

Speak out!

“Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as **faithful stewards** of God’s grace in its various forms.”

(1 PETER 4:10)

The Bible begins with the story of creation, as many of us know, in Genesis, chapters 1 and 2. We may remember that humanity is created on the last day of the creation account. We may even remember that human beings were created uniquely in the image of God. But what we may not remember is that humanity is given a special calling by God: to exercise careful stewardship within the earth as a reflection of who God is (Genesis 1:26-28).



That charge is explained further as we're told in Genesis 2 that *"The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it"* (Genesis 2:15). This reveals a double calling of humanity in relation to the garden: to work it, and to take care of it. There are many implications of this assignment in relation to the created world, creatures, relationships, and our lives.

At least one of those implications is that human beings are caretakers, or stewards, on behalf of God in the world. This idea is sharpened to further clarity for those who follow Jesus, where we are called to love God with all of who we are and to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22:36-40).

In light of Genesis 1-2 we are stewards, and in light of the Great Commandment we live that out in love to God and for others. This is why the Apostle Peter writes, *"Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms"* (1 Peter 4:10). Stewardship means all we have is a gift from God, and we take what God has given us to lovingly care for others and for the world as a reflection of Him.

Two good questions we can ask ourselves are: "What has God given me?" and "What has God placed in my hands?"

In this latest edition of *Speak Out*, we'll see how some in our community have answered those questions and explore this idea of stewardship. I hope as we read the stories in this issue, we are encouraged by all God has given and the various ways congregants are stewarding that as a reflection of Him in our church and in our city. May we all know God has gifted and entrusted us with much, and called us to bear His image to the world.

Matt Erickson
Senior Pastor, Eastbrook Church

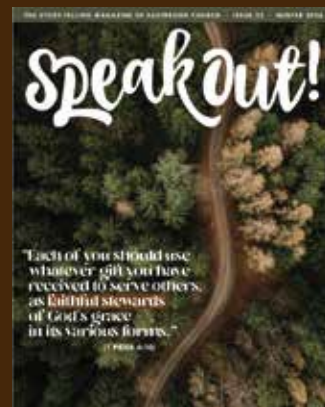
A Note about Stewardship

"Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms." (1 Peter 4:10)

This issue focuses on the spiritual discipline of stewardship. It's common to hear this word and associate it primarily with the giving of finances. But true stewardship is so much more than that.

To steward is to be responsible, to take care, to manage, and minister. The daily use of our gifts and possessions reveals our spiritual priorities. Think of it as our spiritual job. The tools for our job: our time, talents, and yes, our treasure—the gifts God has given us, in whatever forms they take. And that may mean different things for different people.

We hope through this issue you're inspired by Eastbrookers who are discerning what those gifts might be and figuring out how they can use them to give back to God's kingdom.



Life with God is a journey, and along the way, He asks us to steward our time, treasure, and talent in a way that glorifies His kingdom! This issue digs into the topic of stewardship and our cover image reminds us that we're all "on the way" ... none of us has "arrived" yet!

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STORY **GOD** RY

Stewarding from the “Sweet Spots”

by Jay Thorson



“Teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom.” (Psalm 90:12)

If you no longer had to work, how would you use your time? About five years ago I faced this very question when I realized that I could afford to retire. My perspective on how I was using my time began to shift in unexpected ways.

I had served as a Lutheran pastor for over 30 years. But my parents dying earlier than I expected and frequent preaching at funerals kept reminding me of my limits. “Teach us to number our days...” echoed in my heart. And a lifetime of studying Scripture was making me question whether I was even Lutheran anymore. Now that I could retire, and do anything, was being a traditional Lutheran pastor the best stewardship of the remaining days God would give me? I read articles on “when a pastor should retire,” studied the Scriptures, meditated, journaled, and prayed. A picture emerged.

As a solo pastor, I was involved with nearly everything at the church. For decades that was exciting, but now I sensed God calling me to focus my energy on my core spiritual gifts. **It was time to stop scattering my energy on running a church and concentrate on growing disciples.**

It was also time to be rooted in a Christian community. Unlike at Eastbrook, Lutheran clergy are expected to keep an emotional distance from their congregations—and cut off all ties when they move to a new church. It’s heartbreaking, and I didn’t want to ever do that again. Instead of filling in for pastoral vacancies and vacations like many pastors do during retirement, I felt called to invest in relationships that could abide until the Lord called me home.

