



# Peace Lutheran Church Bible Study Journey Guide

*"[The Kingdom of God] is like a mustard seed,  
which a man took and planted in his garden.  
It grew and became a tree, and the birds  
perched in its branches."*

— Luke 13:19

## **Our Journey**

### **Welcome to “Seeds to Branches for Another Generation”**

We are excited and grateful for your willingness to embark on this exciting journey over the next several weeks. As we begin, we want to make it clear to all that the purpose of “Seeds to Branches” is first and foremost a spiritual journey. A church is composed of its members — those members each seeking after God’s heart, collectively energized and focused on the vision, representing Christ and responding in ministry and service. Throughout this journey, we can expect that God will energize and speak to us in unexpected ways as he weaves our hearts together more deeply!

We acknowledge we have a financial goal of \$3.75 million to expand and enhance the early childhood ministry of Peace. More importantly, we have a spiritual goal to respond to the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

As you consider your personal involvement in response to “Seeds to Branches,” be encouraged that your dedicated prayer and financial partnership could be the catalyst that enables us to carry out the vision we have of sharing God’s love with children and adults for the next generation. I invite you to seek God and join those already in prayer about our future. I am excited to think not only about what God has done already at Peace, but what He wants to do in and through us in the years ahead.

Get ready to see what the Spirit of God does in our hearts, in our ministries, in our community and in our world as we posture ourselves in prayer and submission to Him. He has great things in store for us.

In Christ,

Pastor Bill Weis

## For Your Calendar

**November 7-9**      **Seeds of Faith for the Children**  
Mark 10:13-16: *Let the Little Children Come to Me*

**November 14-16**      **Seeds of Faith for Saginaw**  
Luke 10:25-37: *The Good Samaritan*

**November 21-23**      **Seeds of Generosity (for Jesus)**  
Matthew 26:6-13: *Jesus Anointed at Bethany*

**November 28-30**      **Seeds for the Kingdom (Not for Me)**  
Mark 12:41-44: *Widow's Mite*

**December 5-7**      **Seeds of Transformation**  
Matthew 25:14-30: *The Risk of the Steward*

**December 12-14**      **Branches for the Future**  
Joshua 3: *Crossing Over*

**December 13**      **Commitment Sunday**

“Seeds to Branches” Celebration with worship, fellowship and FUN!

Come and celebrate how God has moved in the hearts and lives of our church family on this special weekend.

We will have the opportunity to express our trust in God by turning in our three-year commitment cards for “Seeds to Branches” at all worship services.

We will celebrate together in a special afternoon event **at our Lawndale Campus**, which will include fun for all ages!

## **We Embark on “Seeds to Branches” Pursuing this Vision**

### **1. Completing the Journey**

To finish the plans we started of bringing our facilities at Lawndale Campus the needed space for Early Childhood and other ministries that equip us for the mission that God calls us to *for another generation*.

### **2. Strengthening our Stewardship Culture**

To grow in our spiritual knowledge of stewardship principles and commit to proportionate and sacrificial giving for both the ongoing financial needs of Peace Ministries and for this special project.

### **3. Growth as the Family of God**

To weave our hearts together as the family of God in this place, each owning our commitment to serve one another, and together to reach out with God’s love to a lost and hurting world.

## **Conversations for the Journey**

### ***Conversations Together***

Throughout November, our Sunday services will focus our attention on the spiritual journey we are on together as a church. For each of the weeks of November, there are some notes in this guide and a series of questions, which you can reflect on by yourself, or, even better, as part of a small group within the life of the church. If you're not currently part of a small group, please consider joining with people you know who meet together, or contact Emily Kast (791-4172 or edemkast@sbcglobal.net) and she can help you get with a group. Shared conversations, prayer, encouragement and companionship make journeys memorable experiences. This guide also encourages you to utilize your daily quiet times to reflect on the Bible's counsel about how we live the whole of our lives as stewards of what God has entrusted us with. Each week there are four devotionals that can be used individually and separately, or concurrently in a group, and we hope these prove valuable to you in your conversation with God along the path He is calling you.

### ***Conversations with God***

Just as it's important to encourage one another in our faith along the way, it's also important to engage in conversation with God. In our daily quiet time, reflection on Scripture and prayer, we allow ourselves to talk with God as our conversation partner. Each week there are four passages just for our own reflection (as well as making time to read the Scripture for the coming Sunday). If you're not used to making time to be alone with God in reading, reflection and prayer, here is a quick guide:

- Make space to be by yourself somewhere quiet for 10-15 minutes.
- As you settle down, be aware that God is present with you. Offer him your praise and thankfulness.
- Read the passage of Scripture for the day. Then re-read it slowly and attentively.
- Look at the comment in the devotional and the questions. Note your reflections. If the questions are helpful to you, great. If not, it doesn't matter. The important thing is that you allow yourself to ask, "What is God saying to me through this Scripture?" and write that down.
- Pray for the people in your life, for your church and for God's world.
- Walk through the day ahead with God, and offer part of your day to Him.

## Week 1: FOR THE CHILDREN

*“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the Kingdom of God like a little child will not enter it.”*

— Mark 10:14-15

### **READ: Mark 10:13-16**

People are bringing children to Jesus, but the disciples rebuke them. It doesn't say exactly why the disciples rebuke them — but perhaps we can imagine they feel that blessing children is somehow beneath their master's dignity. He's got enough to do with all the adults who are coming to him for ministry — people should leave him alone with their children. We don't often hear of Jesus getting cross, but he is here. The text reports that “Jesus was indignant.” It's not a quiet teaching opportunity but a moment where Jesus' passion is aroused. It's not a harmless mistake, but one that denies the very reality of God's kingdom — the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these.

Peace Lutheran Church and School has always invested heavily in children. Our school provides an opportunity day by day to bring children to Jesus — to teach them, pray with them and seek Jesus' blessing on their lives. It's a wonderful ministry because in this way, we are able to reach out beyond the walls of our congregation and bring the good news of Jesus to the lives of children (and their families) within our wider community. In doing this, we are doing all that we can to remove the barriers that would prevent children from being able to come to Jesus.

I sometimes hear people criticize the idea that children are the “church of tomorrow.” “Oh no,” they say, “children are the church of today.” The truth is that the church will have no tomorrow if it does not have children today. Bringing children to Christ is an essential part of a mission that involves passing on the faith from one generation to another. None of us in the church is too single, too old, too encumbered with our own children or too young to have a profound effect on the children within our community. We can either be a conduit for God's love to be shown to them through the embrace and blessing of our common life, or we can be a hindrance — through our subconscious desire to have an adult church uninterrupted by the noise and disturbance of children.

