

Session 1

Exploring a Life of Stewardship

JOY-FILLED MANAGERS

Christian stewards receive God's gifts gratefully, cherish and tend them in a responsible and accountable manner, share them in justice and love with all, and return them with increase to the Lord.

(Stewardship: A Disciple's Response, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops)

GATHERING: (15 minutes)

Welcome and Greeting

- One word that describes me today is...
- What are my hopes for our small group?

PRAYING: (15 minutes)

Songs

Traditional songs to sing/play or select a contemporary personal favorite

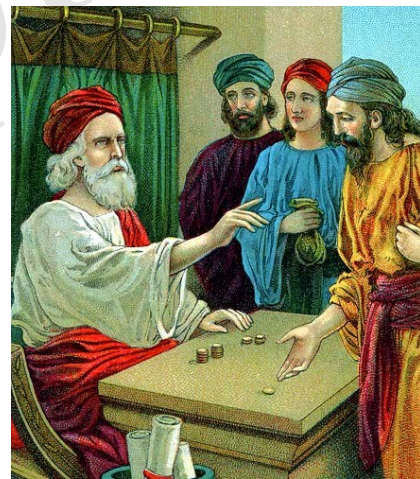
- Lord of Glory - Tim Manion
- All Good Gifts - Kevin Keil
- Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow - Old Hundreth
- Glory and Praise to Our God - Dan Schutte
- Lead Me, Lord - John D. Becker

Scripture for Inspiration

Matthew 25:14-30

Question for Group Reflection

- Words or verses from the passage that spoke to me are?



Quotation for Silent Reflection

Consider a word or phrase for possible sharing

"In the Old Testament the prophet Ezekiel, speaking for God, makes this statement: 'A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.' (*Ezekiel 36:26*) Our God is a promise-maker; our God is a promise-keeper. When the Holy Spirit breaks into our lives, our hearts become more prayerful, our ministry joyful, and our generosity extravagant."

Bishop Robert F. Morneau

Prayer Conclusion (Together)

Lord and Master of all, we thank and praise you for all the gifts that you have placed in our care. You have entrusted us with this world and all its blessings and given us the freedom to choose how we use them. Infuse us with your Spirit that we may not be afraid in today's world to be assertive in nurturing your many gifts and return them in abundance to you. Help us to be "holy" risk-takers as we work to imitate Jesus. We ask this in the name of the "ultimate steward," your Son and our Savior.

"The promotion of the practice of stewardship is important for the mission of the Church and for the spiritual well-being of each individual Christian. Everyone benefits from the sacrificial gift one makes of his time, talent and treasure."

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (letter dated June 20, 1997)

CONSIDER THIS: (38 minutes - If participants have not read content prior to gathering, please take a moment to read aloud, rotating willing members.)

Stewardship: A Way of Life – Believing and Doing

Are you a steward? It is certainly an interesting question to be asked in our day. The word has all kinds of definitions for a variety of people. As one might anticipate, the Church approaches the term from a biblical perspective and, as with many things whenever faith enters into the conversation, it becomes a challenging and life-giving opportunity. Thus, our question becomes, “Are you a Christian steward?”

In 1992, the U. S. Bishops issued the pastoral letter, *Stewardship: a Disciple’s Response*, as a way of bringing the biblical reality of stewardship to Catholics in our country. This document not only has guided us in understanding what a true Christian steward “believes” but also what he/she does.

There are three key truths that a person brings to the practice of stewardship. One is that Jesus is our Savior, and as baptized Christians, it is our call to live not only in admiration of him but also in imitation of him. The pastoral states: “Stewardship always starts with the personal experience of the Risen Christ in our midst and in our hearts. It is a vocation to discipleship.” Ron Rolheiser, in *The Holy Longing*, suggests that admiration of Jesus is the easy part. It is living like Jesus that becomes the challenge as well as the opportunity. *Do you believe?*

The second fact is everything in the universe, including ourselves, was created by God for God. The reality (perhaps harsh or maybe freeing) is that we own nothing. Like the servants in the Parable of the Talents, we are only caretakers or managers of everything around us: our environment, bodies, relationships, time, talents, financial resources, etc. And yes, someday the “Rightful Owner” will return for an accounting of everything. *Do you believe?*

The third reality is once we understand “Who” we belong to and why we are here, we have the opportunity to live joy-filled generous lives and build God’s kingdom. Our bishops in the pastoral tell us, “Whenever we accept our lives as sheer gifts, the Spirit can use us as instruments for spreading the Gospel. Wherever the Spirit works there is joy. Good stewards are always the joyful bearers of the Good News of Salvation.” The testimony to this truth is a global Catholic Church of over a billion members. Our ancestors understood and believed. *Do you believe?*

Those who believe, act. The bishops in *Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response* have given us a template to how we live in imitation of Jesus as Christian Stewards. So what *do* Christian stewards do?



Quotation for Reflection

Disciples who practice stewardship recognize God as the origin of life, the giver of freedom, the source of all they have and are and will be. . . They know themselves to be recipients and caretakers of God’s many gifts. They are grateful for what they have received.

(Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response)

The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it. *(Psalm 24:1)*

Pathway to Christian Stewardship

Receive God's gifts gratefully

Gratitude is foundational to the life of stewardship. (It is so important that the next session of this process is dedicated to it.) When we are authentically grateful for the many blessings God has provided, we find generosity an easy response. Conversely, ingratitude is a fertile ground for envy, greed and unhappiness. Even if we understand and believe that everything belongs to God, choosing to be grateful for what has been put in our care is intentional. As we take inventory of our own stewardship efforts, considering to heavily invest in the area of gratitude can pay joyful dividends in striving to become a generous steward.

Cherish and tend God's gifts in a responsible and accountable manner

Once we are able to stand in awe and express appreciation for what God has given, a Christian steward acknowledges the *Handle with Faith and Care* directive that comes with all that God has fashioned. The Parable of the Talents is one way of understanding this concept. Bishop Robert F. Morneau has eloquently used an additional image of gardens (such as the spiritual, economic, ecological, intellectual and talent gardens) to make this important point come to life. He asks the question: "How well have we or are we tending the gardens in our life?" With limited time and resources, there are always important choices for a Christian steward to make if we want an abundant harvest.

Share God's gifts in justice and love with all

Generously sharing what God has loaned us is frequently one of the biggest challenges to the Christian steward. Jesus was certainly clear about using our lives to pray and serve others. He was equally transparent about sharing our resources with those in need. Today our Church teaches about supporting the "common good." Yet, in our current culture it is personally difficult to determine when "enough is enough" both in use of our time and our resources. The biblical tithe of 10% can serve as a guide, as the Christian steward strives to be led by the Holy Spirit in giving one's time for prayer and service, as well as one's income. A fruit of the Holy Spirit is generosity. Scripture encourages us not to give of what is left of our time and resources but our "first fruits."

Return God's gifts with increase

Imagine one day, like the servants in the Parable of the Talents, we will be standing before the Master to provide an account of our "management" endeavors. As a grateful Christian and joyful steward, we will be able to provide a report that reveals our great care for the environment and all life, liberal amounts of time spent in faith-filled prayer and compassionate service as well as the sharing of a generous portion of material and financial resources. Our abundant return will promote and affirm God's love for the world and give others the opportunity to know Christ more intimately. On that day, we will be invited to "Come, share the Master's joy."

Questions for Reflection

What resonates with you the most about stewardship? * Considering the three truths, what is the easiest to believe? * What is the most difficult? * Currently what do you do well in the areas of Christian stewardship? * What might be an area of weakness? * What might you consider doing in taking a step forward in becoming a Christian steward?

Notes:

LIVING LIKE JESUS: (21 minutes)

Take Action

Consider how your prayer, reflection and sharing in Session 1 might have inspired you to step out in faith this week. Share ideas and reflect your personal situation or consider one of the simple ideas below.

- Read through the “Scripture Passages” found below and write a personal definition of stewardship.
- Reflect upon a favorite saint or person in your life who you think is a model of stewardship. How do they live in admiration and imitation of Jesus?
- Generate a “doable” list with monthly ideas for expressing your joy-filled gratitude as a household. Follow through with these ideas.
- Identify three areas of your life where you tend God’s gift in a responsible and accountable way and three areas that you might like to improve. Select one of your “needs improvement” areas to work on this week.
- Discern areas of your life in which you share of God’s gifts in justice and love. Celebrate your efforts.
- Become knowledgeable about a need in your parish or community that touches your heart and might call you to share your gifts in service or resources in sharing in a new way.

Commitment:

- In light of this, what commitment will I make for the week(s) ahead?

Wrap Up: (1 minute)

Date for Session 2 _____

Closing Prayer (Together)

Wonderful Creator, Awesome Redeemer, Energizing Advocate, you are the source of our admiration and love. You have breathed life into our beings, and saved us from a life without you. For this, we are grateful. As we work to become stewards, inspire us that we may not remain passive, but that our admiration expressed in prayer and worship will bring us to our feet as joy-filled managers of all that is put in our care. We want to be authentic disciples and ask this in the name of Jesus, our Savior. Amen.

Additional Resources:

- ▶ *Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response (USCCB)*
- ▶ *Making Stewardship a Way of Life*, by Fr. Andrew Kemberling and Mila Glodava
- ▶ *Forming Generous Hearts*, by Leisa Anslinger
- ▶ *New Beginnings: A New Way of Living as a Catholic – A Short Course*, by Paul Wilkes
- ▶ *The Steward’s Way: A Spirituality of Stewardship*, by C. Justin Clements
- ▶ *Disciple as Steward*, by Sharon Hueckel
- ▶ *The Good Steward Series (columns)*, by Dan Conway

Stewardship has the power to shape and mold our understanding of our lives and the way in which we live.

Scripture Passages

Genesis 2:15
Leviticus 25:23
Psalm 116:1-2
Psalm 24:1
1 Chronicles 29:11-12
Matthew 10:8
Matthew 13:44-50
Luke 6:38
Luke 14:28-33
Romans 8:32
1 Corinthians 4:1-2
James 1:16-17



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Censor Liborum

IMPRIMATUR
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