



## Week 1 Preaching Resources: Me > We

### Scripture Passage:

Acts 2:14-18

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### Focus Statement:

If you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.

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### ME:

Share a story about a time when you tried to do something alone and when others got involved to help, you were successful together. For example, you could talk about moving, studying together for a test, an online fundraiser, etc.

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### WE:

We can all think of times when something was easier or more successful when we worked together rather than alone. But it's not just about combining resources. There is something special that happens when we work together. Share a story of ministry or mission that required people to come together over a shared dream (preferably in your own congregation).

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### GOD:

Acts 2:14-18 talks about what happens when the Holy Spirit is poured out on the diverse group of believers in Jerusalem at Pentecost. Men and women of all ages and social classes had visions and dreams (verses 17-18). Together, they had a vision greater than what they could have alone. Even though they spoke different languages and came from different walks of life, the Spirit enabled them to understand each other and be united in their vision for community.

Onlookers were surprised. They thought the people were drunk. Such big, bold dreams won't make sense to everyone, but in the end, 3,000 people were baptized. The dream is *led* by the Holy Spirit who works *through* the community. More and more different kinds of people catch the dream and become inspired.

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### YOU:

God makes the same promise to us as to those gathered at Pentecost – that when we follow Jesus, we will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit inspires our dreams and unifies our vision. Share a goal for the congregation of growing in generosity (e.g., 90% of the congregation will grow in generosity, we will host a Rise Against Hunger event). Describe the individual actions needed to achieve the goal (e.g., spend 30 minutes praying, discussing, working through the giving sheet; set a date, contact Rise Against Hunger, volunteer to pack meals).

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### WE:

Paint a vision of what could be possible if everyone did this (e.g., if 90% of the congregation participated). Describe what you could accomplish, how you could serve the community and the world. Remind the congregation that unless people think we might be drunk, the dream is not big enough! (Or use similar, context-appropriate imagery).

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## Week 2 Preaching Resources: Investment > Quick Fix

### Scripture Passage:

Matthew 7:24-27

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### Focus Statement:

When we build a solid foundation, instead of going for the quick fix, we can withstand the trials that will come our way.

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### ME:

Share a story about a time you took a shortcut to fix something and it ended up costing more in the long run, or when you made a choice for quick gratification instead of delaying for a bigger pay off. If the pastor is willing, this can be a moment to share about their own giving habits, humanize themselves and show that the road to perfection is a journey.

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### WE:

Every day we are faced with decisions where we can choose between a “quick fix” and an investment (give examples of spending time, effort or resources in both ways). We can do this as a church community too. In this year’s stewardship campaign, are we willing to step into the “Greater Than” by investing in the future rather than opting for the quick fix?

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### GOD:

Matthew 7:24-27 comes at the end of Jesus’ sermon on the mount and teaching the Lord’s prayer. This powerful sermon concludes with making a foundational investment. Jesus draws a contrast between a house built on a foundation of sand and one built on a foundation of stone.

Foundation of sand:

- Those who hear Jesus’ words but do not act on them
- Foolish
- House falls when trials (bad weather) come

Foundation of stone:

- Those who act on Jesus’ words
- Wise
- House can weather difficult times

Expand on the analogy: It is quicker, easier to build on sand. Perhaps this house has a lake view, a large deck. If we are in a hurry, we might not realize we are even building on sand (packed sand fools us into thinking it’s rock). It is harder, more labor and time intensive to build on rock but it will last and weather the storm.

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## YOU:

Challenge the congregation to be mindful in the coming week about each decision they make and ask themselves, “Is this a sand or a rock decision?” They can begin with spending decisions, using handing over a credit card or cash as a cue to ask themselves this question. What commitment are you willing to make to build a firm foundation of generosity in your own life and for the ministry of this congregation?

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## WE:

Point out that the church has a building, but whether or not it has a strong foundation is something you must answer together. Describe what it might look like to invest in the future of the church and surrounding community. What words of Jesus are you being called to act on as a community in this stewardship campaign?

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## Week 3 Preaching Resources: Abundance > Comfort

### Scripture Passage:

Malachi 3:10

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### Focus Statement:

When we recognize all, we have as a gift from God, we can give out of our abundance, rather than focusing on making ourselves comfortable.

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### ME:

Tell a story about when seeking or maintaining your comfort had a different outcome than living out of abundance. For example, was there a time you wanted to stay home and watch TV (comfort) but you chose to be generous with your time and spend time with a loved one or helping someone instead (abundance)? Maybe there was a time when you invited people to stay at your home and it made things tight. It wasn't necessarily comfortable, but the action came from believing there was enough to go around.

