2. Draw a picture of how you might use your gifts for the good of your community or even the world.

### Words of encouragement

#### Materials

- Basic supplies
- Index cards or other small cards



**Suitable for all ages**

### The practice of prayer

#### Directions

Thessalonica was an important city on the coast of Greece. The apostle Paul had established a church there. After he left, Paul wrote a letter of encouragement that included this wisdom: "Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing." Allow these words to focus your prayer and your hope in this simple breath prayer. A breath prayer is a simple prayer that you offer to God through your breathing using a simple phrase.

1. Invite Paul's hope to become part of your breath.

Build up each other,  
as indeed you are doing.

*Inhale* on the first line and *exhale* on the second. Allow the breath to carry the words along with it. Say the prayer over and over (silently or aloud) like a mantra.

2. Allow the breath prayer to gently lead you to that place of inner silence and calm – the place where you don't need to say the words anymore.
3. If desired, take an index card to remember this breath prayer or create a new one to decorate and keep in your pocket to remind you of God's words of encouragement.



## Full of talents

### Materials

- Basic supplies
- Posterboard or other large paper
- Magazines
- Assorted art supplies including markers, glue, paint, scrapbook materials and other embellishments



**Suitable for  
ages 9–adult**

## The practice of visioning

### Directions

Vision boards are often used to help prioritize goals, values, and intentions and can help us make the most of the talents God has shared with us.

1. Look back over the past year and reflect on your God-given gifts, talents, and resources. Wonder:
  - **How have you been sharing your talents?**
  - **How have you buried your gifts?**
  - **What fears have prevented you from sharing your resources?**
2. Ask God to help you use your gifts toward realizing the kin-dom.
3. Flip through the magazines for images and words that might help you to use your talents more. Cut out anything and everything that feels important.
4. Once you feel like you have a sense of a vision for your talents with the words and images collected, start arranging your cut pieces on your poster board. Trim where needed. Glue when you are ready.
5. Use the art materials provided to embellish and emphasize how you're feeling called to use your talents in the next year.
6. Bring home your vision board and put it somewhere in your home where you'll see it every day and engage in renewed reflection.

## Letting go of our fears

### Materials

- Stones
- Bowl of water
- Hand sanitizer or wipes



**Suitable for  
all ages**

## The practice of contemplation

### Directions

The person who received one piece of gold in Jesus' story said they were scared. They were afraid of losing the gold and hid it. Sometimes, we are also afraid and unable to be our whole selves because we are scared of what might happen or what other people might think of us.

1. Reflect on your fears, whether in the past or present. It might be something specific, such as a fear of heights or more general, such as uncertainty about the future.
2. Imagine how your fear might be represented in a physical way and pick up a stone. Feel the weight of it.
  - **How has this fear overwhelmed or even buried you?**
  - **Where is this fear most present?**
3. Move your stone to the other hand. As you feel the weight of it, consider what might come if you were to allow this fear to release its power from you.
4. Move quietly to the bowl of water and prepare to let this fear go to God.
5. Place the stone in the bowl and feel the water of new beginnings welcome something new within you.
6. Touch and feel the lightness of the water on your hands and remember how heavy the stone felt.
7. Offer a prayer to God that this lightness and freedom will continue to renew you and strengthen you.

The article "[Connecting with the Art](#)" on page 8 provides background to this season's posters and art engagement ideas for individuals and groups. You might add an Art station and select one of the art engagement ideas.



Story and activities for the very young to use in church or at home.

## The parable of Three Workers

A story based on Matthew 25:14–30

One day Jesus told this story...

Once there was a landowner who was going on a trip. Before leaving, the landowner asked the workers to take care of things. The landowner trusted the workers to do their best.

To the first worker, the landowner gave five coins. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. To the second worker, the landowner gave two coins. 1, 2. To the third worker, the landowner gave 1 coin. 1. 5, 2, 1!

"Take good care of this money," the landowner told them. Then the landowner went away.

While the landowner was away, the first worker bought some seeds with the five coins. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. The worker planted the seeds and later sold the vegetables that grew from those seeds. Now the worker had 10 coins. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10.

The second worker bought a cow with the two coins. 1, 2. Every morning the worker would milk the cow and sell the milk to the neighbours. Now the worker had four coins. 1, 2, 3, 4.

The third worker looked at the coin and was afraid that the one coin would be lost. 1. So, the worker hid the coin. One coin stayed one coin. 1.

Much later the landowner returned home. The landowner was very interested to know what the workers had done with the coins.

To the first worker, the landowner said, "I gave you five coins. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. Now I see that I have ten coins. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10. Your work is important, and you did well! Be happy with me."

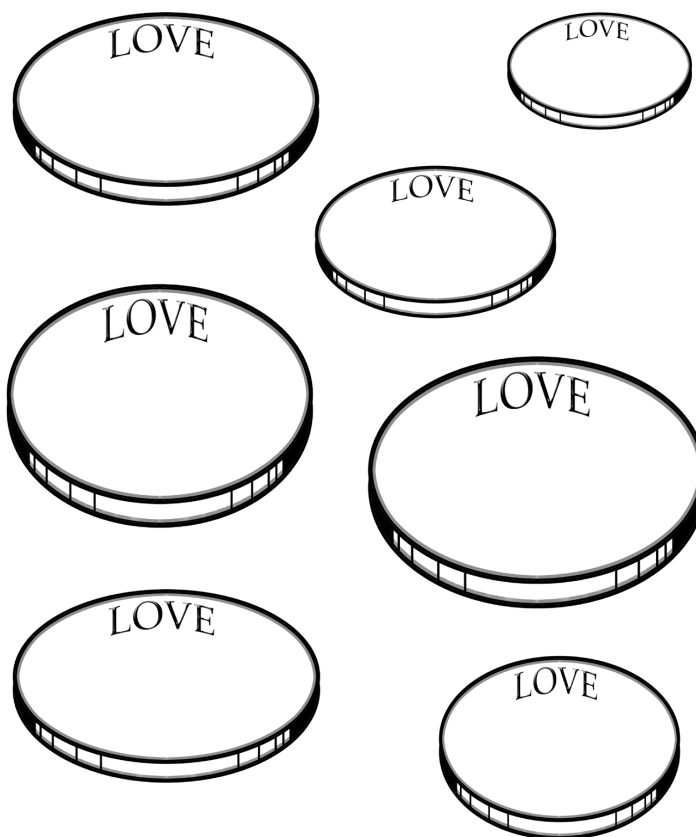
To the second worker, the landowner said, "I gave you two coins. 1, 2. Now I have four coins. 1, 2, 3, 4. Your work is important, and you did well! Be happy with me."

To the third worker, the landowner said, "I gave you one coin, and you hid it. I still have only one coin. 1. Your work is important to me, but you chose not to do it."

10, 4, 1! Everyone's work is important!

## Spending Love

The coins in the story that Jesus told can represent the gifts that God gives us to share with others. The coins here all have the word "love" written on them. After the word "love" write someone or something with whom you can show love, such as your family, God, your dog, trees, and so on.



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## Exploring Our Faith • November 19, 2023

The landowner helped the workers to see that they were all important and could make a difference. Even a small gesture makes a difference.

Write or draw about ways you can use your abilities and gifts to make a difference in the world.

Here's one idea: Draw a smiling face and think about ways your smile or kindness can make a difference. What other gifts do you have to offer?