Jesus' example, as a man to whom children were brought for his blessing, should encourage us to continue to place ministry to children and the passing on of our faith to a younger generation at the heart of what it means for us to be a faithful church.

### To Think About on the Way:

1. Why do the disciples react in this way when people bring children to Jesus? What attitudes do we share with them?
2. How do we serve children and help them come to Jesus?
3. What would it mean for you to actively work to include and engage a younger generation within whatever ministry you are a part of at church?

### Studies:

#### 1. Exercise Faith: Read Colossians 4:12-13

Wrestling is an ancient sport. In the first century, wrestlers struggled for their lives, not for TV ratings. In the language of the day, the wrestling ring was called the agone, and the wrestlers were called antagonists. Such is this word-image that Paul uses to describe the work of prayer from a spiritual leader of the Colossian church, Epaphras. Paul tells the church that Epaphras wrestles in prayer for them. We would catch Paul's wordplay if we say that Epaphras agonizes in prayer for them. What a powerful image — and a biblical image, too — like Jacob wrestling with the angel all night for a blessing (Genesis 32:24-31), and like Jesus praying so fervently in the Garden of Gethsemane that his sweat became like drops of blood (Luke 22:41-44). What is so important that Epaphras would pray so fervently? That the Colossian church would grow in their knowledge of God's will and in their maturity of faith.

"Seeds to Branches" is a call to prayer for us. We are called to reflect on a simple question: "What would You do through me, Lord, to make Your will happen in this church?" Genuinely reflecting on that question will mean prayerfully wrestling with God's will in your life and with God's will in our church. This challenge is a time to exercise your faith.

- **Prayer:** Lord, lead me in prayer to wrestle hard with Your will. I will hold fast to You until I find Your blessing.
- **Action Item:** Decide now to make a prayerful decision about your participation in this program. Set aside specific time (at least 15 minutes) at least four or five days a week for the next five weeks to spend in prayer and reflection using this journey guide.

#### 2. Explore Promise: Read Luke 11:9-11

Most of us are good at the first baby step of prayer. It is easy to ask God to do something! Unfortunately, after the asking, we think that we are finished. We think that since we have already asked, we are expected to do nothing more. The first step in any journey is crucial. We do need to ask in

order to receive. But asking is just the first step. It takes many more steps to continue a real journey of prayer. Jesus offers his disciples a model for such a prayer journey. Ask — yes, of course! But then seek. And finally, knock on the doors that you find.

Seeking God's will is much more work than simply asking; seeking takes time, attention, listening, looking and searching. That journey of prayer will lead us far past asking, deep into new paths of seeking God's way for our lives. Along those paths, we will discover doorways — places where choices and decisions must be made. Do we have the courage and commitment to knock on those doors? And when those new doorways are opened, will we step into a new way of life?

- **Prayer:** Lord, I seek Your will and Your way in my life. Lead me down Your paths for Your name's sake. Open new doors that I might find a new way of life!
- **Action Item:** Capture this journey of prayer that you are committing yourself to by journaling your adventure. During your prayer time over the next several weeks, write down what you are asking and what you are given, what you are seeking and what you are finding, what doors you knock upon and what is opened to you.

### **3. Examine purpose: Read Matthew 28:16-20**

When a church has a capital program, everyone seems to have “what” questions: What are we building? What am I going to get out of this? What is my part to play? Fundamentally, all of those “what” questions are the least important questions to ask. The most important question in a capital program challenge is not *what*, but *WHY*.

- Why are we building?
- Why are we getting our finances in good shape for ministry?
- Why is the church here?
- Why are you here?

The last commandment Jesus spoke for every Christian was, “Go ... make disciples of all nations ... teach them all that I have commanded you.” This program is not simply about programs or buildings.

“Seeds to Branches” is about reaching and teaching and changing the lives of people with the good news of Jesus Christ. In short: It's about ETERNITY.

The resources raised will provide the necessary tools to help us better reach, better teach and more effectively change the lives of those people. You needed Christ. Your life has been reached, taught and changed by the witness and ministries of this church. Would you like for other people to have a story of faith to tell and a purpose for their lives? Their stories depend now on your faithfulness.



- **Prayer:** Lord, grow my passion for Your purposes in my life and in my church. You have brought me here for a reason. Show me what You would do through me.
- **Action Item:** Make a list of WHY this project is important. Can you put a value on what changing people's lives may be worth? When you focus on the WHY question, how important does this journey become for you?

#### 4. Experience Calling: Read 1 Samuel 3:1-11

In the time of Samuel, the Bible says, "the word of the Lord was rare in those days, and visions were not widespread." It is easy for people to feel the same way today. Who has heard God call their name? Who has heard God speak a word to them? And what great, Godly vision drives your life?

Maybe, like the boy Samuel, we simply are not listening well. We hear something calling our name and tugging at our heart, and assume that something is just Pastor Eli making a fuss again. Perhaps we need to learn to listen better for a word from God. Perhaps it is not a word from God that is rare, but faithful listening from those who would serve God that is so rare.

Every Christian has a calling. In fact, every Christian has several callings, as well as the God-given gifts, graces and blessings to respond to those callings. Every Christian is called to be a faithful steward of the talents, time and resources God has blessed them with.

You can ignore that calling completely. You can brush off that calling by responding only in minimal ways. Or, recognizing God's claim over your life, you can wake up and listen for God's own voice. There is a word from the Lord for you in this program. There is a God-given vision for your church in this program. "Speak to me, Lord. I am your servant. I am listening to hear from You."

- **Prayer:** Lord, teach me not only to say Samuel's prayer, "Speak, for your servant is listening," but to actually listen for Your word, Lord, and to do Your word.
- **Action Item:** Are you listening for God's word? In your daily prayer time and your journaling, make note of the ways that God is speaking to you.

## Week 2: FOR YOUR COMMUNITY

*“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind”; and ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”*

— Luke 10:27

### **READ: Luke 10:25-37**

The summary of the law that Jesus gives is less a pair of rules that have to be obeyed and more a fundamental attitude adjustment. We are used to lives that are centered on ourselves — our choices, our preferences, our decisions. What if the location of our identity were no longer to be in the self, but was located in our love of God and in a relationship with our “neighbors,” so that their well-being and prosperity were every bit as important as our own? We can’t understand the command “love your neighbor as yourself” as signifying anything less. So that raises the very pertinent question, “So who is my neighbor?” to which, Jesus replies by giving us the story of the Good Samaritan.

