



Living Stewardship

About this Faith Practice

As a way of life, expressed in gratitude, living stewardship is a practice that involves all that it means to live as faithful followers of Jesus Christ. It grows out of a deep caring for and joy in who we are as God's created people and the natural world in which we live. Living stewardship is about how we live our lives and how our lives express our values. It affects all of our decisions, especially the ones we make about the natural and human resources entrusted to us for care. Living stewardship is shalom: living in harmony with others and the world. It is about our relationships, liberation, grace, justice, peace, and mutuality as well as our material possessions. As faithful stewards, we are joined by our common gift of life and the reality of finite resources. We recognize that each of us is a mixture of neediness and fullness and so have responsibility to care for each other as we honor the holy in creation and ourselves. As faithful disciples, we are called to live as generous creatures created by a generous God who mutually shares responsibility with us for all creation. Stewardship involves all people because all are connected in mutually covenanted stewardship within God's original intent for creation....

Let's Begin...

Now that you've downloaded the files for your faith practice and age group or setting, you can get started planning one or multiple sessions:

1 Open the .pdf file for your age group or setting. Choose an Exploration, the approach you think will help your group to best experience the faith practice. Choose any one of the following Explorations to use for one session:



Discovery



Scripture



Discipleship



Christian Tradition



Context and Mission



Future and Vision

Note: If you're planning multiple sessions, you can follow the order suggested above or feel free to use any order that fits the needs of your group. Some groups may choose to start with Scripture and then see where that leads them. Others may be more ready to act in their community and might want to start with Context and Mission.

Living Stewardship

- 2 Locate the Exploration you've chosen
- 3 Look through all 9 activities and select the ones you would like to do with your group.
 - If you're planning a 30–45 minute session, choose 3 activities.
 - It is best to select at least one activity from Exploring and Engaging, at least one from Discerning and Deciding, and at least one from Sending and Serving.
 - For 45 minutes to 1 hour, choose 4 or 5 activities.
 - For a 1½ to 2-hour session, you can use all 9 activities.

Tip: Look for this symbol  to find activities designed for Easy Preparation (able to be done with minimal preparation using supplies normally found at the church).

- 4 Make copies of any handouts () related to your activities. Order posters () if using art (see "Ordering Posters," below).

Use of Art, Music, and Scripture in Faith Practices

Faith Practices activities include many opportunities to grow in faith through the use of scripture, music, and art.

Ordering Posters

If you choose activities that use an art image, you or your church will need to purchase posters of the art by clicking on the link provided in the activity. If you wish to use art, you will need to plan ahead, since it takes 1 to 2 weeks for the posters to arrive after you place your order.

Art

Six posters are used with the faith practice Living Stewardship and may be ordered by clicking on the links provided.

From Imaging the Word Poster Sets:

"Planting" by Rex Goreleigh (<http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>)

"The Moorish Kitchen Maid with the Supper at Emmaus" by Diego Rodriguez de Silva y Velazquez (<http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>)

"With hoot and squawk and squeak and bark ..." by Barbara Reid (<http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>)

From AllPosters.com:

"Banjo Lesson" by Henry Ossawa Tanner (<http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters4>)

"Baobab, Okavango Delta, Botswana" by Pete Oxford (<http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters5>)

"Orion Nebula" by Stocktrek Images (<http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters6>)

Music

Three music selections are used with Living Stewardship. We have selected music which is easily found in many hymnals. A web link is provided to give more information about each music selection.

Jesu, Jesu Fill Us With Your Love, Tune: Chereponi (<http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong4>)

Take My Gifts And Let Me Love You, Tune: Talavera Terrace (<http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong5>)

God Whose Giving Knows No Ending, Tune: Austrian Hymn (Hymn lyrics: <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong6>) (Austrian Hymn tune: <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong6a>)

Scripture

Twelve Bible passages are used with Living Stewardship, two with each Exploration.

Discovery	Deuteronomy 8:7-18	Matthew 2:1-11
Scripture	Genesis 1:26-31	I Timothy 6:6-10, 17-19
Discipleship	Isaiah 55:1-3	Mark 10:17-22
Christian Tradition	Deuteronomy 14:22-29	Acts 4:32 - 5:11
Context and Mission	Isaiah 1:10-17	Mark 14:3-9
Future and Vision	I Chronicles 29:1-19	Revelation 21:10, 21:22-22:5

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Living Stewardship



Exploration: Discovery

About this Setting

Generally, the person who attends church regularly allows and expects the pastor and church leadership to formulate and direct worship. While that is appropriate and commendable for public worship, it does not necessarily address the personal faith journey of one person. There is also the desire to nurture an ongoing and personal worshipful relationship with the Creator God. This relationship reflects the light and teachings of Jesus Christ. "Living Practices in Daily Life" is designed to create activities that will help learners achieve a greater understanding and a more informed practice of stewardship as developed, personally tailored, and enhanced by and for individuals at home, at work, or at play. The goal is to assist in the ongoing renewal of one's spirit regarding the understanding and importance of stewardship, even as one's relationship with the Spirit of the Divine is deepened.

About this Exploration

For many, stewardship is only or primarily about money and tithing. This Exploration intends to help individuals (and churches) discover and imagine possibilities of what it means to live into a Christian sense of stewardship that involves all of life. We hope to explore both what this can mean and how we might integrate this with our life experiences. Because God is still speaking, we listen, envision, and embrace our responsibility as God's people, drawing upon the stories found in scripture and the importance of continuing and sharing the story of what it means to be a disciple who is living stewardship.



BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
Deuteronomy 8:7-18
Matthew 2:1-11

Household and Family Life

Exploring & Engaging Activities

Leader Preparation

You are your own leader in this set of exercises and activities. These call for you to establish the movement of the practice, living into an understanding of and commitment to the personal growth integral to the sound development of the Christian life. While it is true that you may be alone during this journey, remember that the Holy Spirit is present, standing alongside you, teaching, guiding, and empowering your spiritual growth and maturity. Therefore, the first movement of preparation for the individual is always to invoke the presence and advocacy of the Holy Spirit through prayer.

Prayer: Holy One, I am seeking insight and understanding of the Christian journey, especially now regarding stewardship. I also want to understand my role in light of the gifts and abilities that are mine and those I am yet to receive. In the strong name of Jesus Christ, I pray. Amen.

1 Stewardship Stew

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper
- pens or pencils

There are many ways to practice stewardship, so it is possible to think of it as a stew of various ingredients that provide a healthy and substantial main course for a household. Daily, set aside a specific time for scripture reading with your household. Invite God to enlighten your household regarding Deuteronomy 8:7-18, specifically with new understandings of stewardship. Read aloud Deuteronomy 8:7-18. Scripture is meant to be heard. Discuss all that God provided for God's people. List God's expectations.

Sit in silence for a time and then ask questions such as: What new understanding of stewardship is suggested by the list of gifts? How does this list carry stewardship beyond giving money to the church? Does mixing all of the gifts and the expectation of generosity provide any new understanding of how God graciously blesses humankind? Or your household? What might you add to the Stewardship Stew?

Record your impressions and insights about how this scripture broadens the household's understanding of stewardship. What might you decide to do together to follow through on your learning?

Discerning & Deciding Activities

2 Think about the Givers

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper
- pens or pencils
- markers
- crèche (optional)

Offer a prayer asking God for understanding and for guidance into appropriate action in response to the reading of Matthew 2:1-11.

Read aloud Matthew 2:1-11. Invite all to draw pictures of the gifts and the givers described in the narrative. You might also set up a crèche and add the Magi, providing time to consider how odd this scene is, that is, the rich Magi and the humble carpenter family. Think about those who went looking for "the child who has been born king of the Jews." Why would they be so determined to find him? Why would they take him gifts? What, if anything, does this incident have to



do with stewardship? With our household? It is such a familiar story, but full of surprises—what surprises you? Why? Ponder the implications of seeking and finding the child, kneeling, and offering gifts. What does this say to contemporary Christians offering praise and gifts from our abundance and abilities? How would you do this? What gift would you bring to Jesus? Would giving gifts to needy strangers address a kind of stewardship that speaks to your response to God in Christ?

If you journal, write your response to your conclusions after thinking through your insights and reactions to the story. How does this story change your life, or your way of thinking about gratitude and stewardship?

Sending & Serving Activities

3 Offering Time and Talent

Supplies:

- a basket or container to transport baked goods
- plates and napkins

Offer a prayer to God asking for insight and guidance for entering into an activity that will result in sharing the gifts and talents of the household.

Look up the meaning of the word “steward” in a dictionary. What does a steward do? Who has stewardship responsibilities? What kind of stewardship responsibilities do you have? How does this apply to each individual? What might we do? Consider ideas such as these: Call a lonely, elderly person and schedule a time to drop by and visit. Bake or purchase a treat of cookies, a pie, or a cake to take with you. Set aside enough time so that you can eat together and get better acquainted. If all goes well during the visit, set up time for another visit. Ask if there is anything you might do to help the person before you leave or upon your return visit. If there is something, do not fail to do it. Afterward, reflect and journal about your service and how it changes how you think about yourself, your household, and stewardship.

