





Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.

John 15:4 (NSRV)



A LETTER FROM OUR PASTORS

Dear First-Centenary Family

There is no question that this is a very tumultuous time. Just within our church building, our BEYOND work is ongoing and we are addressing other issues and needs as they arise. A never ending adventure for a fifty-year-old building! Outside our church walls, challenging economic conditions persist, natural disasters strike, global conflicts remain and new ones arise, and political and social tensions are all around us.

All of these circumstances pull on us, and that is to be expected. When we learn to reflect God's character through discipleship and worship, that should lead our hearts to a response. However, a natural human tendency has always been to give too much power to influences other than God. When that happens, our thoughts are no longer conforming to God's thoughts. We fail to put God first and we fail to love our neighbor as ourselves. We become misaligned.

We believe this generosity series is the exact right message at the exact right time. Each one of us must be intentional in remaining aligned with God and God's purposes for our lives and the church. When we experience alignment as individuals and families, and then the church body operates in alignment, we all can be God's effective hands and feet to our world. Friends and neighbors are feeling the exact same tensions we are. But unfortunately, some do not have strong roots of faith. Jesus teaches us we are part of His vine. He is strong for us. He provides stability for us. When we fully believe and trust in His provision, we experience lives of contentment. As we will see, a life of contentment will lead to a life of generosity. Life of generosity reflects the character of our Triune God.

This journal will serve you well. Please remember to bring it to worship on Sundays and utilize it throughout these four weeks. We are grateful for all the minds and creativity that have put this resource together for your benefit. We are grateful for your commitment to First-Centenary. But most of all, we are grateful for God's faithfulness to First-Centenary, His disciples, and His creation.

Blessings,

Pastors Jason, Will, Barry, and Michelle

ALIGN

Most Christians have had a time in their lives where they are abiding in God's love and direction for their lives. Everything seems to be working well. Relationships are richer. Jobs are fulfilling. Joy is easy to come by.

¹"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. ²He removes every branch in Me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit He prunes to make it bear more fruit. ³You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴Abide in Me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in Me. ⁵I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who abide in Me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶Whoever does not abide in Me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷If you abide in Me and My words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become My disciples. ⁹As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in My love. ¹⁰If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in His love. ¹¹I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

¹²"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴You are my friends if you do what I command you.

John 15:1-14 (NSRV)

However, in this world, it is easy to venture away from the vine and try to do things ourselves. It is typically not an intentional decision to move away from God, but it happens. It often happens over a period of time, and we do not recognize we have done so until we realize we are not bearing much 'good fruit.'

The question then becomes, why do we not stay close to God all of the time? If we believe Jesus' words and know we cannot bear good fruit without remaining in Him, why do we fall away? What is going on in our hearts that keeps us from staying aligned with God?

Maybe it's not only that our hearts drift away. Maybe it's not that we are inherently insincere people or that we do not intend to stay close to the vine. Maybe other forces are working against us, causing us to feel discontentment and seek answers through our own devices.





Culture works very hard at pulling us away from the vine. Culture makes us want more and feel if we have more then we will be happy. Contentment can be hard to come by.

¹¹Not that I am referring to being in need, for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. ¹²I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. ¹³I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

Philippians 4:11-13 (NSRV)

In this passage, Paul was explaining to the Philippians how much he appreciated them and their concern for him. He also greatly appreciated their willingness to provide for his physical needs through giving. He shares with them how he has learned to be content and the only way is through God who gave him strength. So it should be for us.



CONTENTMENT comes from trust that God will provide. It can be difficult to trust that God will provide when times are not going well. We all have financially difficult times, and it can be challenging to give. Sometimes the call to give may seem too large, or it may be a request that feels completely out of reach – one that could put you or your family in jeopardy if you were to give at that level.

There is only one place in the Bible where God gives us the command to test Him. We are given permission to test God in the area of giving.

¹⁰ Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house, and thus put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing. ¹¹ I will rebuke the locust for you, so that it will not destroy the produce of your soil, and your vine in the field shall not be barren, says the Lord of hosts. ¹² Then all nations will count you happy, for you will be a land of delight, says the Lord of hosts.