The human mind always wants to set a limit on our obligations, whereas the mind of God would inspire us to allow our hearts to be expanded by the Holy Spirit way beyond what we could achieve by ourselves. The story itself is designed to shock and provoke. It is not the priest and the Levite who are the ones who help but a Samaritan — not even a proper Jew. The conclusion of the story is a question: “Who was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” It’s a telling question, because the answer relates to the summary of the law — it could be re-expressed — “So which one do you think fulfilled the demands of the law?” It’s not too comfortable to have to say “a Samaritan,” and, in fact, the expert in the law manages to avoid saying that when he answers “The one who had mercy on him.” But the point is made.

As we think about our journey together as a church, as disciples of Jesus, we have to always hear the call of God for our lives to be rooted in our love of our neighbor. We need to allow our thinking to go way beyond our own choices, preferences and desires, and be located in the world that God has called us to.

Archbishop Temple is credited with the quote, “The church is the only society that exists for the benefit of nonmembers.” Our story — the story of the Good Samaritan — gives us a very visual image of what that might look like. Spontaneously loving our neighbor is not something that we can program, but needs to come out of the overflow of our hearts — out of our fundamental attitude to others. It is something that needs to be shaped in us by our faith in God, which is why the command to love God comes first.

I pray that as a community, we might be always about encouraging one another in our love of God, and in the outworking of that within our church family and our various communities.

What better gift can our communities be given than a place of God's pure grace can come into their lives? We can be part of that gift giving for the next generation!

**To Think About on the Way:**

1. Has following Jesus made you more loving to your neighbor? How did that happen (or not)?
2. When has someone else reached out to you and served you? What impact did this have on you?
3. How do we encourage one another in our concern for our neighbor?

**Studies:**

**5. Extra Effort: Read Matthew 6:19-21 and Luke 19:1-9**

Look at a revealing count of New Testament words:

- Believe, Believing - 275 times
- Pray, Praying - 371 times
- Love, loves, loving - 714 times
- Giving or give - 2,162 times

Jesus knew that our treasures and our hearts are inseparably linked. For Him, talking about treasure was to reach more completely for the full allegiance of people's hearts. Jesus knew that dealing with our treasures is one of those critical places where the rubber meets the road — where the practicality of our faith is tested — and where what we believe becomes tangible and real. Remember the story of Zacchaeus in Luke 19? We know that Jesus reached and dramatically changed that person's heart. How do we know that? Follow the money! Look at what happened with Zacchaeus' treasure. Half of what he possessed, he gave immediately. Every wrong, he set himself to make right. Seeing where the treasure went, Jesus exclaims, "Today salvation has come to this house!"

- **Prayer:** Lord, teach me to love You with all my heart — and with all my life. Let salvation come to this house!
- **Action Item:** Sketch out a simple budget of where your treasures are (of where your financial resources go). Now write down your current giving to the ministries of the church. How does

your giving to God's work through the church compare to your investment in your other treasures? Does that level of giving represent what you believe in? What does that level of giving say about where your heart is? Where would you rather your heart be?

## **6. Extreme Transformation: Read Romans 12:1-2**

What motto is on your T-shirt? What values do you conform to? Where do you reshape yourself in order to "fit in." What do you give yourself to as a kind of living sacrifice? Anything suggesting that it can make us the greatest, the most successful, the most famous, can capture us and conform us to its own set of values. A magazine ran a series of articles asking people "How has your mind changed?" What can change your mind? That is an interesting question. Changing one's mind is a difficult thing, especially if the transformation means changing our directions, our opinions, our goals and our plans. Yet such change is exactly what Paul calls every Christian to. He calls us to be completely transformed by the renewing of our mind. Would anyone notice that your life is molded by the mind of Christ? Could anyone see your transformation? How has your life in faith changed your mind? How have your priorities changed? How has your life changed? Are you still conformed to this world, or are you being transformed?

- **Prayer:** Lord, lead me to see things differently, to think differently and to live differently. Reset my priorities. Transform my mind — and my life!
- **Action Item:** Get in touch with the "mindset" that you have entered this program with. What have you predetermined? What are you stubborn about? What have you already decided? Be honest here: Write these things down. Then make a commitment with yourself to be open-minded. Listen, look, reflect — and see what you learn. You may be surprised to find yourself transformed before this prayer journey is finished.

## **7. No Excuses: Read Luke 14:15-24**

How many reasons are there for not participating in "Seeds to Branches"?

The possibilities are endless! There are more than enough reasons to justify anyone. A modern parable might begin like this: The Kingdom of God is like a capital program. God gave His people a vision. "Come," said God. "Take your place prepared for you. Take up your part in My work. Everything is ready now. All of you are invited to make a difference. When you take your place and take up your part, all will be blessed to break bread in My kingdom." But they all alike began to make excuses ....

Synergy is a word best understood when divided. Ergo, is Greek for work, while the prefix syn means together. When merged, the words mean "working together." However, there is more. Synergy is better defined to mean that the result accomplished is greater than the individual parts. Sports teams

demonstrate the meaning of synergy. Playing together makes them better than playing as individuals. Your participation in the mission of this church is unquestionably significant. No one can play your part but you. No one can give your part but you. Others can only do their part. We best express ourselves as God's body when each one does his or her part.

- **Prayer:** Lord, when Your call challenges me, it is easy for me to excuse myself. Reach me! Compel me to respond to Your call in whatever ways I can.
- **Action Item:** If you have already made up your list of excuses, then take that list and offer it up as a burnt sacrifice. Go back to the list you made on Day 2 – reasons why these projects are important. Looking over that list, can you now find reasons to give?

#### **8. Excess Baggage: Read John 15:1-9**

If you have ever grown grapes in your yard, then you will know that grapevines will naturally overextend themselves with prolific branching and leaf growth every year. If grapevines are not pruned, all of the branching and leaf growth can completely cover an arbor in as little as two growing seasons. Look at pictures of a well-kept vineyard whose purpose is to bear good fruit. You will see thick, decades-old grapevines pruned back to no more than four short branches so that all the energy of the plant is focused on growing great grapes. Pruning — heavy, regular pruning — is necessary to bearing good fruit.