Individual and Personal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activities

4 Lectio Divina

Supplies:

- Bible
- a journal

Lectio divina is an ancient practice of the church that provides a means for a person to engage the biblical text from varying perspectives. This daily practice, which calls for prayer, journaling, listening, and meditation, calls you deeply into the text and poses the questions: What am I learning here? What is God saying to me? What do I need to be praying about? How is God calling me to change?



Use the biblical texts for this Exploration: Deuteronomy 8:7–18 and/or Matthew 2:1–11. Read the passage(s) four times, each time with a different "pair of glasses," all the time praying that God will bring the text before you as living Word.

Lens 1—Reading/Listening: Read aloud a short passage of Scripture. As you read, listen for the word or phrase that speaks to you. To what is the Spirit drawing your attention?

Lens 2—Meditating: Repeat aloud the word or phrase to which you are drawn. Make connections between it and your life. What is God saying to you by means of this word or phrase?

Lens 3—Praying: Now take these thoughts and offer them back to God in prayer, giving thanks, asking for guidance, asking for forgiveness, and resting in God's love. What is God leading you to pray?

Lens 4—Contemplating: Move from the activity of prayer to the stillness of contemplation. Simply rest in God's presence. Stay open to God. Listen to God. Remain in peace and silence before God. How is God revealing God's self to you?

Record your thoughts and your prayers in your journal, especially those understandings about gratitude, generosity, and the spirit of God. It is especially important to live with the last question, "What is God revealing about stewardship and about God's self to you?"

Discerning & Deciding Activities

5 What Is My Responsibility?

Supplies:

- appropriate yard tools for whatever task you choose

Depending on the season of the year, assess the care you might offer to an elderly or physically challenged person who lives alone and works in the yard. Do this activity as an individual or jointly as members of the household.

Spring: Plant flowers and help the person take care of them.

Summer: Cultivate a garden and regularly help take care of it.

Fall: Help clean up the grounds of leaves and plants that will not survive the winter; plant bulbs that will come forth in the spring.

Winter: Clear walkways of debris and/or ice and snow.

Always include a visit. After each time spent helping and visiting, think about or discuss with your fellow laborers what was learned about Christian stewardship. How does helping others reflect God's generosity? When planting and nurturing plants and vegetation, did you think about or experience being co-creators with God? If you worked as an individual, journal your reflections and think about who and what you have helped. Ponder how you might have changed, or how your understanding of stewardship has changed.



Sending & Serving Activities

6 What Little Extra Thing?

Supplies:

- good, clean boxes
- tissue paper

Clean your home, a closet, a chest of drawers, or the garage. Invite your household to help and/or to go through their own closets and drawers to collect things that are seldom used yet too good to be discarded. Set aside those items and decide who might benefit from receiving them. If trash, throw it away. If gently used and still has value, package it up and determine where to donate it. Offer a prayer to God asking for discernment regarding greed, waste, and how to simplify your sense of ownership.

After cleaning and prioritizing what to eliminate, donate to an organization that can make it available to those with real need. You could also think about its usefulness in the hands of someone you know. Neatly package the object, call upon the person to whom you want to give it, and offer it just because you want the individual to have it. When giving, do not say anything about how useless it was to you or that it had just been sitting around. Once the item has been given away, reflect with those who participated: What does it mean to buy and keep objects that are not needed? What do your responses say about prudent buying and spending? Keeping and hoarding? Selfishness and sharing? What is evident with regard to stewardship? How do we understand the notion of serving others and sending forth the blessings we have? If this activity was done by an individual, journal about your experience and how it made you feel.

Work Place and Communal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activities

7 Taking a Closer Look

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper and pen or pencil

Reread Deuteronomy 8:7–18. Offer a prayer to God for insight regarding possible ways to serve your faith community.

Discuss Deuteronomy 8:7-18 with your household or with persons where you work. Then either individually or with the members of your household, attend a regular service of worship at your church. Observe the life of the gathered community. Observe activities that are going on around you. Carefully read the worship bulletin concerning ministries that are newly forming or are already established. Reread the latest church newsletter, paying attention to the needs of the various ministries and new opportunities that might call forth your interests and abilities. Either together or individually, make a list of what interests you.



Pray that the Holy Spirit will help you discern how you can claim the talents you have and determine how best you can offer them to enhance the communal life of the church. As you (and/or the members of your household) are led, contact the appropriate person(s) who will help you move forward into these identified ministries. Don't stop with the list. Sit with your pastor or a ministry leader and talk about how you might be most helpful. Then, follow through.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

8 Being a Personal Detective

Supplies:

- paper and pen or pencil
- copy of the hymn "Take My Gifts and Let Me Love You" (tune: Talavera Terrace), <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong5>

Spend time reflecting on your relationship with God and what you enjoy doing. Find a copy of the words of the hymn "Take My Gifts and Let Me Love You" (tune: Talavera Terrace) at <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong5>. Read the hymn out loud and then silently. Let it speak to you.

Consider this story: There was a very capable gentleman who volunteered much of his time doing repair work at his church and for people in his neighborhood. Many times he was heard saying he wished he knew where God wanted him to serve God's purpose. This gentleman finally realized that the abilities he used to repair and care for the church and the homes of his friends were exactly what God wanted him to do and what others needed him to do. He was a true steward of the abilities God had given him and a dedicated servant.

Sit in one of your favorite outdoor places. Invite members of your household to do the same. Observe the beauty around you and offer gratitude to God for creating and blessing you. If there is more than one participant, discuss the activities each individual likes to do best. Consider how easily you do some things. Do you ever think that because they are so easy, they must not be very important, spiritual, or representative of your faith in God?

Pretend you are a detective. Encourage and question yourself (and the others in the group) to acknowledge your strengths and abilities. Write down your reflections. Compliment yourself honestly. Continue to ponder your individual abilities. What are your greatest interests and strengths? Allow the Holy Spirit to bring to light what you are searching for, and then decide how to best offer your unique and individual abilities to further the realm of God. If you are working individually, write down your insights and conclusions. If you are working with your household, discuss your personal decisions as well as what you observe in one another. How will you (and the household) be accountable?



Sending & Serving Activities

9 Get Going . . . Start Doing

Supplies:

- paper, pen or pencil
- hymn “Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love,”
<http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong4>

Pray for guidance offered by the Holy Spirit. Individually (or as a household) read the lyrics of the hymn “Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love” (tune: Chereponi). You can hear the tune and read the lyrics at <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong4>.

Reflect on the refrain at least two or three times. Ask yourself: In a global sense, who is my neighbor? Considering the fact that the hymn refrain implores Jesus to fill us with love and to show us how to serve our neighbors, construct your own list of what that might mean in your personal life and ministry. Who might benefit (for example, the troops in Afghanistan, to whom you could send letters and care packages)? In so doing, greet the individual(s) with the good news of Jesus Christ. Keep this as an ongoing project.

Reflect

Although much of what we do as individuals for daily practice of a prayerful, quiet, and dynamic relationship with God our Creator is personal, we do not live in a vacuum. We come and go from home, to church, to work, and to social events. As we prepare ourselves for leadership, either by ourselves, with members of our various households, or beyond, it is vitally important to remember that no matter where we go or who we are with, we are called as Christians to represent Christ, as servants to the world around us, understanding that stewardship calls us to nurture all the blessings we have received from God.

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Living Stewardship



Exploration: Scripture

About this Setting

God's desire and determination to be in close relationship with humankind is clear in Genesis 1:26–31. From creation, scripture affirms that God created humankind in “God’s own image” and then granted us the responsibility to care for the entire created order. On this foundation rest God-given blessings as well as God’s expectations for humankind. Much later in his letter to Timothy, we read that the Apostle Paul invites followers of Christ to realize that all things come from God and that we are not to be tempted by the love of money and material wealth. Furthermore, we are to place a total reliance upon God, “who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment” (1 Timothy 6:17). The question for the Christian thus becomes: What are we to do as stewards of these vast blessings from our Creator in light of our “dominion” over the earth and all its resources?

About this Exploration

When we hear scripture as a community, we discern its life-giving blessings and reconcile its power to generate wholeness with its history of abuse and its potential for misuse. Scripture gives us a foundational image of God that is relational and embodies differences within the whole. We hear many different voices and contexts within scripture and are invited to sit with these differences without resolving the tension. Within the context of stewardship, scripture affirms that God blesses each part of creation as necessary for the well-being of the whole. At the same time, our experience, guided by the Holy Spirit, calls us to reject an understanding of dominion as power over creation. Scripture tells us that we are made in the



image of God, the Creator and Source of Life, and so invites us to accept the gifts God provides for the enjoyment of all and to embrace “life that is really life” rather than storing up treasures and individual possessions.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Genesis 1:26–31
1 Timothy 6:6–10, 17–19

Leader Preparation

Any engagement with scripture begins best with prayer. The desire to understand what the scriptures have to say about our response to God and the world around us begins best with prayer. Prayer is vital to everything we are and everything we aspire to do and to be. In addition to identifying the needs that are to be laid before God, in this instance, the leader should read and study the scripture references listed for this activity.