God has also placed in my wife Beth’s and my heart a love for the city. I was being called to bless those who live and serve in our adopted hometown. That meant embracing a Milwaukee church. Of the

city churches we knew, Eastbrook stood out as Bible-teaching, disciple-making, and mission-driven. Pre-COVID, while I was still pastoring elsewhere, we worshipped here regularly at the Saturday night service. That opportunity to step out of leading and be part of the congregation refreshed me to persevere in my ministry. Like many Eastbrookers, Beth is a Wheaton College alumna, so she already found Eastbrook’s culture very familiar.

So, I met with Pastor Matt to ask, “What would you let an ex-Lutheran do as a volunteer around here?” He was very encouraging! Over the past three and a half years, I’ve had the chance to try many ministries here, and focus with the ones that fit me well. My core gift is teaching adults God’s Word, which I now get to do regularly in several fruitful ways. I’ve been involved in worship music my whole life and am grateful I’ve been delighted to play guitar and bass as part of the worship team. Ministry through hospitality has been a life-long calling for us, and now I have more time and flexibility for that—like hosting the Alpha class for international students in our home near UW-Milwaukee. And God keeps surprising me with opportunities to do individual discipling and encouraging.

Finally, I gained something I wasn’t asking for. It turned out that retirement allowed me to get unstuck spiritually, and steward my soul in a fresh way, by taking me from overseeing many things to living under the authority of others. Big change! Four things happened:

First, I’m learning to let go of control. As a pastor, I got to have a lot of things my way (like picking my favorite songs for worship). Learning to appreciate other leaders’ direction has been easier than I expected. I’m finding there is freedom in being under the authority of others.

Second, I am learning to rely on God’s affirmation, rather than human praise.

Pastors can get addicted to the congregation’s affirmation. There is freedom when your mood doesn’t go up and down depending on how well your sermon or the council meeting went that week.

Third, God made it clear it was time for me to stop being critical and become generous in affirming others. In my years of renewing congregations, I had to do a lot of “problem finding,” which fed my critical spirit. In retirement, God is giving me a chance to quit finding what’s wrong and fixing it, to instead find what’s right and blessing it. I’m learning to say “*what is helpful for building others up according to their needs.*” (Ephesians 4:29). This is not easy for me!

Fourth, I am delightfully surprised that for the first time in my adult life, I’m among many people who are more mature in the faith than me, examples of Christlikeness and kingdom-centered service. Every time I’m on campus I meet people I’d like to be like when I grow up! Serving and building relationships with them has been a great gift.

Every day I praise God for the gift of retirement. I’m privileged to be spending so much time serving in my sweet spots. I’m surrounded by a “*cloud of witnesses*” (Hebrews 12:1) who inspire me with their passion for God’s Word and mission. Week by week I’m building precious connections with an amazing range of people. I’m being given a glimpse of heaven that’s renewing my faith and zeal for God’s kingdom. ■

Have a God Story that you’d like to share in a future issue of *Speak Out*? Know somebody you’d like to nominate? We’d love to hear from you! Email Rachel Shuster at rshuster@eastbrook.org.

Stewards & Servants

How Can I Give of Myself in the New Year?



Pre-Explorer

Someone who does not yet know God

Time: Join us for Sunday service. Sundays are a great time to learn more about what's happening at Eastbrook. Make sure to stop by *The Connecting Point* in the Main Lobby to meet a few friendly faces and hear what's going on around campus.

Talent: Get active! In addition to the many activities and groups Eastbrook offers to intentionally grow your faith, we also offer opportunities to simply be together and get to know others in the community. Do your skills rival Giannis on the court? Join us for Men's Basketball (Saturdays)! Whiz in the kitchen? Enter our Chili Cook-Off (March 8). Love the environment? Help at our River Clean-Up (April 25).