How overextended is your life? We may think that wildly branching out everywhere as fast as we can grow helps us to cover all the bases in life. But in truth, such unmanaged growth just keeps us from bearing any real fruit. Ask yourself, “Where could I cut back so I could invest the time and energy and resources available to me into bearing the kind of good fruit in my life that matters?” If it has been a while since you paid any attention to pruning, you may be astonished at how overgrown your life has become. No wonder Jesus says that God will prune our lives to help us bear better fruit.

- **Prayer:** Lord, abide more fully in me. Help me to prune and manage my life better. Reshape my living to bear good fruit that would glorify You.
- **Action Item:** Make a list of areas in your life that are overgrown. What branches can you cut out? What resources does that pruning free up for you to invest in bearing good fruit?

## Week 3: FOR JESUS

*“While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table.”*

— Matthew 26:6-7

### READ: Matthew 26:6-13

I’m not sure that I would appreciate the gesture if someone were to pour a whole jar of perfume over my head (however expensive it was). It’s clear that the disciples are not impressed either — except in their case, it is not the mess but the financial implication that they are worried about. The perfume could have been sold and the money given to the poor. What could justify such an extravagant act? Their thinking makes sense if we are only counting dollars and cents, and regard our mission simply in terms of the difference that we can make in the world. It stops making sense if our focus becomes how we might express our devotion to Jesus, and if this takes priority over everything else. No doubt a devotion to Jesus may well lead us to make quite a difference in the world — for the sake of our neighbor. But a love of Jesus should be the first thing in our sights, everything else following. In fact, it’s only when our attention is on Jesus first that we can put ourselves in the place where he is able to change our hearts and lead us to the place where we can make a difference in the world for his sake.

Mother Theresa was once asked how she received a call to serve the poor. She replied that she had never received a call to serve the poor — she had a call to follow Jesus, and he led her to the poor. Everything that we do as a church is first of all “For Jesus.” It’s why worship and prayer are the focal points of our common life. They express the attitude of our church family that we are first of all about Jesus. Only as we come to him, as sinners who are loved and redeemed, will we be able to find the proper focus of our attention and service. Everything flows out of this common point, our shared identity as God’s people gathered together in and for the Lord Jesus.

Jesus is entirely comfortable with this extravagant action — “She has done a beautiful thing to me,” he says. Her action takes on the significance of preparing Jesus’ body for burial. Her actions will be spoken about “wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world.” Devotion and generous extravagance take priority over mere practicalities. It may be, too, that the calculations that the disciples make are really centered on perception of their own significance as those who can make a difference. The woman with the perfume is concerned only with Jesus’ significance.

As we think about the way that we live our lives, are they lived as an extravagant offering of devotion to Jesus? Is he the focal point around which everything else makes sense? As we move forward in our journey together as a church, we keep our eyes firmly fixed on Jesus — all we do is for him, about him and an expression of our devotion to him.

**To Think About on the Way:**

1. Would you have been annoyed by this woman along with the rest of the disciples? Why?
2. Do you like extravagant gestures, or are you inclined to think rather more practically? What would it mean for you to be extravagant in your following of Jesus?
3. What does this woman's example teach you?

**Studies:**

**9. Each given to the Lord: Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-5**

Have you ever watched a tee-ball game where the children are just beginning to learn baseball? Have you ever seen a child, so excited to hit the ball off the tee that the youngster runs directly to third base and then races back to home plate to score? Too often we think of giving to the church as a financial decision rather than as a stewardship decision. We shortcut the ground rules, like the child running directly to third. As a result, we may make a donation to the church, but we do not make a stewardship commitment. To make a stewardship decision, we have to go all the way around and touch all of the bases. Reaching first means making a faith decision before we even consider the financial aspect of our giving. In 2 Corinthians 8:5, Paul says of the Macedonian church, "they gave of themselves first to the Lord, and then to us in keeping with God's will." Getting to first means determining your commitment level before deciding your financial position. First things first. They gave themselves first to the Lord. That is the place to begin a conversation about a stewardship decision.

- **Prayer:** Lord, first let me give myself more fully to You. Then let my decisions grow out of what I believe — and out of what You call me to be and to do.
- **Action Item:** Instead of rushing to the calculator or the budget, answer these questions first: What does God call me to be? What does God call me to do? What is God doing in our church now? How is God working in my life now? What could God do through me? How can I give myself more fully to God?

## 10. Every Step in Prayer: Read Matthew 6:5-19

Are you still intent on making a stewardship decision? When you have decided to make your decision a matter of faith, then the next step is to seek God's will. "They gave themselves first to the Lord, and, by the will of God, then to us" (2 Corinthians 8:5). Seeking God's will means getting God involved in your decisions and in your life! Seeking God's will means inviting God's input and guidance. It means genuinely asking, "What would You do through me, Lord, to make Your will happen in my church?" Where does one ask for God's guidance and seek God's will? How does one invite God to participate in his or her life? Those things happen as we intentionally spend time in prayer. A stewardship decision is a prayerful commitment. A stewardship decision invites God to the dialogue and involves God in the discussion. A stewardship decision becomes much more than just my sense of goodwill — it means discovering and acting within a sense of God's goodwill. Taking the turn at second base will take much time for prayer — time for listening and learning and reflecting — time for asking and searching and seeking. Getting to second base means turning even further from what I am willing to do toward what God wills in my life.

- **Prayer:** Lord, I want to honor Your name. Speak to me! Let Your will be done in me and through me. Let Your kingdom come — here in my life.
- **Action Item:** Listen well over the next week. Make notes in your journal of what you hear and believe God is speaking to you.

## 11. Excellence in Action: Read 2 Corinthians 8:7-8

Now that we have made a faith commitment, and now that we have earnestly sought God's will in prayer, it is time to turn what we have learned into what we can do and will do. We are rounding third. Now is the time to take inventory: "OK, Lord, what have You equipped me and blessed me to do?" What resources do I have to give? How can I think creatively about giving — beyond the narrow box of my income and expenses — in order to give of myself fully? Are there assets beyond my monthly income that I can give? Can I create new resources to give with my talents, gifts and time? Does my faith commitment lead me to change other priorities in my life, reducing spending and thus freeing resources for giving? There is no one "correct" plan that is right for everyone. There is no formula for the right pledge. Talking to the church in Corinth, Paul knows there is no formula for giving. In fact, he realizes that he cannot command anyone about giving. Giving has to grow from the heart. It is time to get practical about God's blessings in your life and what you can (and will!) do to financially support God's work in this project. It is time to get real.