Prayer: God of all that is, please open my mind and heart to your ideas and mandates in scripture. Lead me to new understandings of your created order and what I might do to care for and nurture the life and lives you have placed before me. Please grant me insight and innovative ideas as I strive to comprehend my role as one created in your image, called to do your work and your will. I ask for depth of vision and opportunity, led by your Holy Spirit. In Christ's holy name, Amen.

Household and Family Life

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 Looking to the Author of Creation

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper and pen or pencil

Call your household together and ask God to illuminate the Genesis passage. Read Genesis 1:26–31 out loud. Invite all to make notes about their first impressions. Reread the passage slowly, this time noting what actions are taken and by whom. Make a list of the things that are mentioned in the lineup of created things. What impresses us as important? What didn't we notice before? Do we have any new sense of the awesomeness of God's handiwork? Document reactions to the idea of being created in the image of God. What meaning do we find in the teaching that each of us is created in the image of God? How has this reading changed your relationship with God? Record it in your journal or discuss it. What difference does your changed relationship make? Who will even know?

Discerning & Deciding Activities

2 A Further Investigation

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper and pen or pencil

Call your household together and read 1 Timothy 6:6–10, 17–19. Ask God for assistance in understanding and guidance as you read the verses. Record anything of significance that your household group notes about the faithful practice of Christian stewardship. Next, read and contemplate Genesis 1:26–31. Jot down the impressions about any call to stewardship from this text. Place the work on both scripture passages alongside each other. What, if anything, do we deduce from these two texts that addresses personal stewardship and God's intervention in human life? Does something really jump out? List any former and/or new affirmations regarding our intention to care for ourselves and the blessings God has given us, and to care for others and God's creation. Ask: In response to what we have found in our study of these scripture passages, what will we plan to do rather than merely think about it? Do we see ourselves, in any way, as co-creators with God? If so, what might our next steps be as God's agents in caring for our blessings? Perhaps it would be helpful to list both previous and new ways to become more active as a steward of God's realm here on earth. Write down your responses to the scripture passage(s) and discuss them.



Sending & Serving Activities

③ Taking Dominion Seriously

Supplies:

- Bible
- dictionary or computer
- paper and a pen or pencil

Settle in a comfortable space, one that is pleasing to your senses and creates a sense of well-being, a setting where you find inner peace and quiet. It might be the comfort of your home or a special outdoor setting. Observe what is around you. After settling in and calming your spirit, offer a prayer to God. Express your gratitude and request guidance for and understanding of the time spent doing this activity. What will it yield that will be beneficial to God, God's creation, and your response to the call to faithful stewardship?

Call your household together and read (perhaps again) Genesis 1:26–31; record any new thoughts that come to your gathering regarding the message found in there. Look up the word “dominion” and agree about a definition. Invite your household to spend time in quiet thought and prayer, seeking to acquaint themselves with what the message of the text and the definition say to you about a more deliberate personal involvement and actions. List some of the places or ministries where you would like to volunteer time and abilities. Contact agencies and begin the volunteer process. Discuss and determine if there is any interest in participating with one another in volunteer work at the same agency. Don't just leave it there; find a time when you might work together.

Individual and Personal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activities

④ Lectio Divina

Supplies:

- Bible
- a journal
- pen or pencil

Lectio divina is an ancient practice of the church that provides a means for a person to engage the biblical text from varying perspectives. This daily practice, which calls for prayer, journaling, listening, and meditation, calls you deeply into the text and asks the questions: What am I learning here? What is God saying to me? What do I need to be praying about? How is God calling me to change? Use the biblical texts for this Exploration: Genesis 1:26–31 and 1 Timothy 6:6–10, 17–19. Read the passages four times, each time with a different “pair of glasses,” all the time praying that God will bring the text before you as living Word.

Lens 1—Reading/Listening: Read aloud a short passage of scripture. As you read, listen for the word or phrase that speaks to you. What is the Spirit drawing your attention to?



Lens 2—Meditating: Repeat aloud the word or phrase to which you are drawn. Make connections between it and your life. What is God saying to you by means of this word or phrase?

Lens 3—Praying: Now take these thoughts and offer them back to God in prayer, giving thanks, asking for guidance, asking for forgiveness, and resting in God's love. What is God leading you to pray?

Lens 4—Contemplating: Move from the activity of prayer to the stillness of contemplation. Simply rest in God's presence. Stay open to God. Listen to God. Remain in peace and silence before God. How is God revealing God's self to you?

Record your thoughts and your prayers in your journal, especially those understandings about gratitude, generosity, and the spirit of God. It is especially important to live with the last question: "What is God revealing about stewardship to you?"

Discerning & Deciding Activities

5 Setting a Deliberate Plan

Supplies:

- notes and journal entries that you have done thinking about how you might be a better steward of your time, gifts, talents, and abilities
- paper and pen or pencil
- computer with Internet access

Open with prayer, offering yourself to God as a willing participant. Yield yourself to ideas and perspectives that come together concerning what God is calling you to do as a faithful steward. After reviewing your notes, choose a task or ministry that most interests you. Does the work of this ministry or organization fulfill your passion? Would your abilities and talents be best utilized if you were to volunteer your time and efforts here? Contact the organization or ministry and set up an appointment to meet. Pray about the information you have obtained. Discuss it with members of your household who may want to participate with you. Seek affirmation of the path that you may follow as a result of diligently seeking to offer service for the realm of God as you now more fully understand your responsibility to God and others. Make a decision, plan, and implement.

Sending & Serving Activities

6 Determining the Service

Supplies: None

Pray for God's guidance as you take your first step to serve. While it is yours to decide, the choice of ministry or organization should involve you in service that represents your practice of faithful stewardship. Reflect on the real needs in the part of God's realm of creation within which you will be serving. Pray that your gifts will be used to their greatest strength and productivity.



Knowing what ministry or organization best fits your abilities and passions, begin doing the tasks that you have agreed to perform. Be sure to plan for the time and personal energy expected of you. At the end of each volunteer session, write down your reactions: How do you feel? How has this affected your beliefs about Christian stewardship and your role therein? Does your experience affirm your thoughts concerning human dominion over creation? What do you think or believe about God's calling humanity into this kind of responsibility—and is it changing? How does this work affect your understanding of God's desires to be in relationship with humankind? Consider the biblical readings—how do they inform this choice? How is this service an expression of the Genesis and 1 Timothy passages?

Work Place and Communal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activities

7 Casting New Lines

Supplies:

- your notes made during study, reflection, and volunteer participation
- brochures collected from the volunteer organization(s) where you have worked
- copy of the hymn "Take My Gifts and Let Me Love You" (tune: Talavera Terrace), <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong5>
- paper and pen or pencil

Because so many of these activities are directed to the individual as daily practice, it is not always apparent what they will yield beyond the home or the individual life. However, it is important to understand that humans, including the homebound, do not live in a vacuum. We are all connected. Whether or not we live with others, we spend time on the telephone, the Internet, out in our neighborhoods, or at the workplace. Much of what we internalize will likely be shared with others. The understanding of that reality calls us to account to others for what we have learned. Questions arise out of activities and subsequent commitments that we make as we present ourselves to God with the desire to serve.

Offer a prayer to God asking for opportunities to share what you have developed about stewardship and Christian service as a practice of your faith.

Secure a copy of the hymn "Take My Gifts and Let Me Love You." You can find the lyrics at <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong5>. Read the lyrics and ponder the meaning of the hymn.

Consider whom you come into contact with and what you might share with them about your discoveries regarding the care of the earth, animal life, the water, and the air around us. How might you take what you have learned and share it with others? What would you like to share from the experiences you have had in the volunteer setting? Are there individuals you could tap as possible partners in your quest to learn more about stewardship and service? Devise a plan of action as you read your notes, glean information from the brochures of your volunteer organization, and determine what you want to say and share as you cast new lines of communication with those various individuals with whom you will spend time.



Discerning & Deciding Activities

8 Who, What, and Where

Supplies:

- notations you made from reading the hymn “Take My Gifts and Let Me Love You” and reading Genesis 1:26–31 and 1 Timothy 6:6–10, 17–19

Reread Genesis 1:26–31 and 1 Timothy 6:6–10, 17–19 and the lyrics of the hymn “Take My Gifts and Let Me Love You” (tune: Talavera Terrace). Ask God for guidance regarding with whom you might share what you are learning. Pray about what you might say as you share and where you might meet. Gather your personal notations. Reflect on any work—written or practiced—you have done concerning stewardship. Jot down any new understanding you have as you make further plans regarding your individual work or the work that you would like to invite others to do with you.