Malachi 3:10-12 (NSRV)

The God of all of the heavens and earth challenges us to put God to the test when it comes to giving! It is THE only place in the Bible where we are given permission to test God.

- When we are aligned with God... it is easier to trust that God will provide enough.
- When we trust God will provide enough... we can be content with what we have.
- When we are aligned with God... contentment is easier to embrace.
- When we are content with what we have... giving generously is easier.

During this campaign, we will all be encouraged and challenged to align ourselves with God's will for our lives. As we strive to trust God more, we can have more contentment in the resources God has made available to each of us.





ALIGN is a four-week series where we will look at what it might take for each of us to be aligned with God in all areas of our lives. The sermon series will focus on:

1. Alignment with God's Word

- What does the Bible have to say about how we should live our lives?
- How have you utilized the Bible in your life to stay close to God; to abide; to be aligned?
- What does the Bible say about giving and how we should give back to God?

2. Alignment with the Trinity

- What does it look like to pray to God and trust God?
- How do we love Jesus and embrace His teachings and the example that He set?
- Will we allow room for the Holy Spirit to lead in all areas of our lives, including giving?

3. Heart Alignment

- Is your heart aligned with the Trinity?
- Do you allow the Trinity to lead your heart toward your family, your friends, and your job?
- How can we allow the Holy Spirit to transform our hearts and minds so that our daily encounters with people reveal how our hearts are aligned with God's - so that we can be cheerful givers?

4. Vision Alignment

- What is God's vision for your life? Have you ever asked God that question and made room for the Holy Spirit to answer?
- What is the vision for your church and are you aligned with that vision?
- Do you believe the leadership of your church is aligned with the Trinity and is leading accordingly?
- What is your role in helping the church's God-inspired vision become a reality?
- How does your giving allow the church's vision to become a reality?

WEEK ONE

October 26, 2025

ALIGNED WITH GOD'S WORD

John 15:1-17 (NSRV)

⁵I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who abide in Me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from Me you can do nothing.

Sermon Notes:

[illegible]

Aligned with God's Word:

- What we believe. Read/recite the Apostles Creed. Do you believe those words? Do you live according to those words?
- How we live. Read Matthew 7:15-20. What are the fruits you are bearing that your family, friends, co-workers and neighbors see?
- What we say. Read James 3:2. When you speak, do people “hear” your heart?
- How we give. Read Matthew 6:25-34. Do you think Jesus intended this to be a teaching on worry or a positive story on trust and contentment? Read Matthew 10:8. Do you freely give or give with hesitation sometimes?

Children:

- Find a small box and decorate it with pictures, drawings, or stickers of your favorite fruits. Once the box is decorated, write down or draw pictures of fruit you produce with your words and actions. You can bring this with you to church and show people how the fruit you produce with your words and actions is aligned with God's Word, the trinity, God's heart and the vision God has for First-Centenary.
- Write a sentence that talks about the fruit you produce with your words and actions or draw some grapes and write a fruit you produce with your words and actions in each grape.

Family Activity:

- Choose a person or family that you can be generous to with the fruit you produce from your words and actions this week.

ONE OF THE GOALS for any initiative is 100% participation from every family in our church. We encourage you to prayerfully consider completing a commitment card for this initiative. This portion of the journal is designed to help explain the significance (practically and spiritually) of turning in a card.

A COMMITMENT CARD:

- Provides opportunity for personal (self) assessment.
- Motivates a specific increase in one's generosity.
- Provides a timeline for a decision personally and organizationally rather than an undefined closure.
- A goal when written is much more likely achieved than one that remains in the head. A written commitment makes it real and provides a mechanism for accountability.

There is power in a physical symbol. Individuals wear a wedding ring as a way of symbolizing commitment to their marriage. It doesn't make someone married. You could be married without it. But the physical symbol is important, and it sends a message to those who see it.

In an age when so many helpful (but automatic) giving options abound, it is tempting to put one's giving on autopilot. This can stall continuing growth and discipleship, and impact generosity. Completing a card allows for the automated giver to reassess his or her giving level.