- **Prayer:** Lord, I have heard Your word. Help me to be a doer of Your word.



- **Action item:** Make some lists. First, identify (and give thanks for!) all that God has blessed you with. Second, come up with a list of as many ways of giving that are possible to you (for example: changing spending, monthly pledge from income, gift of assets, etc.). Begin to think of your pledge as a worksheet, and use this list as you determine your pledge over the next week.

## 12. Examined Commitment: Read 2 Samuel 24:18-25

Finally, we are heading toward home plate and getting close to being ready to fill out a pledge card. But this gift has become something more than a donation! We have first given ourselves to the Lord. We have prayed for God’s will to be done in our lives. We have looked hard at our resources in order to find every way to make our faith real with our gift. This gift has become a stewardship decision that reshapes your life — you are growing in your discipleship! Such a gift will certainly cost you something. King David had an opportunity to make an easy “sacrifice” (or offering) to God. Araunah was going to give him the whole deal: the threshing floor (the place for the altar), the oxen, and even the wood for the sacrifice — for nothing. What a deal! But David realized that such a deal was really no sacrifice for himself at all, no worship that honored his Lord and God. “I will not offer a sacrifice to the Lord my God which costs me nothing,” David said. Offering yourself to God — giving sacrificially — does not come easy. It will cost you something. Does your giving model the kind of commitment that would honor and worship God? Does your sacrifice make a real difference to you? Are you giving in ways that shape your living? If you can answer “yes,” then you are not simply sharing a gift, you are sharing your faith!

- **Prayer:** Lord, if I give myself in ways that mean little to me, how would that honor and worship You? Let my giving honor You as my Lord and my God.
- **Action Item:** Reflect on this question: Does what I am thinking about giving make a difference in the way I live my life?

## Week 4: FOR THE KINGDOM ... NOT FOR ME

*“A poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, ‘I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything — all she had to live on.’”*

— Mark 12:42-44

### READ: Mark 12:41-44

To my mind, this is the most precious of all the biblical texts that speak about giving. The observation that Jesus makes with his disciples of a poor widow’s gift is about the merit of a gift that is entirely focused on the one to whom it is given. The gift is costly and sacrificial, and yet it has no inherent value. Those two small copper coins will do nothing in practical terms for the ministry of the temple. Compared to the large gifts that preceded it, they will barely register on the temple accounts. Their worth is measured entirely by the sacrifice of the donor, and the offering of a life given to God that this sacrifice represents. As such, Jesus evaluates that she “put more into the treasury than all the others.” When we are able to give gifts that are valuable and can “do more” than the widow’s coins, we are tempted to think about them differently.

Maybe our gift can enable some ministry that we value to happen? Maybe our gift can solicit gratitude from the one who receives it or the admiration of others? Maybe our gift can bolster our self-image as a generous donor who makes a significant difference? These thoughts are not necessarily all bad, and perhaps some of them passed through the minds of those rich people who threw large amounts into the temple treasury. Jesus certainly doesn’t say that they contributed nothing, just that the poor widow contributed more.

The widow’s example is of a pure gift because her motivation in giving is not about her, or even what she can achieve through her gift — it is given out of pure devotion. It is all about the one to whom it is given and what the gift speaks about that relationship.

Our giving — of our money, but also of our time and abilities — should seek to be motivated in the same way. How do our lives reflect a self-giving devotion to God that is not at all about us but everything about the God we love and want to express our devotion to? How do we allow God to move us to a place where we are prepared not just to give him a part, but to “put in everything” in our service of Him, and our building up of His kingdom?

### **To Think About on the Way:**

1. How does the example of the widow challenge you?
2. What would change if you made the decision that you would give everything to God?
3. When you give (of time, talent or treasure) what are you expecting in return?

### **Studies:**

#### **13. Expanding Influence: Read Acts 4:32-37**

The name “Joseph” is such a fine name. In Hebrew, the name means “God’s added blessing.” This was the name for Jesus’ earthly father. So why would the apostles give Joseph of Cypress a nickname like “Barnabas”? Barnabas, Acts tells us, means “son of encouragement.” Apparently, this Joseph was such an encourager that a new name was in order. When the early church needed money to underwrite its ministries, Joseph sold a field he owned and brought the money to the apostles. When Saul of Tarsus (renamed Paul) needed a friend to welcome him into the church he once persecuted, it was this Joseph who was that friend who nurtured Paul into a ministry of his own. When the church needed to send someone to encourage the new believers among the Gentiles, they sent this Joseph. When young Mark needed someone to believe in him and to give him a second chance to serve as a missionary, Joseph encouraged him. Any wonder that all of Joseph’s friends called him Barnabas – “son of encouragement”?

Your church needs generosity to underwrite its ministry. Your church needs leaders, people who can speak up, step up and help encourage others to passionate mission and generous giving. Be a Barnabas! Look for ways to encourage the faith of others by sharing your witness, your passion and your faith. In doing so, you multiply God’s grace and influence the faithful response of others.

- **Prayer:** Lord, help me to be a witness and encouragement to others.
- **Action Item:** Make a list of your spheres of influence — people with whom you connect regularly and whom you have the opportunity to encourage. Find at least one way to share your passion and your faith about these projects with the people in your spheres of influence.

#### **14. Expressing Joy: Read John 3:22-30**

John the Baptist was a great man. No less an authority than Jesus said so himself. When people heard him preach, they trembled. He attracted disciples, crowds and the attention of the press. He even

attracted the attention of kings and queens. But when Jesus came, John never forgot his place. Despite being goaded by his disciples to be jealous of the early success of Jesus' ministry, John remained steadfast in his sense of place within God's plan. He even helped his own disciples to join with Jesus. John 3:22-30 is John's explanation of his own role to his disciples. Now my joy is complete. He (Jesus) must increase, and I must decrease. Have you discovered this truth yet? Most of us think that joy increases as we increase — as our wealth and our prestige, our influence and our power increase. But in fact, just the opposite is true. Lasting joy is not found at the top of the corporate mountain or at the pinnacle of power. Joy is not a reward of accomplishment. True joy is found where John the Baptist found it, by finding one's place in relationship to Jesus Christ. Are you ready to find joy complete? He (Jesus) must continue to increase in significance and Lordship of our lives while we (our plans and ambitions) must decrease.