After you decide what and with whom you would like to share, plan a presentation. Pray for the individuals you want to invite. Plan a time and place for gathering and invite the individuals you think might be interested in hearing what you have been doing. When you meet with this group, seek their ideas and input as well as sharing your own for a holistic approach to the process of what you and the group would like to accomplish. Once you have met with this group and determined a more complete approach to what you and the other individuals would like to see happen, consider contacting the Stewardship Committee of your church and ask if you could share some new insights that go beyond the borders of mere monetary giving and the tithing of one's income.

Sending & Serving Activities

9 Stewards, Servants, Disciples

Supplies:

- Bible
- copy of the hymn “Take My Gifts, and Let Me Love You” (tune: Talavera Terrace <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong5>)
- paper and pen or pencil

Continue to pray about your ongoing practice of faith as demonstrated through a new understanding and resolve concerning Christian stewardship. Read Genesis 1:26–31 and 1 Timothy 6:6–10, 17–19, and the lyrics of the hymn “Take My Gifts and Let Me Love You.” You can find the lyrics at <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong5>.

Make notations regarding the scripture and hymn texts. Read through your notations. Organize and set a date for an outing for yourself and other interested parties to go to the grounds of a local church. It need not be your church. It would be helpful for someone in your group to be a member in order to secure permission to be on the grounds and/or to be of assistance in working on the grounds if work is needed.



Look about and determine if there is any specific area that needs care. If the need for care of the grounds is determined, seek permission from the church staff or leadership of the church to proceed. Discussion during the outing should consider how the work addresses taking care of the earth and God's realm as described in the Genesis and 1 Timothy passages. Seek to participate with an understanding of what it means that God has granted human dominion over creation.

Reflect

The work calls for discussion about the importance of caring for the earth and God's creation beyond the volunteer location, to wherever you find yourself, and in whatever you do. Discuss and/or make notations as to how it comes to reality. In doing so, discuss also how you and the others are realizing the activity and actuality of being stewards of the earth, servants to God and others—disciples with a mission.

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Living Stewardship



Exploration: Discipleship

About this Setting

This session is directed to the individual who pursues faith formation as a Christian steward. For the most part the activities are intended to lead the individual into a deeper relationship with God the Creator through practices done either alone or with members of a shared household.

About this Exploration

Generational and experiential differences condition how we perceive, understand, and practice discipleship. Living as an intentional disciple of Jesus assumes being a person of faith who embraces life as a journey of discovery and discernment about who Jesus is and what it means to live as a steward of God's creation. Discipleship involves the stewardship of our whole lives even as it enables our stewardship.



BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Isaiah 55:1–3
Mark 10:17–22

Leader Preparation

It is advisable for the user pursuing this study individually to set aside a regular time to study the scripture and practice these activities. In this way, it is possible to delve deeper into one's own spirit, to come into a closer relationship with God, and to maximize understanding and service as is determined by one's faithful practice of Christian stewardship.

Prayer: Loving God, I come to you asking that you honor my desire to become a more fulfilled disciple of your Son, Jesus Christ. Help me to be diligent in my studies, strong in my learning, and determined in my faithful practice as one of his disciples, as I strive to be a steward whose work and ministry are pleasing to you. In Christ's holy name, I offer myself and this prayer of invocation. Amen.

Household and Family Life

Exploring & Engaging Activities

① What Am I Looking For?

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper and pen or pencil

Call your household together for a time of reflection on Isaiah 55:1–3. Ask them to make the following lists as they listen (you might read this twice, once for each list): First, list the statements that speak to the well-being of those individuals who are addressed. Second, list the directives that are spoken to them. Then, discuss these lists with questions such as: What insights do you gather from these lists? Who do you think is the speaker? What difference does that make? In what way do you relate to the statements, directives, and questions? Describe your feelings. Does this draw you to think about your responsibilities to God? To your personal circumstances? To individuals you know and care for? Does this passage inspire you to look beyond your present understanding of stewardship to deepen your resolve? What difference will any new insights from this study make in your life as a disciple—or for us as a household of faith? Invite your household to share any prayer requests they might have, and include them in a prayer.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

② What Do You Think You Can Do?

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper and pen or pencil

Call your household together for another time of reflection on Isaiah 55:1–3. Read the Isaiah text perhaps using one or two different translations. Then ask: What new understandings have you gained? What might you do to put into practice a more active form of stewardship? Ask God for insight and direction. It is difficult to ask questions when you don't know what you don't know. Many an individual has cried, "I just wish God would say something out loud to me so I would know what God expects of me." How does this Isaiah passage address those feelings? Consider contacting someone whom you know needs assistance—one who needs food, clothing, or simply a visit from someone in order to abate loneliness. Name your strengths and abilities and consider offering help to someone whom you could help. If you are working through this activity with your household, encourage them to do the same. Ask one another to name the strengths you see in one another to see if some new self-knowledge could develop. Discuss the possibility of working together.



Sending & Serving Activities

3 Following Up, Going Forth

Supplies:

- items needed to accomplish the task or the help that you will offer to someone who needs your assistance

Call your household together. Begin by sharing this statement: Answered prayers may be hard to identify. It is true, however, that many people ignore the encouraging words of others. Consider the possibility that the compliments and encouragement we receive from others is God's way of encouraging us so that we will serve others with the strong abilities others see in us. Invite your household to share any words of commendation or appreciation they remember receiving or hearing. Ask: Is it possible that through these God has spoken to you? Decide as a household what you would like to do and for whom. Contact that person, explain your idea for helping her/him with some project, set up a time when you can get together, and plan to complete your intended service. Ask: Are we becoming a servant people?

Individual and Personal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activities

4 Seeking to Know

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper and pen or pencil

Read Mark 10:17-22 and then ask: What do I think about Jesus' response to the man who knelt before him seeking to find out what he needed to do to inherit eternal life? Consider that this man had led an exemplary life and had kept all the commandments. Yet he walked away, grieving. What do you think of Jesus' first response to the man who called him "Good Teacher"? What does Jesus' response say to me about God and about the man? What do you think of Jesus' answer to the man that he should "go, sell what you own . . . then come, follow me"? Jesus' command is stringent. Do you think it was harsh? How might Jesus have said this? Reflect and record your observations. If another member of the household is working on this activity with you, share opinions and understanding. Other questions to consider: Is this message difficult to comprehend? Is it possible to obtain eternal life if one does not sell or give away all of one's possessions? If you disagree with the command in this passage, how is it possible to reconcile the message with your insight or opinion?



Discerning & Deciding Activities

5 Why Look to the Teacher?

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper and pen or pencil

Read Mark 10:17–22. There are many things we consider when we think of Jesus. He is acknowledged as the Son of God, the Messiah, and Savior, to mention a few. In this passage he is called "teacher." In the Jewish tradition, a teacher is called rabbi—it was a title and position of great respect and authority. In seeking to follow Jesus as a disciple, we need to understand and determine the teacher's message. However difficult the message may sound, and for most people this passage is very difficult, the message is recorded and we cannot ignore it. Imagine if you were standing in the crowd, listening to the discourse between the man and Jesus. Would you wonder if Jesus' statement about giving away all possessions and selling everything in order to inherit eternal life was meant only for the one who had asked the question? If so, why? If not, why? What would you think of the command? What is the underlying message? How would you internalize the message? Was it a message relative only to the man asking the question? Was it a statement made to be taken literally or figuratively? Was there something in the man's behavior that caused Jesus to treat him more harshly than others? Make note of your determinations, what you discern, and any decisions you have made.

Pray for insight and understanding. Acknowledge the difficulty of Jesus' words to the man who was inquiring about what he must do to inherit eternal life.

Sending & Serving Activities

6 Making My Way

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper and pen or pencil

Prayer offers an individual the opportunity to speak directly to God. Meditation affords the opportunity to hear the still, small voice within one's spirit that many understand as the voice of God in answer to prayer. Just as I speak to God, I should listen for God's response as well.

Lectio divina is an ancient practice of the church that provides a means for a person to engage the biblical text from varying perspectives. This daily practice, which calls for prayer, journaling, listening, and meditation, calls you deeply into the text and asks the questions: What am I learning here? What is God saying to me? What do I need to be praying about? How is God calling me to change? Use the biblical text for this Exploration, Mark 10:17–22. Read the passage four times, each time with a different "pair of glasses," all the time praying that God will bring the text before you as living Word.

Lens 1—Reading/Listening: Read aloud a short passage of scripture. As you



read, listen for the word or phrase that speaks to you. What is the Spirit drawing your attention to?

Lens 2--Meditating: Repeat aloud the word or phrase to which you are drawn. Make connections between it and your life. What is God saying to you by means of this word or phrase?

