

General Programs

2013

Authored By:

Lisa Caldwell Reiss
Southgate, KY

Stewardship: These Blessings Count!

Notes to Leader:

Spaces:

1. A conversation area, circle of chairs with a small table or stool at the center, a marker board or flip chart
2. A kitchen space with a cook top, move things around so there everyone can gather in and see the stove.
3. A work space with a table & chairs that will accommodate everyone. Push several rectangle tables together into one big square if need be.

Supplies:

You will need to read through the program options to determine precisely which supplies you will need.

- A Bible
- Blank paper (scrap is fine), tape & markers
- A large bag of un-popped popcorn (old school, not microwave), poured into a big mixing bowl
- A smaller bowl or cup for each person
- A large DRY kettle or soup pan in your Conversation area
- A kettle with oil prepared to pop corn in your Kitchen Area

Your Choice Projects:

- Bird Feeder/ Christmas Garland: Button thread, large needles & scissors for everyone
- Share the Treat: Paper Bags & popcorn flavorings
- Shaping it Up: Foil/wax paper, butter, molasses, etc. for popcorn balls
- Savoring the Gift: Bowls & a movie/video

Scripture: Ephesians 3:14-21, Matthew 6:25-34, Luke 6:38

Theme & Explanation:

So often, when we think of stewardship, we think about how we are going to come up with the resources that we need to do the things we do. What will we have to give to get the result that we want? However, our theme scripture invites us to begin stewardship in a very different place. Let's start our stewardship with a different

question. As we examine all the blessings we have and the passionate desire of our own hearts, then we ask ourselves, "what is God calling us to do with what God has given us?"

For a deeper explanation of this idea, check out: [The Power of Asset Mapping: How Your Congregation Can Act on its Gifts](#) by Luther K. Snow, Alban Institute, 2004

Set Up:

Place an empty bowl or cup at each chair in the Conversation area. Place the large empty, DRY pot on the table in the center. Have the mixing bowl full of un-popped corn available at one side. Invite folks to wash & dry their hands before they take a seat.

PROGRAM

We Sing the Scripture: "Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God" from Matthew 6:33

We Prepare in Prayer:

Ask each person to take the empty cup/bowl in their hands and hold it throughout the prayer. They may close their eyes or focus visually on the cup/bowl.

Holy God, giver of every good and perfect gift, you amaze us with your generosity. You give with both hands. You inspire us with timely and relevant gifts. Your grace and mercy overwhelm our need. You transform our scarcity into opportunity. We don't even know where to begin, but we praise you anyway!

(Hold the cup/bowl on the flat of your hand and consider it as a gift you have just received)

We are so blessed, we know but we confess that when we find ourselves looking at cups that seem empty, it frightens us. We feel embarrassed. Is anyone else's cup empty? Did we forget something? Have we wasted our resources and run out already? Are we doing something wrong? Is there even enough to go around? It's easy for us to doubt when we are sitting here, even in your presence, holding an empty cup.



(Turn the cup/bowl upside down on your palm and consider the emptiness trapped

inside)

But you don't give up on us. Empty cups are just ready to be filled. you remind us again and again. Your resources are endless and your willingness to bless us is more than we can ask or imagine. Thank you for being patient with us. Thank you for welcoming our empty cups. Thank you for waiting for us to realize that we can ask for more when the time is right.

(Flip your cup/bowl back over and lift it up to God)

Help us today as we once again consider what it means to give and receive in your kingdom. Stir our courage and inspire the desires of our heart. Show us your hand at work and your will alive in us. Amen.

(Clink your cup/bowl with others around the circle)

Hear the Scripture: Ephesians 3:14-21

We Name Our Blessings:

1. *Pass the mixing bowl and invite everyone to dip their cup or bowl into the un-popped corn and take a good scoop full.*
2. *Then, ask everyone to consider the blessings or assets which your group (congregation, circle, women's ministry, etc.) has for its ministry. Encourage folks to be very specific (THIS IS IMPORTANT). Blessings may be physical things (building, furniture, possessions, etc.), people (individuals, abilities, affinities, gifts, etc.), networks or associations that support you, other ministries that you work with or serve, financial, etc.*
3. *Finally, invite folks to drop a kernel of un-popped corn in the empty kettle in the center for each blessing or asset they can name. Have them only drop one kernel for each asset, so rather than "our music program" getting one kernel, they will want to say "our Christmas cantata, our children's choir, our bells, our choir director and get four. Make sure they do not pour in their whole cup without naming something for each kernel (THIS IS ALSO IMPORTANT)*
4. *Have someone record as much of this as you can on the flip chart or marker board.*



We Recognize the Need:

Read Ephesians 3:14-21 again. Take a look at the list. What ministries can and do arise from the blessings that you have on your list? What are you as a congregation/circle/women's ministry currently doing with those gifts? Are there gifts that are not getting

used? What needs in your community are echoed in the blessings you see here? How can you make use of these resources more creatively? More wisely? More efficiently?

We Claim the Call of Our Hearts:

Write your groups' responses as distinct actions, one per piece of paper. Tape these to the walls. Invite the group to "vote with their feet." Have each person go stand under the paper that indicates their greatest passion. Remind the group that no one is voting against a ministry or action. They are simply indicating their own personal passion and motivation. Have each person explain why they are standing where they are.

We Sing: "Count Your Blessings, Name Them One by One"

We Witness the Miracle:

Regroup in the Kitchen Area and pop your blessings. Well, the popcorn in your kettle anyway ~ on the stove, old school. You'll be surprised at what a delight this is, even if you've done it before. And amazed at how many people have not. Notice the increase in volume. Consider how the same is true when we return our blessings to God to be shared along with the passion of our hearts (the heat).

We Act On It

Make it Known:

Using the thread and needles, string popcorn. If it's Christmas time, use the popcorn on a church or family tree and take the opportunity to talk about how God turns blessings into abundance. You can also use shorter strands on wires as a bird feeder to hang on a tree. Again, be sure to share the reason with someone.

Share the Treat:

Toss your popcorn in powdered flavorings such as cheese, caramel, garlic, etc. Fill wax paper bags or popcorn boxes with the flavored popcorn and take it to someone who needs a treat. Make sure you tell them what the popcorn means.

Shaping it Up:

Remember popcorn balls? Well, google them! Find a recipe that sounds good for the syrup and toss all that beautiful popcorn in. Butter your hands and use the wax paper to cover the table surface. Shape the resulting goo into balls. You can use popsicle sticks or lollipop sticks to make the treats easier to hold. Wrap these in plastic when they are cool and tie with



fun ribbon. Share with a children's class and share Luke 6:38 with them. Tell them what it means to you.

Savoring the Gift:

Give everyone a bowl and have them dip into the blessings of the popcorn bowl. Watch a movie or video that inspires you to gratitude and giving. *The Peanuts Thanksgiving Special* is one possibility.

Benediction:

Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Luke 6:38