- **Prayer:** Lord, lead me to find joy and abundant living as I give my life more fully to you.
- **Action Item:** Make a list of the things that really bring joy to your life. You will find that the things that bring joy are not things at all, but rather gifts given to you (like family, health, a sunrise or a friend). Perhaps the way to discover more joy is to give those kinds of gifts more fully to others.

#### **15. Exuding Gratitude: Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-15**

"A capital program." "Above and beyond giving." "Sacrificial giving." Someone will describe such capital program giving in this way: "I know what that means ... it means give until it hurts!"

Give until it hurts? Making a sacrifice actually means giving up something of meaningful value to you in order to give to something that means even more to you.

The lasting effect of such giving should not be "hurt," but rather the joy discovered in giving yourself to those things that are most important to you. Give until it hurts? Try giving until you discover some joy. The joy of making a difference in a God-given calling. The joy of aligning your life with God's grace and will. The joy of a meaningfully and purposefully committed life. The joy of doing your part along with a whole community of faithful people. The joy of seeing people's lives change because of seeds you planted and nurtured. The joy of glorifying God.

Indeed, as Paul says to the church in Corinth, "you will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God" (Verse 11). Give until it hurts? No one is being asked to by participating in "Seeds to Branches." Besides, giving until it hurts is far too easy. If you want a real challenge — and a real blessing in your life — try giving in ways that mean so much to you that you discover joy in your commitment.

- **Prayer:** Lord, teach me greater joy and abundant thanksgiving in a meaningful, purposeful and committed life.
- **Action Item:** Make a list of the reasons why you are GLAD to give — your own litany of rejoicing and thanksgiving.

### 16. Inexpressible Grace: Read 1 Corinthians 8:9-13

There it is — the reason for, the model for, the example for our giving — in the grace and the sacrifice of Christ himself. Has this church blessed and shaped and changed your life? Maybe you have never been a part of a capital program in this congregation. If that is true, then this church exists with the tools and the facilities to serve you in Christ’s name only because of the sacrifice and the gifts of others. For them, you were worth it.

Maybe you have been a part of this church for a long time. Maybe you have made sacrifices before so that this church could minister to people in Christ’s name. If so, then you have seen the lives of many people change because of what you have given. Was it worth what you have given? You know it was worth it, and you know that this new commitment will be translated into stories of faith that you can scarcely imagine.

You know it will be worth it. God gave. Other people of faith have given. Now it is time for your faithful, hopeful, joyful response. “Now finish doing this, so that your eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means. For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has.” (1 Corinthians 8:11-12)

- **Prayer:** Thank you, Lord, for the inexpressible grace You have given to me. Bless my gift, and use my gift to bless others in Your name.
- **Action Item:** Follow through! Make the pledge commitment that you feel right about and joyful about in your heart. And over the next several years, as you see God’s grace work wonders in people’s lives, in part through your gift, ask yourself, “Was it worth it?”

## Week 5: FOR TRANSFORMATION

**READ: Matthew 25:14-30**

The seven second-to-last words of the church: "We've never done it that way before."

The seven very last words of the church: "And we're not about to start now."

These words are less "of the church" and more "of church members." God's church does not stand still, but takes risks to reach into the future!

By faith, Noah took a risk when he went and built an ark. Think about this. He invested everything he had in something that seemed completely impossible. Can you imagine building a boat in your back yard in a day when there were no cranes that could move it? Though he could not see or understand it, he based his life on God's word and was willing to wait 120 years for the promise to be fulfilled. Noah's vision was based on what he had been told by God.

By faith, Abraham took a risk when he left his home and went to the Promised Land. Though he was living in a tent, he saw the future city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. He believed God and based his life on that vision.

Jesus was a risk taker. He entrusted the salvation of the world to 11 weak and frightened men. Through God's power and vision, they changed the world. Instead of looking at the past or trusting in the present, they saw God's future church and boldly went forward to make it happen.

Are you willing to lay everything on the line for God? Are you motivated by what has happened in your life, by what you presently have, or are you open for God to use you in ways that you have never been used before? Is your vision for your life and family limited to immediate needs? God is shaking the kingdoms of the earth and the Kingdom of Heaven is forcefully advancing. Don't miss what God is doing. Join Him!

### **To Think About on the Way:**

1. What risks have you taken in your personal life? Did they pay off? Did they fail?
2. What risks have you taken for the Lord? Did they pay off?
3. Is there a risk you have taken that caused a change or transformation in your life?

## **Studies:**

### **17. Exodus was a Risk! Read Exodus 13:17-14:31**

Can you imagine being in one of the Hebrew homes in Egypt the night before the Exodus? Passover was being instituted, and suddenly it would become clear to you that tomorrow EVERYTHING WILL CHANGE. Your home will be gone, you will live in tents, you will have the government (harsh as it was) to take care of you, and you will set out on a journey to a place you've never been. All this at the direction of a man claiming to know who God is, and leading you at His direction.

Would you go? Would you risk it? They did, and the slaves of Egypt were transformed into the family, the nation of God. Because of that risk taken, the Holy Land was established as the place where Jesus would come to save us. The risk and reward are obvious looking back, but it must have been tough for those who stepped away from their homes and faced the Red Sea.

God isn't asking us to do that —at least not yet. He is, however, asking us to take a risk of giving, of growing and of transforming our minds and hearts. We are changed to see the bigger picture. We are transformed to let go of what was once important, and put it into His hands.

- **Prayer:** Ask the Lord to change you — to make you a risk taker for His kingdom.
- **Action Item:** Write down what you are willing to risk. Pray over it. Live it. Prepare to let go of it.

### **18. Effortless Giving? Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-9, 12-14**

An early transatlantic pilot heard a grinding, chewing noise under the control panel in the cockpit of his plane. Bits of insulation from the wire fell ominously at his feet and onto the cockpit floor. Only one thing could explain the gnawing threat to the instruments: a stowaway rat was eating the wires to the crucial gauges.

The pilot sat alone with the dull drone of the engines. He could not see beneath the cockpit instrument panel. There was no going back to land. What was he to do? He went up. Putting on his oxygen mask, he climbed higher and higher. Finally the atmosphere changed so much the rodent could not live. The menacing rat fell to the cockpit floor, the victim of a different atmosphere.

For far too long, the proper concept of Christian generosity has been gnawed away by a legalistic understanding of stewardship. A sense of obligation, guilt or manipulation motivated giving. It is time to elevate the concept to a different atmosphere. The gnawing legalism that eats away the joy from generosity will give way to a higher atmosphere. Giving is *grace*, not obligation.