Lens 3--Praying: Now take these thoughts and offer them back to God in prayer, giving thanks, asking for guidance, asking for forgiveness, and resting in God's love. What is God leading you to pray?

Lens 4--Contemplating: Move from the activity of prayer to the stillness of contemplation. Simply rest in God's presence. Stay open to God. Listen to God. Remain in peace and silence before God. How is God revealing God's self to you?

Record your thoughts and your prayers in your journal. Determine what you believe is the message you are to believe concerning the possessions you have acquired. Ask: Do any of my possessions get in the way of my relationship with God? If so, what action might I consider to clear the barrier?

Work Place and Communal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activities

7 My Involvement in the Wider Context

Supplies:

- whatever you need to accomplish the task you have decided to do

Even though you have done much of your work individually, your presence in the community is needed. As a growing disciple of Jesus Christ and a member of a church, the church is strengthened through your gifts and abilities. Ask God to guide you in the timing and the selection of a place where your offering would be most needed. Acknowledge your gifts and abilities as distinctly your own and specifically appropriated for you to do God's will as you are led.

Familiarize yourself with the upcoming activities of your church, select one that interests you, and offer to work with others who are committed to the task—or, if needed, to organize it. Remember that you are a disciple of Jesus Christ, and, by doing the work of his church in mission with other disciples, you are performing the work of Jesus. Your very presence offers Christ to others. In the name of Jesus, you are sharing with others what God has given you to share. Individually, or with the group you are working with, reflect on and discuss how it makes you feel to consider yourself as the hands, the face, the feet, and the voice of Jesus the Christ. How do your conclusions speak to being his disciple?



Discerning & Deciding Activities

8 Going the Extra Distance

Supplies:

- construction paper
- colorful markers
- attractive seasonal stickers
- scissors
- glue

Determine what interests you have in upcoming events or ongoing ministries within of your church. Remember that the gifts God has given you are specifically your own; yet they are given to increase God's realm on earth. As you acknowledge the abilities God has given you, your willing response to various opportunities of stewardship will continue to call forth your gifts to serve. Remember also that a willing response to stewardship will continue to open doors. Perhaps there is currently not a specific event that appeals to you. This may be God's way of involving you in a new ministry. With that in mind, consider organizing a group you would like to work alongside to encourage and empower others. Schedule a time to meet with your coworker(s) for planning. For example, you could create an opportunity to help the young people of the congregation develop a ministry of their own. Any age group will do, but consider one for which you have a burden. For example, if you are a writer, invite young people to meet with you to write a collection of "Thoughts for the Day," using the theme of stewardship. Plan for a time of sharing, planning, creating, and constructing. Plan for the young people to deliver their "Stewardship Thoughts for the Day" to people in church one Sunday a month.

In prayer, share your accomplishments with God. Ask God to bless what you have done within the faith community and to give you further opportunities. Remember to share your understanding of stewardship with those whom you will be working.

Sending & Serving Activities

9 Discipleship: A Conscious Decision

Supplies:

- the hymn "Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love,"
<http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong4>
- paper
- pen or pencil
- Bible

There are many different ways to come to know Jesus. Studying scriptural accounts of his life and ministry is the primary place to begin. Another good resource is hymn texts that express knowledge gained by an individual who took the time to pen an experience of relationship with Jesus. The African folk melody "Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love" (tune: Chereponi) is a wonderful example of how to learn more about Jesus. You can read the lyrics and hear the tune at <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong4>.



John 13:1–20 and Galatians 5:13–14 point to even more insight into Jesus. Study this hymn and read carefully the words of these two texts. What do they teach you about discipleship?

Another meaningful way to know Jesus is to have an encounter with one of his disciples. This activity is framed around the invitation to make a conscious decision to offer yourself as a disciple of Jesus. Determine how and what you are being called to do. As you understand your talent(s), determine what you want to do for God’s realm as a disciple. Here are a couple of examples: Are you a gifted speaker? If so, consider telling a friend of your relationship with Jesus the Messiah. Are you a good listener? If so, determine to spend time with a friend or acquaintance who needs a listening ear. There are many ways of giving your time and talents to people who are in need. It is up to you to spend time deciding what you are called to do in going forth and being the hands, the feet, the face, and the voice of Jesus. Plan your action(s) and time accordingly.

Reflect

Getting to know Jesus as one of his disciples requires diligence. It is a life-long quest. As the children of God, we are blessed to be a blessing. As brothers and sisters in Christ, we are called into service. The original disciples did not follow him because they knew all the answers to the questions. They had no prior training to be able to do the things they did in his name. They became disciples because he said, “Come, follow me.” Jesus continues to say, “Come, follow me.”

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Living Stewardship



Exploration: Christian Tradition

About this Setting

When we look seriously at the past, the present, and the future of the Christian church, we hope to determine our role in responding and supporting the ongoing vitality of the gathered communities of faith. The mission of Jesus Christ is held together by the committed disciples who understand the fundamental importance of stewardship. Therefore, this session is intended to help participants internalize and subsequently actualize a more faithful response to personal and communal stewardship.

About this Exploration

Our ancestors in faith have given us a rich inheritance of living stewardship. The spiritual practice of tithing is a gift that forms us as a community and provides for all even as it honors God. From tithing as joyful celebration in community among our Hebrew forebears and the “holding all things in common” of the earliest Christian churches, we see that people of faith before us were formed and challenged by God’s call—as we are today—to live generously and compassionately, sometimes at great cost. From the beginning of the church, shaped for stewardship by worship, education, fellowship, and service, as intentional disciples of Jesus, we embrace life as a journey of discovery and discernment about who Jesus is, what it means to live as stewards of God’s creation, and as workers for justice, peace, wholeness, and inclusion. Exploring this legacy can inspire us to add faithfully to the tradition through our own acts of generous and compassionate stewardship.



BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
Deuteronomy 14:22–29
Acts 4:32–5:11

Leader Preparation

The importance of the development of a deeper sense of spirituality on the part of the individual should be pointed out once again. The basis of this work is focused on the individual, in a setting away from the gathered community. Therefore, the time is directed toward communication with God through personal prayer and study. Deliberate scheduling of time dedicated to God is a most helpful practice. Take time to pray, study scripture, and be silent before God. Listen to what you read. As you become aware of your deepening relationship with God, allow the thoughts that arise during your time of silence before God minister to you.

Prayer: Remind me, O generous and gracious God, that I am the recipient of gifts of insight and practice that forge a link between me and earlier practitioners of the faith. May I remember, as well, to transmit and pass along these treasures to those who come after me. Amen.

Household and Family Life

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 Tithing: Thinking About the Expectation

Supplies:

- Bible
- dictionary
- paper and pen or pencil

After reading Deuteronomy 14:22–29, look up the word "tithe" in a dictionary. Jot down notes about what the Israelites were expected to do with the produce of the land. What indications of being stewards of the land and the expectation of stewardship do you notice? Who realized the benefits of the reaping labor? Who was provided for from the yield of the grain, wines, oil, and so forth? What were they to keep from the yield of their work? Where were they to take the proceeds from their labor and why? Describe in your own words how this passage might inform our practice of stewardship today.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

2 What Others Need to Know

Supplies:

- Bible,
- notes you have taken concerning stewardship and tithing from other activities
- paper and pen or pencil

Read Deuteronomy 14:22–29. Through prayer, address God with the questions and needs you have discovered through the reading of the Deuteronomy passage as well as your responses and reactions to your understanding of stewardship in this text. Share your prayer with individuals of the household, if any others are working with you.

If there are other members of the household engaged in this work with you, talk with one another about your responses to reading of the scripture. What, if any, action might your reflection move you to take? Discuss what you believe is a Christian's responsibility to God with regard to personal possessions that one has earned. In what ways was God active in the opportunities that have presented the yield of your work? What, do you believe, is your responsibility concerning God? Concerning God's realm? Concerning God's church? Next, consider what you will do in response to giving? To tithing. If you decide to tithe, will it be as individuals or as a household?



Sending & Serving Activities

③ Serving as a Steward

Supplies:

- personal written reflections
- copy of the hymn “God, Whose Giving Knows No Ending” (tune: Austrian Hymn). You can hear the tune at <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong6> and read the lyrics at <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong6a>

Serious reflection on the tradition from which we draw our heritage, rituals, and responses not only helps us to understand current practice, but also helps us to think about our spiritual and faithful response to God. Our tradition points us to our responsibility to other followers of Jesus Christ, especially those who come after us. How do we model sound and faithful stewardship practices for those? Projecting into the future calls us into account for what we are doing today in order that tomorrow’s generations will have a model of stewardship worth emulating and improving upon.