Treasure: "Spend" some time with us. Getting here costs you something, whether that be gas or bus fare, alternative plans, or the opportunity to sleep longer on the weekend. Making that deposit to get here can pay dividends in the future! Come chat with us on January 18 or April 12 for Lunch with the Staff.

Explorer

An active seeker who believes in something and is looking for answers

Time: Dig Deeper. As in, those questions under the "Dig Deeper" heading on each Sunday's sermon outline handout. Take a few minutes (or more!) during the week to turn your attention inward and reflect on some of the prompts our pastors have put together to help you understand the message better and even apply it to your everyday life.

Talent: Explore your spiritual gifts. It's okay if you can't readily identify talents that directly serve or bless others—but we're sure you have them! Get help figuring out what those might be by taking a Spiritual Gifts assessment. We offer options for starting points on the Eastbrook website: navigate to the "Next Steps" page to get started.

Treasure: Take a first step of giving. God calls us to be faithful with little—so start small! Consider a one-time financial gift, lend what you can for seasonal drives like Boxes of Love. Even a small donation to the Food Pantry or another local drive this winter goes a long way!

New Disciple

A follower of Jesus who is hungry for answers and excited about their new life in Christ

Time: Stewarding your time well doesn't have to mean adding an extra event to your calendar! Say hello to the person sitting next to you on Sunday morning. Arrive to your Bible study a few minutes early for a bit of conversation with a classmate. Linger outside your child's Sunday School class and introduce yourself to other parents.

Talent: Consider how you could plug into service. Channel that excitement about your spirituality into serving His kingdom! Eastbrook's many ministries offer several opportunities to learn about the work they do, and try your hand before committing to more. Attend an Info Session at the International Community Center (January 19) or participate in the Food Pantry's Container Gardening Class (March 21). Keep an eye on the Care Board in our East Lobby for others who are seeking service in our community!

Treasure: Now that you are committed to Christ, think about how you'd like to give back some of what He has gifted you monetarily. Find helpful wisdom from Scripture and our past sermons on the Eastbrook app or website—just navigate to our "Media" page to search by topics and keywords like "Generosity."

Every journey starts with a first step. You put one foot in front of the other, and soon you're well on your way. As followers of Christ, we're on an adventure to know God better and become more like Him as part of our everyday, ordinary lives. Each of our personal discipleship journeys may look different!

As with anything new, it can be tough to know where to start. Below are some easy, low-, medium- and high-commitment ways to deepen your engagement with what God may be calling you to this year, organized according to the various "stages" of our Discipleship Pathway. Consider this your invitation into stewarding your gifts here at Eastbrook! ■



Growing Disciple

A Christian who is grown in their understanding of God, and desire to serve His church

Time: Level up in your service by taking on a leadership role. You're likely already serving somewhere at Eastbrook; why not ask what more you could do? Deepening your engagement can similarly deepen your experience of God and His work in our community. Talk to your ministry lead about taking a next step.

Talent: Go and do. Local and cross-cultural mission trips are a great opportunity to use a wide range of skills to serve others. Learn more about how you can be part of what God's doing around the world and hear about our 2026 short-term trips at the Ready, Set, Go info session on March 1.

Treasure: Do U "FPU?" Finances are biblical—flip through this issue to learn more about Financial Peace University (page 7) and how it teaches Biblically-based concepts for managing your money. Consider joining our next FPU session, or a special 6-week Sunday morning class, "Christians and Wealth Stewardship. Learn more at eastbrook.org/spring2026.

Christ-Centered Disciple

A mature Christian living a sacrificial, fruitful, Spirit-led life

Time: Consider leading a class, group, or ministry. What better way to pay forward what you have learned on your journey than to pass it on? Talk to one of our pastors to discuss what options might be available to you.

Talent: Share your God Story. Each of us has a story to tell, and an opportunity to disciple and inspire others in the process. Consider writing out your God Story (you can use the prompts on the Eastbrook app!) and then share your experience with others. *Speak Out!* is one of many wonderful venues for your testimony—we'd love to hear from you! Email rshuster@eastbrook.org if you'd like to contribute.

Treasure: Check in with your giving. You are likely already giving financial gifts to Eastbrook or another church or Christ-centered organization. Did you know you can check in on your giving at any time right on the Eastbrook app? Click on your profile in the upper right-hand corner.