Paul's concept of giving lifts it to another atmosphere and ennobles the life of giving. "We make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia" (2 Corinthians 8:1). The word "grace" comes from the Greek word "charis." It refers to the quality in anything or anyone that makes that thing or person attractive, appealing or winsome. In the New Testament, the word came to indicate God's desire to give those qualities to us. Thus, grace giving means giving motivated by an attractive or winsome desire to give —not a legalistic extraction from those unwilling to give. It is truly a Godly, supernatural compulsion that results in JOY.

**To Think About on the Way:**

1. Simply ask yourself: "Why do I give?"
2. Pray that God will give you the grace to do so like a Macedonian.
3. Begin to feel the joy.

**Studies:**

**19. Envision the Task: Read 1 Chronicles 29**

David came forward with a sacrificial gift that led many others to do the same. The moment was right. The opportunity was there. The generosity flowed.

Are you one of those heroic souls who recognize the significance of the moment —OUR moment —and are ready to seize the opportunity?



Before us today is a door of opportunity to reach into the next generation by planting some magnificent seeds. They will grow branches. Nests will be built.

Very soon, we each will be called upon to make a sacrifice. The call of the moment does not beckon us to equal gifts, but to equal sacrifices. Be assured of this: At the strategic moment, God's people seize the opportunity and make historic sacrifices.

- **Prayer:** Here am I, Lord. Use me for this moment.

## **20. Each Take a Step: Read Joshua 3**

On Commitment Sunday, we will study the crossing of the Jordan River into the Promised Land. Forty years of preparation came down to that first foot in the water. It took faith and trust. It took courage and strength. It took God's people moving forward. Is your foot wet? It is time.

- **Prayer:** Ask God to get your foot wet.
- **Action Item:** Get ready by putting yourself on the banks of the Jordan. Where are you standing? In the front? Back? Middle? Wherever you are, remember that you are called to cross over.

## Week 6: FOR THE FUTURE

*“The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.”*

— Luke 16:8-9

### **READ: Luke 16:1-10**

The story of the shrewd manager is not about Jesus commending the behavior of an unscrupulous character — it is about a comparison. It is about a comparison between the “people of this world” and the “people of the light.” The shrewd manager is not acting according to a Kingdom standard, but according to a worldly one. According to that standard, Jesus’ story commends the shrewd manager for being smart. He has used what influence he had, which he had it, to make friends that would last beyond his stewardship.

Jesus invites us to compare the dealings of the “people of this world” with the “people of the light.” Who acts more shrewdly? So what would be the shrewd action for a person of the light? Well, “to use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.”

The “person of the light” lives by a Kingdom standard, not a worldly one. That means that they, like the “shrewd manager,” know that they are only stewards of what they have and do not own it outright. It is in trust for the master. We know that our master has declared that we cannot be stewards of what we have in this life forever, and that our stewardship is coming to an end and that an account will be made.

How will we use what we have (while we have it) to prepare ourselves for life after our stewardship is over? The shrewd manager’s actions are not wise if you think only about the period of his stewardship. They only look smart when you realize how they have set him up for what happens next.

What investment are we making that is not for retirement, but for eternity? If we were as shrewd as the “people of this world” says Jesus, we would be smart in investing in eternal things, and using our influence in this life for the sake of the Kingdom and not just our own temporary prosperity.

**To Think About on the Way:**

1. How does this parable affect the way that I think about my money and how I use it?
2. Is it a bad attitude to think of using our wealth and influence today to prepare ourselves for eternity?
3. What stops us trusting God to take care of us in this life, so that we worry about keeping enough for ourselves?

## Commitment Guide

So what is your individual part in this journey? We want you to consider what role God is asking you to play in giving toward “Seeds to Branches for Another Generation.” As Peace Lutheran Church and School continues to commit itself to reaching another generation with the good news of Jesus Christ, we are grateful for the generous giving of our church family, which makes this possible. We know that God hasn’t given everyone the ability to give the same dollar amount, but we also know that he calls each of us to give according to what he has given us — “not equal gifts, but equal sacrifice.”

We are praying that we will be humbled by what God is able to do through our sacrifices as a body of believers. It may come as a surprise to discover what God can do IN YOU through sacrifice. The process of determining your commitment for another generation can help you grow spiritually more than you might think. As we open our bank accounts to the Lordship of Jesus, we are also opening our hearts.

Beyond equipping us to provide excellent ministry to children and families, trusting God with our resources is fundamental to growing in our trust in Him. We hope that as God helps us to let go of the grip that material possessions have on us, we will learn to be more open-hearted and generous than we imagined possible, and celebrate God’s goodness to us.

## Pray

The best place to start is by talking with God about what's on your heart and mind, specifically in relation to this giving commitment. Be honest and open with Him about where you are (since He already knows), and then make sure you spend some time listening to what He is telling you. If you're not sure where to begin, here are some simple prayer suggestions:

- **Find a private place to relax.**
- **Focus on who God is.** Let your mind and heart be reminded of who God really is based on the truth that we find in the Bible. Here are a few scriptures to get started with: Psalm 36:5-9, Psalm 139 and Ephesians 2:4-10.
- **Talk to Him honestly.** He already knows what you are thinking, so just be straight with Him. Lay out your heart about this commitment. Tell Him what you are hesitant about and what you are looking forward to.
- **Choose to trust Him with what matters most to you.** Remember, He is absolutely trustworthy and loving. Nothing that He is asking you will harm you. Wherever it may be difficult to be open-handed with something, CHOOSE to trust Him with it, and release it to Him.
- **Listen.** Ask Him to speak to you and then sit quietly with the mindset that you will hear something. God speaks through His Word, the Bible. What scriptures from this study are speaking to you now?

Prayer should be the constant heartbeat of this process and the source that we come back to again and again. Remember, this is more than just the nuts and bolts of sorting out our finances — this is a spiritual journey. The idea is not to do a math problem; rather, it is about giving Jesus access to your heart and letting Him lead you in the financial decisions.

## What Can I Afford?

*“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”*

— Matthew 6:19-21

Some of us have more resources than others, and each of us will not be called to contribute equally to “Seeds to Branches.” In his letter to the church in Corinth, Paul reminds us that we should give “according to our means. For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have” (2 Corinthians 8:11-12).