This campaign is an opportunity for us to understand the “why” of commitment cards.

- What if we saw commitment cards as an opportunity not to be missed to reassess our gratitude to God, to demonstrate we are **ALIGNED** in the Word and God’s promises?
- What if we thought of a commitment card in terms of the spiritual check-up it could provide and help us evaluate our priorities and our **ALIGNMENT** with the Trinity in the spiritual discipline of giving?
- What if we saw commitment cards as a sign that our hearts are **ALIGNED** with God, that we are content with the resources God has provided, and that we trust God will provide the resources for us to fulfill our commitment?
- What if we saw turning in a commitment card as an outward and visible sign that we are **ALIGNED** with the vision of our church and that we trust the leadership to use the financial resources to fulfill our church’s God-inspired vision?



A PRAYER FOR US ALL...

Sovereign God, as we begin this journey to explore our alignment with all things good and holy, we pray that You will align us to the truth of Your word: that in giving we shall receive. In the name of Jesus we ask this. Amen.

WEEK TWO

November 2, 2025

ALIGNED WITH THE TRINITY

John 3:16-17 (NSRV)

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but may have eternal life.¹⁷ Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him.

Sermon Notes:

[illegible]

Aligned with God's Word:

- Reflect on a time in your life when “there was enough.” There was no excess. God provided “just enough.” How were you feeling during that time? Were you stressed and worried? Were you thankful? How can you grow in your trust in God to give more through First-Centenary and expand God’s mission in our community?
- Scriptures show no record of Jesus ever giving money to anyone. Does that mean that Jesus was not generous? Most would say Jesus was the most generous person ever to walk the earth. Jesus was extremely generous with his time and meeting others’ needs. What are some ways you have been generous without giving money? What are some things you could do to be more generous with your time, talent, and treasure?
- Do you have the heart of a Macedonian? Since they were experiencing extreme poverty and famine at the time, the Spirit had to be involved for the Macedonians to be inspired to give as generously as they did. Have you ever given away resources to others even when you did not have “much?” What inspired you to do that?

Children:

- The trinity can be confusing and hard to understand. When we say the trinity, we are talking about God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. They are three and at the same time they are one.
- Get your box that you decorated with fruit and some paper along with a pencil, crayon or marker. On the paper write or draw a picture of some things in the Bible that God the Father did, some things God the Son did, and some things God the Holy Spirit did. Then you can put this paper in the box to take to church and show people.
- Using the paper you made for the box to help you, write a sentence, draw a picture, or find a picture or stickers showing something you can do that is in alignment with things that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit did.

Family Activity:

- As a family, pray and ask God the Holy Spirit to show you something that you can do that shows you trust God to provide for your needs and give generously like Jesus. Do that thing this week.

NEARLY EVERY DAY, we make financial decisions. Some are small – should you get a cup of coffee at McDonald's or splurge for the pumpkin spice latte at Starbucks? Some are big – which house, which car, which college? Some concern the future – how much should you spend on Christmas, which retirement funds should you choose?

Probably the most challenging decision we make with money is the decision to give. Giving creates tension. We wonder, "If I give this away, how will the gap be filled?" That's why giving is such a big deal. Nothing invites God into our lives like giving. Giving is a tangible way we declare our trust in, and commitment to, God. Giving often paves the way for God to show up in our lives in a powerful way.

Giving is not just a financial decision, it's a deeply spiritual decision. In this journal, we have put some ideas together to help you consider how God has blessed you and how the Spirit might invite you to trust the Lord during the **ALIGN** campaign. You'll find ideas that will help you pray and consider how God will have you participate. Our prayer is that you would experience the power of God in your life through generous giving and living.

The most effective path to generosity is a spiritual path where you set your heart on things above. Then, your financial priorities will naturally **ALIGN** with your spiritual priorities.

People often describe this as "living a generous lifestyle." It is always a temptation to give to God in a way that it makes little impact on how you live. The challenge of living a generous lifestyle is to intentionally and prayerfully find ways to do just that – to let your giving touch your living!

A gift that would touch the heart of God must first touch the life of the giver! This is the spirit of lifestyle generosity. "If it is for my God, my gift must have meaning and value to me."