Practicing the Way

What does it mean to bring our faith in God into our ordinary lives? As we start the year, this is a good time to bring our faith and discipleship into deep connection with our everyday, ordinary lives: our work, our relationships, our money, our pursuits, our rhythms, and so much more.

The new year is also a time for self-reflection and priority-setting. As this relates to living out our faith, individually and collectively, Eastbrook has a tool we'd like to invite you to try.

It's called "Practicing the Way." This self-assessment tool that allows users to pinpoint where they find themselves on their journey with God, as well as provides feedback and subsequent practices and resources for spiritual growth. You can now find it on the Eastbrook website (use the QR code below!)

Remember: discipleship is a journey, not a destination. There is no "right" or "wrong" spot to find yourself—your personal path may diverge or you may pedal back at times! The aim is continued pursuit of life with God.



GET TO KNOW AN EASTBROOK FAMILY: the Dregers

Introduce yourselves for anyone who might not yet know you...

We are the Dregers; Brian, Jennifer, Jackson, and Sarah. We've been at Eastbrook since 1997.

How did your family come to Eastbrook?

We moved to Glendale from Riverwest in 1997. While driving down Green Bay Ave., Jennifer saw the Eastbrook sign and she remembered working with a woman at a Christian camp in the northwoods of Wisconsin who had talked about Eastbrook over the summer. That was encouragement enough to check it out. We heard Pastor Marc Erickson preach that first Sunday and decided we had found a church home.

What role has this place played in your family's walk with God?

The ethos of Eastbrook matched what God had put on our hearts personally: welcoming, discipling, worshipful, prayerful. All in a place that felt more like a family than a top-down organization. Eastbrook has been a place for us to serve however God calls, creating deeper connections with other believers, and all the while growing in our walks with Jesus. The preaching and teaching have given us a richer understanding of God, and serving alongside charter members in Eastbrook has provided wonderful examples of a godly walk.

How are each of you connected at Eastbrook?

We have hosted a Small Group for the last 20 years, and over that time we've seen Jackson and Sarah grow from toddlers to adults participating in the sermon discussions.

Jennifer attends Women's Study on Wednesday night, is a wedding coordinator for weddings held at Eastbrook, and is Director of Administration at Eastbrook Academy.

Jackson is on staff as an AV Specialist in the Worship Department, and plays bass guitar on worship teams.

Sarah was a design intern last summer and recently joined the Eastbrook staff as a Communication and Design Assistant.

Brian plays guitar on worship teams and is currently serving in his first term on the church council.

In the past we've served as Sunday School teachers, taught the membership class, co-led a young marrieds ministry, served on the Women Unlimited leadership team, organized marriage retreats, women's retreats, and family camp, as well as conducting pre-marital counseling. Jackson and Sarah were in Sunday School as children, as well as children's choirs all the way through high school. Both also attended Eastbrook Academy K-12.



Clockwise from top left: Brian, Jackson, Jennifer, and Sarah Dregers

What first spurred you to get involved?

We initially struggled to find connection, honestly. At a certain point we realized it was up to us to take the first step. We decided to get involved and just show up; and that has made all the difference. Once we began to serve we found fertile ground for personal connections, and more importantly, spiritual growth. We encourage anyone who doesn't feel connected to just step into a ministry. God will take care of the rest.

What do you find most rewarding about those opportunities?

As a family, we've always found great joy in serving others. Whether helping facilitate the education of young scholars, highlighting church ministries on social media, helping create a worshipful atmosphere on Sunday, or serving in council meetings, any effort we put in comes back two-fold in blessings. It is amazing how God has put the gifts He gave us to use for His church. Jennifer's administration, Jackson's aptitude for technology & audio, Sarah's artistic skills, and Brian's guitar playing. All offered back to God.

In contrast, what challenges do you face?

They say our offerings come in the form of time, talent, and treasure. The most challenging aspect in serving for all of us is time. Jackson and Sarah are both still in college as they work and serve. Jennifer and Brian both have full-time jobs in addition to the hours they put in for preparation and practice. Fitting everything in while making sure we still bring the first fruits. God deserves nothing less than our best. One of Eastbrook's vision principles is Multiplying Leaders. We would love to see that come to life with more people serving alongside us. We pray more people can experience the blessings and community that comes from jumping into ministry.