Our gift is acceptable because of our willingness, and not at all in proportion to the amount. It is first of all an act of worship and not simply a number on a spreadsheet. It is about gratitude to God for what He has given us, and about our giving back to Him as part of our acknowledgement that it was His in the first place.

A good point to start in thinking about your giving potential is to look at your income. In light of the fact that God has blessed you with an income, spend some time considering what portion, beyond your regular pledge, you could contribute to “Seeds to Branches” for the next generation.

## Calculating Your Gift

**Consider your monthly income:**

Income 1:     +     Income 2:     +     Other Income:     =     Total Income:  
\$ \_\_\_\_\_     \$ \_\_\_\_\_     \$ \_\_\_\_\_     \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**Consider your monthly expenses (list on a separate piece of paper):**

Total Expenses (including my regular offerings to Peace): \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**Current surplus (or deficit):**

Total Income:     —     Total Expenses:     =     Current Surplus:  
\$ \_\_\_\_\_     \$ \_\_\_\_\_     \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Assuming you have a surplus, ask yourself what portion you could give to “Seeds to Branches” over the next three years.

**What I can afford:** \$ \_\_\_\_\_

## What Can I Sacrifice?

*“I know, my God, that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity. All these things I have given willingly and with honest intent. And now I have seen with joy how willingly your people who are here have given to you. O Lord, God of our fathers Abraham, Isaac and Israel, keep this desire in the hearts of your people forever, and keep their hearts loyal to you.”*

— 1 Chronicles 29:17-18

Beyond giving just what you can afford, ask God to show you ways that you can sacrifice within your discretionary spending in order to be a more faithful steward of his money. There are ways to give that would be inconvenient and costly to us — and he receives these as an extravagant act of worship. Remember to simply listen to what God is asking of you. Let Him show you what he may be asking you to do without, in order that others can receive the benefit.

The account of the people of Israel giving for the building of the tabernacle in Exodus 35 is a wonderful example of sacrificial giving. They didn't just present surplus cash for the building — they gave from their possessions. They brought their gold jewelry and precious linens. Beyond that, they worked with their hands to provide extra for the construction.

“Everyone who was willing and whose heart moved him came and brought an offering to the Lord” (Exodus 35:20). What costly offering (sacrifice) can we present to God?



## Possible Areas of Sacrifice

### Consider adjustments to:

- Meals, drinks and entertainment
- Cellphone and Internet usage
- Vacationing
- Technology upgrades
- Sports and recreation
- Beauty products and services
- Automobile expenses
- Television/cable/satellite packages

### Or perhaps planned expense can be put on hold:

- Buying a new car
- Major appliance/technology upgrade
- International travel plans
- Remodeling your home

*Total lifestyle changes:* \$ \_\_\_\_\_

### Next, consider opportunities to offer secondary income:

- Creative/artistic hobbies
- Recycling
- Rummage sale profits
- Overtime/bonuses

*Enhancements to income:* \$ \_\_\_\_\_

### Then, actively consider contributing personal assets:

- Land/property
- Savings
- Collectibles
- Stocks and bonds

*Total assets:* \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**What I can sacrifice:** \$ \_\_\_\_\_

## My Step of Faith

*“In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. 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.”*

— 2 Corinthians 8:2-4

When all is said and done, joining God in the impossible is about more than simple math — it’s about trusting Him in risky ways. As seen in the Bible, God often taps people on the shoulder and asks them to do something that contradicts conventional wisdom. It’s the type of commitment that might look foolish to a financial planner, but is actually a wise investment in God’s economy. When we go for it, we join ranks with those who have paved the way for the daring advances of God’s Kingdom throughout history.

Where is Jesus calling you into deeper water, to give “even beyond your ability”? What step can you take that will force you to trust God in a new way? Where is He asking you to trust Him without a safety net, so that you can experience His ability to “catch you” in a way that will radically transform your heart and faith?

## Join Him in the Impossible

So how has God been meeting with you in this process? What has He revealed to you about His heart and yours as you've walked through these steps? Have you sensed His voice calling you into "the more" that He has for you? If so, you've done far more than calculate a number, you have let Jesus begin to transform you through this decision. This is what truly opens the door to the impossible!

**Are you ready to see the potential sacrifice you could make?**

What I can afford: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

What I can sacrifice: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

My faith step: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**My total three-year commitment to "Seeds to Branches":**

\$ \_\_\_\_\_

## **Above and Beyond Giving**

The “Seeds to Branches” Generosity Campaign is asking us to give above and beyond our regular giving, which supports the ongoing ministry of the church. However, this focus on how God is calling us to give also allows us the opportunity to review our regular stewardship and ask what we should be giving to the 2016 operating budget.

As you pray about your greater commitment to grow the ministry of Peace through “Seeds to Branches,” will you prayerfully consider your 2016 financial commitment to the ongoing expenses of Peace Ministries? This is a good time to consider our wider stewardship — of time and talent, as well as of treasure.

How is God calling you to use everything that He has entrusted you as a good steward of what comes from God and rightfully belongs to Him?

**It costs about \$3,000,000 to run Peace for a year.**

**Your regular offerings cover approximately \$2,000,000.**

**Tuition and other gifts cover approximately \$1,000,000.**

This shows how important your regular offerings to the general fund giving are!

So as we all consider our gift to “Seeds to Branches,” we also remember with JOY to commit to our ongoing, regular offerings for the operating expenses of Peace. We are taught in Scripture to give regularly ... proportionately ... and generously.

It would be good to remember our regular offerings as we make a commitment to give “Over and Above.” May God bless you as you consider your regular giving, and your *over and above* pledge to “Seeds to Branches.”

We are not asking you to turn in a dollar amount or percentage to the church. We do ask you each to prayerfully decide what that amount will be, and write it down here as a guideline and personal commitment between you and the Lord:

I/we commit to give \_\_\_\_\_ per week to the general fund of Peace. This represents \_\_\_\_\_% of my/our income.

**Let this Word of God be your inspiration:**

**1 Corinthians 16:2**

On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.

**Malachi 3:10**

“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.”

You have just gotten to a great starting point. This exercise was meant to help you get in the ballpark of a potential commitment. But the Journey is just getting started.

Our journey might begin here, but we look forward to it continuing over the next three years of faithfully bringing our prayers and offerings to God and watching to see what God will accomplish in and through us and our church family.

## **Mark Your Calendar for December 13!**

December 13, 2015, is Commitment Sunday, when we will be turning in our “Seeds to Branches” commitments, and celebrating our journey together in worship and fellowship!

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