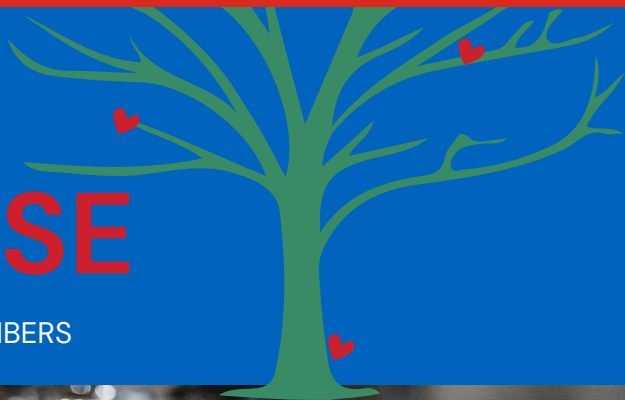


# Abide in **LOVE** Live with **PURPOSE**

STEWARDSHIP 2025 | WEEKLY REFLECTION FROM OUR MEMBERS



## LIVE LOVE TO GIVE LOVE

BY ELIZABETH VAUGHN

In James 1, the lesson is to “be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; But be doers of the word....To care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.” After reading this, I reflected on a recent experience where I was in the Walmart checkout line with my mother, who suffers from schizophrenia. My mother has an outward appearance and mannerisms different from others, and she is not often met with kindness. But she still has to go out in society and brave this impatient and sometimes judgmental world. So, we were at the Walmart checkout line. The line was growing long behind us.

People were getting frustrated with how long our checkout process was taking. She had to put items back because they were outside of her budget. She had to use multiple forms of payment. She had a personal requirement for some items to be packaged in the same bag. It was taking a long time. The people in line were frustrated. My mother could feel their frustration and was so stressed that she couldn't do or say anything for a solid two minutes. I was anxious and doing my best to expedite the situation, trying to keep the line people and my mother happy. Pressure all around us. So it was a complete surprise to me that the Walmart employee helping her check out leaned over to my mother and said, “I'm not in any hurry, ma'am; you just take as much time as you need. Those people behind you can keep waiting or go to a different line.” The pressure was lifted in that instance. She could refocus, and we all made it out of Walmart successfully.

A couple days later, one of my favorite songs came on the radio “Under Pressure” by David Bowie and Queen. And I think the song really drives home the message of James and the reminded me of the Walmart experience.

## SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 1 | EPISTLE READING

**James 1:17-27**

Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. In fulfillment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; for your anger does not produce God's righteousness. Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls.

But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing.

If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

*Pressure pushin' down on me  
Pressin' down on you ....  
...Can't we give ourselves one more chance?  
Why can't we give love?  
Cause love's such an old-fashioned word  
And love dares you to care for  
The people on the edge of the night  
And love dares you to change our way of  
Caring about ourselves*

I'm so grateful for that Walmart employee and everyone who stands up for the vulnerable. She prepared her heart for that experience, and I wish I had been better prepared that day.

Mark 7 discusses the kind of doers we should be. The Pharisees were shocked by the disciples' eating with defiled hands and not following the elders' tradition. Jesus says about the Pharisees, "This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me." Abiding in love means being a doer of the world and living with purpose. The Pharisees had lost some purpose among human tradition.

With all the pressure of the world, it's a challenge to "keep oneself unstained by the world." We read hard news, we rush to get to places, we fall into habits that lose their meaning. So, how do we abide in God's love and live with purpose? I think James 1 has good advice: "being quick to listen." Quieting the noise around us and cultivating joy in ourselves is a good practice. Father Paul gave a sermon recently that referenced procedures for an airplane cabin losing pressure and putting your own mask on before helping others. Admittedly, I can't remember the whole sermon, but that reference stuck with me, and this is good instruction for everyday life. I know I have to spend time on myself and to let love work me over, so I can spread that love to others. I am always searching for habits that connect me to something larger than myself and help me abide in God's love. Some of my favorite habits of heart are:

Earthing, the practice of putting oneself in contact with the earth. I mostly stand barefoot in the grass and dirt and breathe in the outside air. But I hope you all join me in "Earthing" at Ascension as we tend to the community garden and at the All Parish Work Day. Earthing is also a great reminder to be a doer for the planet.

Praying in my car when I'm alone, especially when it's clean (how Pharisee-like of me). My car doesn't have dogs barking, I can't see my dishes, laundry, or my broken kitchen cabinets that should have been repaired seven years ago. My seat belt keeps me still and focused. Similarly, I have enjoyed the same amount of focus in the adult formation classes on Sunday mornings. The conversations in that room are just so good for my soul, and I take them with me throughout the week. I hope you consider joining the Formation classes and perhaps go one step further and consider leading the session!

Lastly, human connection. I love hugging my family every single day. It makes me a better person to give and receive this physical expression of love. I love going on night walks with my friends. I love connecting with my co-workers over lunch. I love greeting you all every Sunday, singing with you, sharing the sign of peace. I have especially enjoyed my time as a Lay Eucharistic Minister. It has allowed me to meet many more of you and get involved in all Ascension offers. I am in awe that our relatively small congregation has such a significant impact on our community. Whether it be the Food Pantry, serving at Austin Street, the Sam Tasby Coat Drive, collecting water for Sandbranch, or handing out blessing bags...Ascension shows up with heart.

Amidst the world's pressures, we can embrace stewardship, tithing, and volunteering as acts of love that reflect our faith. By being quick to listen, slow to speak, and connecting with the earth and each other, we relieve our pressures and empower ourselves to serve and uplift the vulnerable in our communities. Making space for love and compassion in our lives ultimately allows us to spread that love outward, fulfilling our call to be doers of the word.



Elizabeth Vaughan has been married to Justin for almost 13 years. Together, they have three boys: Henry, George, and Lewis. She has been practicing architecture for 19 years, 10 of which have been focused on Data Centers. When she is not architecting and taxi driving her kids to various activities, she enjoys reading, dancing, martial arts, hiking, and dabbling in the ukulele.