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### WE:

It is a common experience to fear discomfort or to fear that there won't be enough (time, resources, etc.) to keep us as comfortable as we would like to be. The desire to make and keep ourselves comfortable can lead us to "the path of least resistance," which does not always lead to the best outcome. Offer a few concrete examples, not all financial.

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### GOD:

The prophet Malachi, speaking on behalf of God, tells the Israelites to bring a full tithe into the Lord's storehouse and almost dares them to see how abundantly God will bless them in response. Important information:

- The Israelites had been giving their least desirable livestock as offerings to God and saving the best for themselves and had been unfaithful to God and each other
- They wondered why God was not turning their offering into blessings

The call from God in Mal. 3:10 is about giving our best to God, being less focused on our own comfort and recognizing that when we give from abundance, God will multiply our blessings in unimaginable ways. It is also about offering to God in a spirit of gratefulness and faithfulness. Name that this is not just about giving so we get something back. We need to distinguish between faith and magic. Maybe you've heard that we give and God will out give us. This is true, but don't hear it as only financial. We need to have eyes to see the blessing. Part of tithing is gratefulness. It's naming all that we are given as gift.

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## YOU:

Where is there abundance in your life (time, compassion, education, finances, etc.)? Where do you tend to worry about being comfortable and does that hold you back from giving from your abundance in any way? How can you take one step towards giving out of a sense of abundance and faith, trusting that God will use what you give to bless not only you, but the world? Discussing tithing can be awkward and uncomfortable. This is a good place to talk about practicing tithing as a spiritual discipline. Discuss how people can grow towards tithing, taking baby steps. Use concrete tools like the step-up chart included with this series.

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## WE:

When we are hyper-focused on our own comfort, we can become numb to others' needs and yet we are sometimes more comfortable than we need to be. Imagine what it would look like if we all shared our abundance. *Remind people now or at the end of the service that next week will be an opportunity to make a commitment to grow toward tithing as we bring and dedicate our gifts to God. Share the step chart.*

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## Week 4 Preaching Resources: Possibility > Status Quo

### Scripture Passage:

John 14:11-14

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### Focus Statement:

Whether or not we like the way things are, we tend to default to the status quo. Leaning on Christ, we have the power to discover endless possibilities.

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### ME:

Tell a story about when you or someone else (if someone you know, get permission) took a chance to do something different than “the way it has always been done,” and it had a positive, exciting outcome. (E.g. A website hosting company, Rackspace, like all similar companies, used a call-queuing system to deal with customer service calls. This allowed them to focus on the tech work instead of getting tied up on the phone. But this created a problem where customers felt like they never got responses. It required taking a chance – disconnecting the call answering system so they had to answer personally – to turn things around. Led them to become one of highest-grossing companies in industry. They went for possibility over the status quo and it paid off. From *Switch* by Chip and Dan Heath, pgs 199-202).

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### WE:

“Status quo” refers to the way things are, rather than the way they could, or maybe should be. Whether or not we like the status quo, we can all be resistant to change at times for different reasons – whether it’s a fear of the unknown or having a hard time imagining how things could be different. You might ask the congregation to think about some of the church’s “status quo” practices. Remind them that the status quo is not necessarily bad, but it can blind us to new possibilities.

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### GOD:

Like many of us, the apostles feared the unknown. In John 13:31-38, Jesus tells them he will be (physically) leaving them soon. They want to know where he is going so, they can follow, as they have been following him all this time. They want things to remain the same.

In John 14:11-14, Jesus empowers them to do works without him, even *greater* works than Jesus himself. Emphasize how hard it would have been for the apostles to imagine the possibility of doing greater works than Jesus. But Jesus has:

- Shown them what good works look like (“believe me because of the works themselves”)
  - Shown them his power is divine power, Jesus and the Father are one
  - Promised that it is by this same power that the apostles – and we – can do even greater works through faith (it is not that we can do better than Jesus, but Jesus has left us to continue his work in his name).
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### YOU:

Challenge members of the congregation to identify a place where they need to rely on faith to dream up and realize new possibilities. Where do they cling to the status quo? How can they bring that complacency to God in prayer and ask for vision to see the great works God is calling them to do to glorify God?

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### WE:

Point out how incredible it would be if we all took seriously Jesus' claim that, by faith, we can do even greater works? Identify some ways that you, as a church, might challenge the status quo in your community, starting close to home – in your own congregation, but not stopping there. Or, how can you begin to discern possibilities that are greater than the status quo?

Invite people into making a commitment to be open to the possibilities of what can happen as they decide to grow in generosity as individuals and as a community of faith.

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