Consider what you are currently doing in the way of financial support of the church where you worship. Is your giving in line with your understanding of what God desires for God’s church? Read the hymn “God, Whose Giving Knows No Ending.” You can hear the tune at <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong6> and read the lyrics at <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong6a>. Focus especially on verse 2. As best as you can, think of yourself as the recipient of and worker of all that is mentioned in this verse. In what ways does this illuminate the importance of the profound gift that you are and the gifts God has given you? Determine what you will do in response to God at this time. Make notations of your thoughts and determinations.

Individual and Personal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activities

④ Seeking Truth

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper and pen or pencil

Ask God to help you understand what is to be learned from tradition, actualized for today, and appropriated for future believers regarding our living and serving as the faithful church.

Read Acts 4:32–5:11. Take notes on what the story says to you. Make notations about the principal characters in the story and your reactions to them. Then ask yourself questions that call forth critical thinking skills as you interpret the meaning of the story. For example: What do you believe is the central message of this text? Why? Is there a mandate for you today? If so, what do you believe that it is? Is there a mandate for the church today? If so, what do you believe that it is? What are the implications of taking care of those who are less fortunate? What,



if anything, is the message concerning truth telling? How would that affect the importance of faithful stewardship? What are you going to do about what you have learned reading and reflecting on this text?

Discerning & Deciding Activities

5 What About Honesty?

Supplies:

- a quiet place
- Bible
- paper and pen or pencil

Find a quiet place where you can be undisturbed for at least 15 minutes. Re-read all the notes you have taken for yourself as you have been on this part of your journey of discovery about stewardship. What threads do you notice in your notes? Are they scattered, or, as you look at your notes, is there a recurring pattern? What stands out as important that you did not notice as you were writing? In what ways has considering the repercussions of the lies in Acts 4:32–5:11 informed your insight into stewardship? What, if any, effect does this have on your honesty with yourself, with those in your household, with individuals in the workplace and, finally, regarding your participation in giving to the church where you belong? What can you do to influence the well-being of faithful stewardship values for future believers? Decide what you will do to make a difference in your personal relationship with God and others. Make notations that will lead you to a faithful response as you reflect on the truths you discerned from reading the scripture. Date and record the decisions you have made. If you have an accountability partner, share your decisions.

Sending & Serving Activities

6 Honesty Is the Best Policy

Supplies:

- Bible
- journal

Lectio divina is an ancient practice of the church that provides a means for a person to engage the biblical text from varying perspectives. This daily practice, which calls for prayer, journaling, listening, and meditation, calls you deeply into the text and asks the questions: What am I learning here? What is God saying to me? What do I need to be praying about? How is God calling me to change? Use the Bible focus passage for this Exploration, Acts 4:32–5:11. It is a hard text, but vital to understanding stewardship and integrity. Read the passage four times, each time with a different "pair of glasses," all the time praying that God will bring the text before you as living Word.

Lens 1—Reading/Listening: Read aloud a short passage of scripture. As you read, listen for the word or phrase that speaks to you. What is the Spirit drawing your attention to?



Lens 2—Meditating: Repeat aloud the word or phrase to which you are drawn. Make connections between it and your life. What is God saying to you by means of this word or phrase?

Lens 3—Praying: Now take these thoughts and offer them back to God in prayer, giving thanks, asking for guidance, asking for forgiveness, and resting in God's love. What is God leading you to pray?

Lens 4—Contemplating: Move from the activity of prayer to the stillness of contemplation. Simply rest in God's presence. Stay open to God. Listen to God. Remain in peace and silence before God. How is God revealing God's self to you?

Record your thoughts and your prayers in your journal, especially those understandings about gratitude, generosity, and the spirit of God. It is especially important to live with the last question: What is God revealing about stewardship and about God's self? What does this text say to me about living honestly before God and others?

Work Place and Communal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activities

7 Taking a Look Around

Supplies:

- copy of the hymn "God, Whose Giving Knows No Ending" (tune: Austrian Hymn). You can hear the tune at <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong6> and read the lyrics at <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong6a>
- paper and pen or pencil

Prepare a message for your church by reading through the hymn "God, Whose Giving Knows No Ending" (see Activity 3). Pay special attention to verse 4. Make notes of your reactions and the insights that come from meditating on the text. Consider the meaning of the phrase that it is God who "adds joy to all our giving." Determine who the pronoun "our" refers to and how that might be a sign of relationship with God. Ask the question: Is there joy in my giving? If not, why? If so, how can I share that message with others and to whom? Go through all of verse 4, asking your own questions and seeking the answers from what you have learned from the tradition of the church. In spreading the message of faithful stewardship, you can determine the course of action you choose and in what location. This is another opportunity to share a sense of tradition with current believers. It is, furthermore, a worthy goal to use this kind of work to add the possibility of new tradition. When you are ready, contact the Stewardship Committee of your church to ask if you would be able to share a message concerning stewardship with the congregation.



Discerning & Deciding Activities

8 Up and Running

Supplies:

- notes from reflection on the hymn “God, Whose Giving Knows No Ending” (tune: Austrian Hymn). You can hear the tune at <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong6> and read the lyrics at <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong6a>

In previous activities your reflection might have led to the realization that humanity was created in the image of God, given dominion over creation, and called to be disciples of Jesus the Christ. Drawing on these truths, we are now called to become active agents. Some people of the church still view stewardship as nothing more than responding to an annual stewardship campaign driven by the financial budget of the church. But a biblical understanding leads us to believe that there is much more to faithful stewardship. Indeed, making a pledge of your treasure to help with the church’s budget is critically important for the ongoing life and ministry of the congregation. But stewardship also involves time and talent. There are needs other than financial in sustaining a witness: Christian education, worship planning, outreach and mission, evangelism, or the care for the property of the church.

As you think about the mission statement of your congregation and its ministry, where do you sense God calling you to be involved? What might you (and others) do to help God breathe new life and spirit into either a new or continuing program? Devise a plan of action. What first steps must be taken? With whom do you need to confer? How might you encourage others to share your vision? What timeline can you establish? What benchmarks can you identify? How will you evaluate your efforts?

Sending & Serving Activities

9 Ready, Set, Go

Supplies:

- copy of the hymn “God, Whose Giving Knows No Ending” (tune: Austrian Hymn). You can hear the tune at <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong6> and read the lyrics at <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong6a>
- paper
- pen or pencil

If you did not work on Activity 8, complete it before proceeding to Activity 9. For Activity 9 review notes concerning the project you intend to do to revitalize a ministry at the church and the notes that you have taken on the hymn “God, Whose Giving Knows No Ending.” Pray for the strength of your resolve and for the individuals who have agreed to work with you.



Set up a meeting with an agenda that will address the action steps needed and the work that will be done by you and your group. Emphasize that faithful stewardship includes much more than giving money. It calls for individual talents to be spent in the improvement and strengthening of ministries of the church at large. Having determined that you and your group are ready to tackle the work, set a goal with a timeline for work activities, and go.

Reflect

With respect to work, we should remember “to keep the main thing the main thing.” The “main thing” of this work and any other work is our relationship with God. Faithful stewardship requires attention to task, whatever the task may be. One idea that is often overlooked is that stewardship can be practiced with a joyful heart. Remember, there are many who have gone before us whose actions have taught us the value of joy in this practice. That can be seen in Christendom where active and strong churches still thrive. Our commission is to promote stewardship faithfully in order that future generations will come to know the joy of practicing stewardship, drawing upon their past and as they face their future.

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Living Stewardship



Exploration: Context and Mission

About this Setting

As you review your personal attitude and approach to mission and its relationship to individual stewardship, consider your decision-making processes and seek empowerment by the Holy Spirit of God. As you work through this session, remember and reflect on God's promises to humankind. Then you will pursue the commitments you will personally make. Because this work engages the daily life of the individual, apart from the gathered faith community, you will experience it as an opportunity for ongoing personal spiritual growth.

About this Exploration

We live in relationship with God and one another in a world created and sustained by God. The scriptures help us discover how God intends us to live as living stewards within a grateful community that goes beyond rituals to serve the needs and celebrate the potentials of our neighbors near and far with extravagant grace and generosity.



BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Isaiah 1:10–17

Mark 14:3–9

Household and Family Life

Exploring & Engaging Activities

Leader Preparation

Set aside time to present yourself before God. Plan to spend time in prayer. Include study time with the scriptures for this session. Provide for silence so that you might hear the still, small voice of God within your spirit. Listen for God's message for you so that you might find a deep and abiding understanding of mission and your role therein.

Prayer: God, help me to see those around me not as souls merely to be "won," as though I was participating in some kind of cosmic evangelistic contest. Instead may I see my brothers and sisters as fellow sojourners to be wooed to the loving Christ, who calls us to a shared life of community, reciprocal concern, generosity, and gratefulness. Amen.

1 Looking to Our Immediate Surroundings

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper
- a pen or pencil

Your relationship with God is uniquely your own, but, as a household of faith, we are called to common purpose. In prayer, affirm your household's desire to serve God and others. Use this time of prayer as a time of two-way communication with God—speak, but be sure to listen.