How has Eastbrook blessed you as a family?

When we first got truly involved at Eastbrook (beyond attending services on Sunday) the people really came around us. When we were moving to a new house, the women in Jennifer's Friday

morning study activated all their husbands to help us. That was a very tangible blessing.

We've also been brought into so many relationships with people who pray over us, pray with us, walk through tough times with us. We can continually grow in our understanding of God and our relationship with Him, while growing closer to fellow believers.

Serving has produced many blessings in itself. We've had the opportunity to serve with original members of Eastbrook as a family; essentially three generations serving together. The wisdom, godly example, and experience gathered from those times is priceless. We pray we can continue to pass that along to future generations.

We're talking about stewardship in this issue—how we are called to multiply our time, talents and treasures for the good of God's kingdom. How do you see your family stewarding what God has blessed you with in our church community?

God truly seems to have led us to use our talents for His glory. As we've followed that leading into ministry, we've found ourselves growing even more in those areas. Jackson may have had a knack for audio and technology, but the opportunity to serve in producing the services has provided unexpected knowledge and growth. Brian is continually challenged to grow in his musical skills, but doing so results in a peace which allows for him to more freely worship. In the midst of our busy lives, God always makes a way for us to serve. We just offer the whole day back to Him, so He can work in each area of our lives.

When we bought our current house, it almost seemed accidental. Before we knew it, we had put in an offer and were preparing to move. What was clear to us was that God had directed the process. And that meant He had a purpose for the house. Since that moment we made using the house for hospitality a priority; offering the space back to God for His kingdom. We pray anyone who has come under our roof has been blessed, but we have been blessed doubly by them.

In what ways do you find God pouring into you, as you are being asked to pour into others?

As we are asked to pour into others, God pours into us through His people. Words of encouragement, lifting us up in prayer, honest feedback; all buoy our spirits and help keep us on the right path. Reading the Word, reading the devotionals written by our friends, hearing illuminating sermons. These all remind us of how good God is, and how much more he deserves our best.

Is there anything else you'd like to say to your Eastbrook family?

Thank you! Eastbrook embraced us more than 25 years ago and we are so grateful for the community of believers here. Growing in Christ together has blessed our family beyond words. Praying with and for others is a privilege, and being prayed over lifts our spirits. We feel joy each time we come together with Eastbrookers, and we know that joy comes from the Lord.

We encourage each of you to step into a ministry somewhere, anywhere. Begin a journey of spiritual growth, deeper community, and blessings while you apply your time, talent and treasure to the fabric of Eastbrook. ■

Caring for Creation

Adapted from an article published by A Rocha USA, by Noah Guthrie

As Pastor Matt reminds us in his opening letter, we are stewards of God's created world, tasked with caring for the world we inhabit. Here at Eastbrook, a team of leaders has made it their mission to take this assignment seriously by partnering with A Rocha USA, a national conservation group committed to helping Christians and churches recover our Biblical calling as "caretakers of God's good but groaning world."

For the past few years, Eastbrook has been a part of an annual effort to clean up the tributary of the Milwaukee River that runs through our Church campus. Our involvement with this event began 13 years ago with John Osborne, an Eastbrook elder and hydrogeologist, who happened to be friends with the director of Milwaukee Riverkeepers. On Earth Day 2011, John organized a volunteer site for Riverkeeper's annual river clean-up here on our Campus and this event has happened each year since! "I think it's important for churches to wade in the muck and mire of this world, and to take responsibility for it. To show that

they care, to be leaders in environmental protection," John says. His point is two-fold: it's important to encourage churches to embrace their calling to care for creation, and it's also important to represent that calling effectively to those outside the church—it's part of our witness to the world.

Our annual river clean-up event is a small way of restoring creation's God-given dignity. This may be part of what drew Eastbrook to join A Rocha USA back in 2024 for the organization's Churches of Restoration program. By joining this cohort, Eastbrook entered a vibrant community of earthkeeping churches, gaining access to an array of educational materials on topics like habitat restoration, recycling, and energy audits, as well as accountability partners in the pursuit of intentional creation care.

Our labors for creation—muddying ourselves—are profoundly Christ-like. What is the incarnation but Jesus plunging in the muck to drag TVs and shopping



Pastor Mic Fridenmaker now leads the River Clean-up effort

carts from the river, striving to heal the creation He loves? As the Apostle Paul wrote, Jesus "did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant" (Phil. 2:6-7).

When we contemplate this idea of self-emptying, we can see it echoed in creation itself. The Milwaukee River, for instance, constantly pours itself out to others. Our choice to clean up these waterways may reflect, in the end, our learning to embody the Christ-like love that the river has practiced all along.

Join us on April 25 as we clean up our portion of the Milwaukee River together! eastbrook.org/rivercleanup

Learn *God's ways* of handling money.

A Look at Stewardship through Financial Peace University

by Rachel Shuster & Matthew Selting

It's unavoidable: the link between the word "stewardship" and the concept of money. Luckily, God provided clear direction to navigate what can sometimes feel like uncharted waters. Finances are a part of daily life, and the Bible has a lot to say about them. Eastbrook has long offered opportunities to gain financial wisdom through classes and seminars—most recently, through an adult ministry course called Financial Peace University.

FPU kicked off at Eastbrook in 2022—but the program isn't an Eastbrook original. It's a nine-week personal finance curriculum created by Ramsey Solutions, a financial services company founded by noted personal finance consultant Dave Ramsey. The goal: to teach folks step-by-step how to pay off debt and build wealth using biblical principles.

The course sequence follows a series of "baby steps" popularized by Ramsey (at right), teaching students how to build a budget, save for emergencies, pay off debt, spend wisely, invest prudently, and give generously—all grounded in God's Word.

Matthew and Madeline Selting lead the course at Eastbrook. Matt says the reception among our church community has been positive. "I have yet to meet someone who went through the class who wasn't glad they took it!" he says.

Fifty-three people have participated in FPU since the class began three years ago. The Seltings say that group has included a wide range of backgrounds:

singles, newlyweds, and seasoned marriages; high schoolers, those early and late in their careers, and retirees; as well as folks with varying levels of financial security, discipline, and ethnic and cultural backgrounds. What do they share in common? An interest in generosity.

"That has been a theme for those who have stuck with the class," says Matt Selting. "They have a genuine interest in learning and want security and peace in their finances. We establish financial security so that we can be outrageously generous, and our participants have all identified with that goal."

"Stewardship" is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as "the job of supervising or taking care of something." Dave Ramsey, who created FPU, defines Biblical stewardship as "managing God's blessings God's way for God's glory." Whether they be treasures, time, talents, or otherwise, we are called to use the gifts God has given us well.

The Seltings say FPU is a place where folks learn about stewardship and carry that into their personal, everyday lives—and not just as it relates to money.

"We dive into some very specific aspects of financial peace, but we also spend time in [the book of] Proverbs and other parts of Scripture that focus very specifically on stewardship," Matt explains. Examples include Lesson 1: Budgeting, which applies not only to dollars and cents but commitments of time and attention, as

well as Lesson 9: Outrageous Generosity, which highlights accountability where folks spend their resources—do your choices truly reflect your values, priorities, and what God has called you to do?

"The concepts are simple, but like so many things in our spiritual walk, that doesn't mean it's easy," Maddie explains.

"We are managers' is the phrase we use in the class," he continues. "We discuss how we manage our finances for God's kingdom and glory, remembering that it all comes from God anyway, it is not ours to grasp onto too tightly."

Learning practical skills and developing personal skills while celebrating God's goodness: a worthy use of our time. ■

Find upcoming dates for FPU at eastbrook.org/fpu.

BABY STEPS YOU'LL LEARN ABOUT AT FPU:

1. Save \$1000 for your starter emergency fund.
2. Pay off all debt (except the house) using the debt snowball.
3. Save 3-6 months of expenses in a fully-funded emergency fund.
4. Invest 15% of your household income in retirement.
5. Save for your children's college fund.
6. Pay off your home early.
7. Build wealth and give.