Lifestyle generosity is a level of giving that affects you, your plans, your activities, your attitude, and your approach to life. It means giving up something in one area so that you can give more of yourself in another.

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A PRAYER FOR US ALL...

Father God, Your love for us is breathtaking; generous beyond our comprehension. Son of God, Your sacrifice for us is breathtaking; generous beyond our comprehension. Spirit of God, Your power given to align ourselves with Your word and Your will is breathtaking; generous beyond our comprehension. Help us embrace generosity in all things. We thank you, Triune God.



WEEK THREE

November 9, 2025

ALIGNED IN HEART

1 Timothy 6:6-7 (NSRV)

⁶Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment,
⁷for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out
of it. . . .

Sermon Notes:

[illegible]

Aligned in Heart

Contentment = Heart Alignment = Generosity

Heart Alignment = Generosity = Contentment

Generosity = Contentment = Heart Alignment

- Do you agree or disagree that these words are interchangeable and have an equal effect on the others?
- Read Matthew 6:21 and Luke 12:34. It is in the Bible twice. There's a reason. It must have been important to Jesus. Jesus clearly knew the connection between our hearts and money. Many would say that treasure and heart are interchangeable in the text, and it still reads in a powerful way. Do you agree?
- Does your heart follow your treasure or does your treasure follow your heart? Or is it both at different times depending on the situation?

Children:

- Get your fruit decorated box. Is there something that you think about a lot? Is there something that you almost always want more of? The Bible talks about where our heart or treasure is. This refers to what we live for, constantly desire, and want more of. What do you think that is for you? Cut out, draw a picture of or write that thing down.
- Does that thing help your heart be aligned with God? The Bible tells us to be content with what we have and serve God. We are to live for God and not money, toys, being popular, or anything else.
- If your heart is constantly thinking about and desiring this item instead of God, will you write "content" over the top of it? Then draw a heart and write God inside it. Put these things in your box.

Family Activity:

- Find some things at home that you have too much of and give them away to someone who can use them.
- Or go to the store and buy something you really like, and give it to someone who can use it to show that you can be content with what you have and that your heart is in alignment with the Bible and the trinity.

GIVE WITH YOUR WHOLE HEART.

In 1 Chronicles 29, David is talking to his leaders about raising the money to build the temple. David is challenging his leaders to give with the same level of sacrifice that he has done. They accepted the challenge and then announced the totals to all the people of Israel. Verse 9 reads, “The people rejoiced at the willing response of their leaders, for they had given freely and wholeheartedly to the Lord. David the king also rejoiced greatly.”

The word that jumps out is “wholeheartedly.” The people gave with their whole hearts. The God we serve wants to be in relationship with us. God created us to have a relationship with Him. God just wants our hearts. God wants us to love the way God loves us. God wants the relationship between God and us to be better than our relationship with our best friend here on earth.



True friendships involve two people who genuinely like each other. They can just hang out with no agenda. They can laugh together, cry together, celebrate together, and mourn together. True friends would rather hang out with each other than anyone else. They just want to be around each other because of the peace, comfort, and happiness they feel when spending time with each other.

True friends give to each other without hesitation, question, or expectation of anything in return. True friends trust each other inherently and would give each other everything they had if the other needed it. We give our time, our words, our actions, our gifts, and our love without hesitation to our best friend. Isn't this what God does for us each day? Doesn't God give to us without hesitation every day? God wants our 'whole hearts.' God wants our friendship, our love, and our generosity.

ALIGN

When we give money to our church we are giving back to God. If we love God with our 'whole heart' we will give our finances to God without hesitation, reservation, or expectation of anything in return.

A PRAYER FOR US ALL...

O God, You have formed us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in You. Help us be what You have formed us to be – people peaceful at heart and aligned with You. Generous in all things. Amen.



During worship on November 16, our FCUMC family will have the opportunity to celebrate God's grace and generosity as we complete our Estimate of Giving cards for 2026.

You will receive your card before Commitment Sunday. Below is an example of the card.