Invite the members of your household to read Isaiah 1:10–17. Ask questions that arise as you read through the words of the prophet Isaiah. Make notes of those questions and, in prayer, seek answers to any burning issue. Keep those questions and answers in front of your household, seeking to discover the how, who, and what that might fit into mission as you have come to understand it. Talk together about any revelation that any of the household has received. Consider a plan of action that will be carried to completion as your household claims its desire to implement a household project of Christian mission.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

2 Naming the Need

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper and a pen or pencil

As you read or reread Isaiah 1:10–17, ask your household to look specifically at the list of things that God is saying through Isaiah that are not pleasing to God. Are any of these connected to our life together? Consider how we might go about eliminating any of these. Now, reread verses 16 and 17. What pleases God? Which of these most directly touches us? What are we already doing that pleases God? How do you see this list as describing mission opportunities for today? Consider the possible needs that are apparent in members of your household and/or your church. Identify instances where "good" needs to be performed, "justice" needs to be appropriated, the "oppressed" need to be rescued, the "orphan defended," and a "widow" needs a spokesperson. Think beyond the actual list as recorded in Isaiah. Where are there other good acts needed? Continue to make notes concerning any needs that others may have and decisions you may make with regard to how you will enter into what is perceived to be a local mission endeavor. Enter into discussions with the members of your household regarding insights and thoughts that came to each or/all individuals.



Sending & Serving Activities

3 Our Mission or God's?

Supplies:

- Bible
- telephone directory
- telephone
- paper
- pen or pencil

Include all members of the household in this activity. Through your times of prayer and reflection you may have a greater understanding of your role in bringing about God's shalom in the world. The world "out there" is not the only context for mission. Most people do not become missionaries. However, that should not be used as an excuse. Invite members of your household to work and plan alongside you to formulate a mission for your household. God's word tells us of God's desire for the health and wealth of the whole world. God created each of us for relationships—with God and with others. Further, God has promised to work alongside us to nurture and care for all creation, the earth, and its inhabitants. God's mission is our mission. Thus, service is an element of stewardship that cannot be other than an active part of the plan God has for our lives. Local work in mission is available at every turn: food pantries, clothing drives, soup kitchens, to mention only a few. Check with local churches and volunteer organizations to find out where help is needed, and then determine where your abilities would be most effective. Plan toward action; then follow your plan.

Individual and Personal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activities

4 Good Service

Supplies:

- Bible
- journal

Lectio divina is an ancient practice of the church that provides a means for a person to engage the biblical text from varying perspectives. This daily practice, which calls for prayer, journaling, listening, and meditation, calls you deeply into the text and asks the questions: What am I learning here? What is God saying to me? What do I need to be praying about? How is God calling me to change? Use Mark 14:3–9. Read the passage four times, each time with a different "pair of glasses," all the time praying that God will bring the text before you as living Word. Pray for new understanding of mission work as you seek to become a steward of what you have.

Lens 1--Reading/Listening: Read aloud a short passage of scripture. As you read, listen for the word or phrase that speaks to you. What is the Spirit drawing your attention to?



Lens 2—Meditating: Repeat aloud the word or phrase to which you are drawn. Make connections between it and your life. What is God saying to you by means of this word or phrase?

Lens 3—Praying: Now take these thoughts and offer them back to God in prayer, giving thanks, asking for guidance, asking for forgiveness, and resting in God's love. What is God leading you to pray?

Lens 4—Contemplating: Move from the activity of prayer to the stillness of contemplation. Simply rest in God's presence. Stay open to God. Listen to God. Remain in peace and silence before God. How is God revealing God's self to you?

Continue to work through these activities as part of your spiritual formation. Keep your heart and mind open to the message God intends for you. What conclusions do you draw from this study? Why do you think this is an important story about mission and stewardship? What is your response to what the woman does for Jesus? What do you think of those who described it as wasteful? What do you think of Jesus' response to them? Take notes concerning your impressions of all that can be deduced from this scriptural account concerning Christian mission. How do you perceive the message of this story as being adaptable for mission work today?

Discerning & Deciding Activities

5 Soul Searching

Supplies:

- Bible
- copy of the hymn "Take My Gifts and Let Me Love You" (tune: Talavera Terrace), <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong5>
- paper and pencil or pen

The lyrics of the hymn can be found at <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong5>. After reading Mark 14:3–9 and the hymn text, write down what you think the message of both is. Do this in your own words; don't simply quote. Consider the gift given to Jesus by the woman and the list of gifts recorded in the hymn. Then consider what Jesus says to his followers: "What you do to/for the least of these you have done to/for me." Read again the verses of the hymn.

Center yourself before God. Take an inventory of your personal assets and belongings. Try to determine a resource of great importance to you; perhaps something that was obtained at great cost and might be sold at substantial financial gain. Is there someone you know of who might benefit from having that resource? Is there a need that could be filled by the item if it were given to a mission project? Consider the extravagance of the woman in Mark 14:3–9. What is your level of generosity? Could you be as generous? Perhaps you find yourself standing with the individuals who criticize her gift giving. How does that make you feel? Now consider mission endeavors that might be in need of your possession. Consider the implications of generosity as they relate to faithful stewardship. Determine how you intend to submit your offering to this mission, ask God to receive your gifts, and, if you are convinced that this is the right thing to do, do it.



Sending & Serving Activities

6 My Offering

Supplies:

- Bible
- copy of the hymn “Take My Gifts and Let Me Love You” (tune: Talavera Terrace), <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong5>
- paper and pencil or pen

If you haven't already, consider the reflective assessment work of Activity 5. That activity could be good preparation for this activity related to the assessment of your personal generosity level. Read Mark 14:3–9 and the words of the hymn “Take My Gifts and Let Me Love You.” Remember that you were created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26–31). Is it possible that God not only has expectations of us, but also is in actual need of our help? Often humans get hung up on giving material goods, yet the question arises: Is there more to stewardship than giving from our material storehouse? What might that be? Does God have your attention? Is it possible that God's primary desire is to have a solid and loving relationship with each of us? Might your gift be the gift of your entire being? Answer these questions and consider what you look like as a gift. John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world that God gave God's only Son, so that everyone who believes in [Jesus] may not perish but may have eternal life.” As you consider yourself as a child of God, can you determine the importance of giving your very life back to the God who loves you that much? In silence, determine what offering God might need you to make as you seek to enhance your gift giving and mission endeavors as a faithful steward. Is this perhaps the first step of serving?

Work Place and Communal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activities

7 Mission Perceived

Supplies:

- your church's newsletter
- the daily newspaper of your city
- paper and pen or pencil

Mission opportunities abound in every sector of life. Read your church newsletter and local newspaper, looking specifically for significant needs in your community. Make notes of interest, locations, and reported needs. What are your possibilities? Pray about what you could do in response to these needs. Then contact the organizations that you want to know more about. Gather as much gain information as you can to determine the proper fit for your abilities and gifts and the needs. Visit the organizations; get to know some of the workers. Narrow the field of organizations. Over the next few days continue to reflect on your personal inclination to work in a specific mission setting. Then, act on it: offer yourself as a service volunteer.



Discerning & Deciding Activities

8 A Good Fit

Supplies:

- information about the mission(s) where you would like to serve
- notes you may have collected to help you arrive at your decision

Research mission organizations (as they were listed in your church newsletter and local newspaper) looking for a good fit based on your interests, abilities, time, location, and personal availability. Honest personal assessment is required. Remember, mission is a stimulating and happy form of stewardship, but it can be significantly demanding. It is a righteous act to offer stewardship and service with joy. Don't make snap decisions. Exercise prayerful wisdom and prudence in your discernment and decision making so that your work will honor God.

Sending & Serving Activities

9 Moving into the Mission Field

Supplies:

- supplies that are needed to work at the mission where you would like to serve
- copy of the hymn "Take My Gifts and Let Me Love You" (tune: Talavera Terrace), <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong5>

What do you know about yourself—your abilities, gifts, health? What makes you strongest? Read Isaiah 1:1–10 and Mark 14:3–9. Read the lyrics of the hymn "Take My Gifts and Let Me Love You." Pray for wisdom and affirmation that what you are planning to do is within the will of God. Where is God calling you? Identify places of service that seem to call to you; contact them; get acquainted. Contact the agency you choose and volunteer. Be sure to check about any special training or background check before you get started. Determine the date of startup and schedule the days and the number of hours you will work. Be the disciple that Jesus has called you to be in this place. Remember to acknowledge your talents and abilities as gifts from God to be used for the furtherance of God's realm here on earth. In so doing, you are living into the daily practice of stewardship as it is manifested in mission. Keep a journal of this adventure.

Reflect

Prayer, scripture study, and observation have always compelled the servants of Jesus to work in fields of mission. As we continue to worship and serve the God of creation, we are to take seriously our responsibilities in the various mission fields, using all that we have been blessed with and all that we have realized as gifts from God. Just as God has been generous with us, we are to be generous with others.

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Living Stewardship



Exploration: Future and Vision

About this Setting

A close look at scripture is a key path for us to come to an understanding of our role in providing stepping stones to future generosity. This session is provided for individuals who are working privately, away from members of the gathered faith community. It will challenge you to develop time and space for personal engagement with God through prayer, study, and meditation, as well as working through activities that consider possibilities of faithful stewardship as a disciple of Jesus the Christ.

About this Exploration

As we move into the future, a clear vision of where we are headed emerges out of our understanding of stewardship. This growing understanding will be enhanced as we consider such far-ranging questions as: What kind of persons do we want to be? To what purpose do we devote our lives? What are our core values and beliefs? That vision will also benefit by wrestling with more immediate questions, such as: What choices and decisions are we making every day in our use of the money, time, talents and abilities, the environment, and other resources that have been entrusted to our care? Living stewardship comes down to individuals and the communities of which they are a part. It also involves acting in new ways; growing out of our reflections on how we are living our lives and the journey we are on; discerning the messages that we've received throughout our lives from culture, family, and God; experiencing ourselves in community; and deciding our next explorations.



BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
1 Chronicles 29:1–19
Revelation: 21:10,
21:22–22:5

Leader Preparation

Because this work is more personal than communal, it requires more self-discipline and personal motivation. There will be times when an activity may be skipped. Stay on schedule. If you skip an activity, go back and complete it before you move on. You will be encouraged in your personal spiritual growth and your commitment to deepen your relationship with God in Christ.

Prayer: Transforming God, give me a vision of the future to which you call me. Grant, as well, the resolve to live so that each day—in a thousand small, subtle ways—I edge closer and closer to what you would have me become. Amen.

Household and Family Life

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 Remembrance of Things Well Done

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper and pen or pencil

Read 1 Chronicles 29:1–19. As you and your household read this ancient text, consider all that David did for future generations and why. Ask what is going on in the church today that lends itself to provision for the future. List your insights about why it is important for your church to plan ministries and facilities for the future. What do you believe is important about sharing this information with others? Keep the information you've recorded for future reference and assistance as you work on this topic.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

2 Back to the Future

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper and pen or pencil

As you and your household read Revelation 21:10, 21:22–22:5, remember that the material offers a vision of things to come rather than an account of what has happened. What questions arise about the future and stewardship as you read? List what will no longer be needed and no longer present. What do you see as the vision of abundance? Name the blessings of God. Who will be blessed? How is blessing earned? Record the various things learned from the reading of the passage and discuss what, if anything, you envision for the future of the practice of faithful stewardship for future generations. Discuss with one another in your household your relationship with God and with your faith community. What have you determined about the responsibility of individuals and the church for the message to be handed to the future?

Sending & Serving Activities

3 Offering the Known While Entering the Unknown

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper and pen or pencil
- copy of the hymn “God, Whose Giving Knows No Ending” (tune: Austrian Hymn). You can hear the tune at <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong6> and read the lyrics at <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong6a>



Ask God for a vision of what God desires for the future of the church. Read 1 Chronicles 29:1–19 and set aside some time to go before God with questions about the church of the past, the church as you know it today, and the vision or hope you have for the church of the future. Read through the lyrics of the hymn “God, Whose Giving Knows No Ending” (tune: Austrian Hymn). You can hear the tune at <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong6> and read the lyrics at <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong6a>. With your household, read verse 4 of the hymn and invite discussion about what you are currently doing about and for the future of the church and the realm of God here on earth. Make a list of actions that could be done to preserve and promote the well-being of God’s church—and your household. What strengths are apparent to you as you consider the ministries of church and family that are currently in place, active, and productive? Are there current ministries that are weak and yet worth salvaging? If so, which one, and how would you promote its well-being? If you can name a ministry or program of the church that is not worth salvaging, consider what might be done to rid the church of the “excess baggage.” With whom would you consider sharing this information? In the event that you find agreement from the church leadership, offer to be of assistance in the work that would be required to appropriately provide for the welfare of the church today and for the future.

Individual and Personal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activities

4 Lectio Divina

Supplies:

- Bible
- a journal

Lectio divina is an ancient practice of the church that provides a means for a person to engage the biblical text from varying perspectives. This daily practice, which calls for prayer, journaling, listening, and meditation, calls you deeply into the text and asks the questions: What am I learning here? What is God saying to me? What do I need to be praying about? How is God calling me to change? Use the biblical texts for this Exploration: 1 Chronicles 29:1–19 or Revelation 21:10, 21:22–22:5. Read the passage(s) you select four times, each time with a different “pair of glasses.”

Lens 1—Reading/Listening: Read aloud a short passage of the scriptures. As you read, listen for the word or phrase that speaks to you. What is the Spirit drawing your attention to?

Lens 2—Meditating: Repeat aloud the word or phrase to which you are drawn. Make connections between it and your life. What is God saying to you by means of this word or phrase?

Lens 3—Praying: Now take these thoughts and offer them back to God in prayer, giving thanks, asking for guidance, asking for forgiveness, and resting in God’s love. What is God leading you to pray?

Lens 4—Contemplating: Move from the activity of prayer to the stillness of contemplation. Simply rest in God’s presence. Stay open to God. Listen to God. Re-



main in peace and silence before God. How is God revealing God's self to you?

Record your thoughts and your prayers in your journal, especially those understandings about gratitude, generosity, and the spirit of God. It is especially important to live with the last question: What is God revealing about stewardship and about God's self?

Discerning & Deciding Activities

5 Further Introspection

Supplies:

- paper and pen or pencil

This activity may help you remember past events and involvement that promoted the well-being of an individual or group to improve their circumstance. Identify the circumstance of the encounter and as many details as you are able to name. Make a list of the important actions you took, discussions that were held, and ways you believe you empowered individuals to make positive and beneficial changes to their circumstances. This activity will help promote awareness of the importance of how the past has power to affect the future. How does the recording of important positive involvement today provide assistance for generations of the future? List the ways you discern that your involvement affected the future well-being of the group.

Sending & Serving Activities

6 The Determination to Serve

Supplies:

- journals or any notes that you have kept as part of your journey

Now is the time to offer your time and talent to promote today's values and actions concerning stewardship and service. Consider what you can do now that will make a difference in the life of an individual or individuals who may need the comfort of your presence, the strength of your resolve to live the Christian life, or assistance in securing food or shelter. You know your context and the opportunities that present themselves. Determine the needs you can meet and the gifts you have. Consider whether the activities and work offered might be of eternal significance. Remember to keep a journal of your thoughts, insights, and the work you plan to pursue.



Work Place and Communal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activities

7 Look to the Needs

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper and pen or pencil

The Great Commission of Jesus is timeless and all encompassing. It weaves itself into every activity and circumstance of human life. It speaks to the importance of acknowledging God's love for all people, including ourselves. Find a special place and sit in silence. Meditate on what you understand of the command to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind . . . "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37). Consider how your commitment to Christian stewardship demonstrates your love of God, neighbor, and self. Is there a place and a circumstance where your energy is called to offer such a gift? Are you willing to share your gift? Reflect on how this represents a compelling stewardship for the well-being of the church of the future. Journal your thoughts and determinations.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

8 Working through Today to Strengthen Tomorrow

Supplies:

- journals or any notes that you have kept as part of your journey
- paper and pen or pencil

Visit your church. Walk around and through the facility; pray as you walk. Ask God to awaken your spirit to a need (such as in the education department)—is there a need for supplies, cleaning, or organization? When you have it, ask someone on staff what can be done to remedy the problem and how you can be of assistance. If approval is needed for you to assume care of the area, find the individual or group who can grant permission for you to do the work. When you have approval, set your action plan. As you implement your plan, ask: Is this the kind of stewardship offering that will make a difference today and does it model effective stewardship that will strengthen the church of the future? Remember to keep a journal of your work.

Sending & Serving Activities

9 The Work of the Day

Supplies

- supplies needed to clean and organize the area of the church where you have decided to work, and any supplies that you will replace



Visit your church. Walk around and through the facility; pray as you walk. Ask God to awaken your spirit to a need (such as in the education department)—is there a need for supplies, cleaning, or organization? When you have it, ask someone on staff what can be done to remedy the problem and how you can be of assistance. Think about whether there is an individual or group willing to work with you. After having contacted individuals, if there are any who agree to be your coworkers, schedule a time to work and call your group together. Gather the supplies; begin the work.

Reflect

As Christians, we are called to do the work of the church. It is appropriate to work individually with God to develop one's relationship with God and to discern the work God desires us to accomplish. It is also important to remember that Christianity is a faith-based community drawn together to worship and serve God. If the actions of the saints who have gone before us influence what we do today, we should perform acts of faithful stewardship that will influence those who will come after us. The church of the future is dependent, in part, upon us.

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