2026 Commitment Card

Please contact me/us with information about:

- ☐ Setting up online recurring gifts
- ☐ Making a gift of appreciated assets or from an IRA
- ☐ Giving through my/our Estate Planning (will, insurance beneficiary, etc.)



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United Methodist Church

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MY / OUR COMMITMENT

I/We will trust in the Lord with all our heart. I/We will honor the Lord with the first fruits of income. I/We estimate giving to the Lord's work/ministry through our church this year as follows:

2026 Annual Commitment \$ _____

I/We plan to fulfill this commitment:

☐ Weekly ☐ Quarterly

☐ Monthly ☐ Annually

Your information. Please print.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ ST _____ Zip _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Signature _____

I understand this commitment may be revised or canceled at any time at my request.

WEEK FOUR

November 16, 2025

ALIGNED IN VISION

Psalm 133:1 (NSRV)

¹ How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!

Sermon Notes:

Aligned in Vision

- Describe a time when you felt completely **ALIGNED** with FCUMC or another church you attended. What elements do you feel were in place to allow you to be that connected and in step with where the church was going?
- Have you ever been a part of a church, business, or organization where you felt disconnected? Was there a clearly defined vision? Do you think a church, business, or organization must have a clearly defined vision to be **ALIGNED** and successful?
- If you were to take the next step on your giving journey as a part of your response to the **ALIGN** campaign, do you feel your increased giving will allow FCUMC to pursue its God-inspired vision with more efficiency and effectiveness?

Children/Family Activity:

- Get your box, paper, and something to write with or draw a picture. Write down or draw your favorite fruit. Next to this word or picture (maybe inside the fruit) write down or draw some thing(s) that you will commit to do this year showing alignment with God's Word, the trinity, your heart, and the vision of the church to transform life by glorifying God, following Jesus, and loving your neighbor. Talk about this with your parents and ask them to help if you can't think of anything. Then put it in the box.
- Bring your box to church to show and tell about the things you have learned and done.
- Put the box up where you will see it often as a reminder of the things you have learned and done as well as your commitment.
- Encourage one another to stay aligned and live out your commitments.

A PRAYER FOR US ALL...

Giver of every good and perfect gift, we must confess: our vision for connecting to You is often clouded and often broken, and often there is no vision at all. We pray for a new vision, one aligned with Your plan for First-Centenary, for our families, for our own lives. Help us trust in You as the Great Provider. Give us faith, O Lord, we pray, faith for greater things.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

GENEROSITY JOURNEY

An **INITIAL GIVER** is someone who decides to give for the first time, out of response to God's Word about giving. This is someone who decides to give something and trust God and the leaders of the Church with this gift. (2 Corinthians 8:7-15)

A **CONSISTENT GIVER** is someone who decides to give something on a consistent basis to exercise the discipline of giving on a regular basis. Often, someone who decides to make their gift an online recurring gift will be someone who is learning the behavior of consistency. (2 Corinthians 9:6-8)

An **INTENTIONAL GIVER** is someone who is beginning to think about their giving in relation to other things on which they spend their money. This giver starts to make their giving an intentional choice that reflects how they prioritize it in relation to other things they spend their money on. (Luke 14:28-35)

A **SACRIFICIAL GIVER** is someone who recognizes the cost Christ paid on the cross for us and is surrendered to honoring God with 100% of their resources as a result. A Sacrificial Giver is someone who gives in a way that changes them, in a way that reflects that their giving is governing their spending/saving rather than their spending/saving governing their giving. (Colossians 1:15-18, 22-23)

A **LIFETIME GIVER** is someone who is thinking about the longer tail of generosity rather than just the shorter term of month-to-month generosity or even year-to-year. A Lifetime Giver makes decisions in the short term that have longer term effects as it relates to their generosity capacity. A Lifetime Giver might be someone who has a lifetime giving goal, something that will govern their larger-ticket decisions. Much like a Sacrificial Giver makes a commitment that will govern his/her monthly and annual decisions, a Lifetime Giver makes a lifetime or longer-term giving commitment that governs his/her larger-item purchases like homes, cars, investments, and the like. (1 Timothy 6:6-19)

I believe God is calling me to grow my generosity by:



