



## 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.

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- 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 Age Group

Caught physically and emotionally halfway in between childhood and adulthood, youth (ages 11–15) are concerned with the ultimate questions of stewardship: Who am I? What is my life purpose? How am I related to other people and to the world around me? Sometimes they think and act like young adults and at other times like children. Consequently, life is a mixed bag for them. They depend on their parents and/or caregivers for guidance, nurture, and transportation, yet increasingly strike out on their own.

In addition, youth are often overwhelmed by frightening physical and emotional changes. They may be embarrassed by the uneven growth of their bodies and limbs. Their clothes may not fit. They may begin to smell differently and grow hair in odd places. Their faces may break out with “zits,” and their raging hormones may produce a variety of strong psychological effects. Partly because of these biological changes, youth may connect to a nurturing congregation that allows them to voice their questions and doubts — particularly if their parents or friends also attend.



## 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 will explore both what stewardship can mean and how we might integrate it 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**

## Leader Preparation

These nine activities introduce the group and the leader to the concepts of Being Stewards and Living Stewardship. Like all spiritual disciplines, stewardship is best understood holistically — as encompassing all areas of life — and the nine activities in this Discovery Exploration, as well as the forty-five activities in the other five Explorations, are intended to examine stewardship in a holistic way. All of these activities may be used in a flexible way, according to the needs of the group and the leader. A full one-third of these activities, that is, three of the nine activities in each of six Explorations, are designated as “easy preparation” activities. They require no supplies and minimal preparation time. If necessary, the leader can simply look these activities over a few minutes before the start of the group meeting, and facilitate them “on the fly.”

One final word: Avoid making these activities excessively “talky.” It is often too easy to resort to the “minilecture.” Obviously, some of the learning that will take place about stewardship will require the use of traditional verbal and mathematical-logical skills. Scripture passages will have to be read and explained. Information about steward-

## Exploring & Engaging Activities



### 1 Being Stewards and Living Stewardship (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** If this is the first time you will be meeting the group members, take time to review their names and any other information you may have, such as where they live, what schools they attend, and their connections to the church, if any. Also, read over this introductory discussion on “Living Stewardship.” Be aware that there is much more content in this activity than you can use. For this reason, you are strongly encouraged to customize this activity for your participants. Let the old expression “Use the best, and chuck the rest!” guide you. If you do not edit this activity, you will need 45–75 minutes to complete all of it.

#### Supplies:

- Bibles
- newsprint or white board and markers

If this is the first time that this group has been together, begin with introductions. As an ice-breaker, ask if they have ever moved or traveled anywhere out of state or away from their city or region. Ask questions such as:

- For those of you who have moved, what was that like? Did you like the move? Why or why not? What was it like saying goodbye to old acquaintances and having to make new friends?
- For those of you who have traveled somewhere, where did you go? How did you get there?
- Have any of you been overseas? Did you enjoy traveling or moving? Who liked it? What did you like about it? Who did not enjoy traveling or moving? What did you not like?
- If you could live or visit anywhere in the world, where would it be?

While moving and traveling can be exciting, these experiences can be traumatic. Ask the group to open their Bibles, and ask someone to read Deuteronomy 8:7–17 aloud. When a group member has read the passage, ask the group what these verses say to them. Some possible responses:

- They tell of God bringing the people into a good land.
- They tell of God supplying all of their needs.
- They describe a pretty rough move — the wilderness crossing was long and difficult. But God was with the people!
- Egypt, their old home country, was a place of slavery, oppression, and hardship. They needed to move!

Explain to the group that this scripture is about the journey we all take through



ship will have to be conveyed to the group. Even so, these activities are not Sunday school lessons or minisermos, and you should avoid such temptations or risk “losing” the group. These Faith Practices activities were created with the idea of “multiple intelligences” in mind. Young people learn in diverse ways, and the activities in this and in the other five Explorations examine stewardship in many different ways: through art, music, drama, and poetry; interpersonally; and through bodily movement — as well as through more traditional linguistic and mathematical-logical intelligences.

*Prayer: O God, we thank you for all of our leaders. We thank you for their dedication to you and for their service to your church. We pray that you will give them a spirit of calm and ease. May they know that you are guiding them as they meet with their groups. May their words and example inspire stewardship among the young people with whom they will be interacting. We thank you for their influence. Be with them now. And be with each learning group as it examines and thinks about these new concepts of stewardship. Amen.*

### Session Development

For each session, leaders may choose from nine activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. 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.” The first activity in each category is designed for “easy preparation” (able to be done with minimal preparation with supplies normally found at the church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.

life. One of the Bible's words for that journey and how we travel it is stewardship. Ask the group if anyone knows what a steward is. What is stewardship all about? Encourage group discussion around these questions. Explain to the group that the third college edition of the [ital]Webster's New World Dictionary[ital] (New York: Webster's New World, 1988, p. 1315) has at least four definitions for the word “steward” (consider having these on newsprint or a whiteboard, or paper to distribute):

1. Somebody who attends to the passengers on an aircraft or ship, or handles food provisions and dining arrangements on a ship;
2. Somebody who manages the domestic affairs of a hotel, club, college, or other establishment that provides meals and lodging;
3. Somebody who acts as a marshal or official at a large public event;
4. Somebody who manages the property, finances, or household of another.

This last definition is the one we are most interested in. In the scriptures and in the church, a steward is one who manages the property, finances, or household of God.

Similarly, stewardship is the act or practice of managing the property, finances, or household of God. In this session we will be talking about living stewardship because stewardship is for today — it is for you and me; it is a living thing.

You might also use the “About This Faith Practice” statement in these resources. If you use the longer definition, consider having the words on newsprint or a white board or on paper to distribute to the group. Ask the group: What do you think of this long definition of stewardship? Does any part of it stand out for you? What does it say to you? Allow participants to think about this question and respond to it. Allow group members to respond fully.

Summarize with words like these: What this means is that stewardship is not only about our money — how we use it, and how much of it we give to the church. Stewardship is about how we make decisions, and it is about all of our different choices. Stewardship is about life! It has to do with:

- Who we decide to hang out with and make friends with — and who we decide not to
- What sports, clubs, and after-school or weekend activities we get involved in — and which ones we don't
- Whether or not we get a part-time job
- Whether or not we attend church or participate in youth group, choir, or other church programs and ministries
- Our plans and goals after high school, such as whether we will go to college, enter military service, and/or get a job
- Other life goals, dreams, and aspirations
- Who we will choose be intimate with — and who we will decide not to;
- What to spend our money on — and what not to.

Thus, making a single choice to do one thing usually means choosing not to do one or more other things. Setting priorities is as important as it is inevitable: We all decide intentionally or accidentally that some things, people, values, and goals are more important to us than other things, people, values, and goals. In concluding this activity, you may ask the group:

- How many of you have had to make any of such hard decisions or choices?
- Have any of you had to set or establish priorities? To say no or yes to some things or activities?

## Living Stewardship



- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose three activities, using one activity from each category.
- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose four or five activities, using at least one activity from each category.

- Has anyone had to make a choice about who to be friends with, and who to spend less time with? Was that easy or hard for you?
- Has anyone had to decide between after-school sports and clubs because your teacher or someone at home said you can't do everything? What was it like making that decision?

All of these things are what living stewardship is all about.

### 2 Three Hymns on Being Stewards: Living Stewardship

**Leader preparation:** Read over this activity before the group meeting. Since this activity requires singing, arrange for an accompanist (preferably a guitarist or pianist) to attend the meeting to assist the group in learning to sing the three hymns listed below. (Note: To facilitate instrumental accompaniment, the group may have to meet in a different room of the church than the one they customarily meet in. For example, they may have to use the church fellowship hall, choir room, or sanctuary.) This activity may require 20 minutes to complete.

#### Supplies:

- computer with Internet access to find hymn lyrics and tunes

If this is the first time that this group has been together, take a few moments for group member introductions. One way to explore and engage in the practice of living stewardship is through music and singing. In this activity, you and the instrumentalist will introduce the group to three hymns that teach us about stewardship. These hymns are:

- "Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love" (Tune: Chereponi); <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong4>
- "Take My Gifts" (Tune: Talvera Terrace; alternate tune: Holy Manna); <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong5>
- "God, Whose Giving Knows No Ending" (Tune: Austrian Hymn; alternate tune: Hyfrydol); lyrics can be found at <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong6> and the tune at <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong6a>.

In this activity, the group will simply practice singing each of the hymns. Many participants will be singing them for the first time. Over the next several weeks, each hymn will be discussed in some detail—in three separate activities. It would be beneficial, if time permits and musical accompaniment is available, for the group to sing these three hymns at each group meeting.

Conclude this activity by briefly introducing these three hymns to the group and then having the group sing each one once.

### 3 Stewardship Auction

**Leader preparation:** Read over this activity in its entirety before the group meets. If this is the first time you are meeting the group, take time before the meeting to go over participants' names and any other information you may have, such as where group members live; what school they attend; and their connection to the church, if any. In addition, you will need to download and make copies of the Stewardship Auction sheet.

Note: If the Stewardship Auction is conducted during the group meeting in its entirety, this activity will require 60–75 minutes to complete. Time-saving al-



ternative: Describe the activity to the group and then ask group members to fill their Stewardship Auction sheets out at home. You can then briefly discuss the Stewardship Auction in the next session.

### Supplies:

- copies of the “Stewardship Auction Sheet,” Attachment: Activity 3
- pens

At the start of this activity, hand out the Stewardship Auction sheets and read the following directions to the group:

- Each participant in the group is a bidder and is assumed to have exactly 100 zillion dollars — no more and no less — that can be spent in any combination among thirty different items that are up for bidding.
- Group members will have 10–15 minutes (the leader may decide exactly how much time) to prioritize all their choices and assign maximum bids on all their choices, just prior to the auction. (Alternatively, you may ask group members to fill their sheets out at home during the week, and hold the auction during the next group meeting.)
- There will be no formal grading or judging of group members' choices; consequently, participants should feel free to bid on those items that they truly want. None of the choices are prejudged to be either good or bad, right or wrong — although some choices obviously reflect humanitarian or spiritual values while others are more self-centered.

Once group members have assigned maximum bids and filled out the Order of Priority boxes, the auction may begin. You may act as the auctioneer and proceed in an orderly fashion from item 1 all the way through to Item 30. As each item is considered, allow group members to place their bids and counter bids out loud.

Note: This auction will run more smoothly and be a lot more fun if the group participates in it with reckless abandon. Polite formality will kill this activity! Encourage group members to enter into the spirit of the auction with emotion and enthusiasm.

After the Stewardship Auction has ended, ask group members to discuss their experiences of the auction and what they learned about themselves:

- Did anyone bid higher on an item than they had originally planned? Why?
- Did anyone bid lower than they had planned, or did anyone not bid at all on an item that they had planned to bid on? Why?
- Does everyone feel that they made good choices — that they were good stewards? Or did some participants make “fun” choices that were not necessarily based on good stewardship values?

Help group members interpret their Stewardship Auction experience. Broadly speaking, the thirty items up for bid can be categorized in terms of seven areas of focus:

- entertainment and celebrity adulation
- personal material possessions and physical appearance
- altruism and selfless service to humankind
- personal development, increased insight, religious understanding, and spirituality
- travel and adventure
- the use of addictive substances and stimulants



- investing in one's family

Encourage group members to think about their bidding behavior and to ask themselves the following two questions:

- Is your primary focus on yourself or on others?
- If your focus is on yourself, is your goal merely to have fun or maximize your pleasure, or is your goal personal development and increased insight?

Note: Emphasize to the group that while the Stewardship Auction is not a scientifically precise test or measuring instrument, it is a fun way to examine participants' attitudes. It provides a "snapshot" of how group members might prioritize several different stewardship-related values at this particular moment of their lives.

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### 4 What Is Stewardship Not About? (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Read over this activity before the group meeting. Time needed to complete this activity: approximately 20 minutes.

**Supplies:**

- newsprint or white board and markers

This simple activity demonstrates that stewardship encompasses all of life. Begin the activity by asking group members to brainstorm several things that do not entail stewardship. Ask: What aspect of your family or personal life, or any aspect of the church's ministry, is not related to stewardship? Write group ideas and suggestions on the newsprint or white board. The point of this activity is simply that almost anything group members can suggest — their hobbies, what they do on Saturdays, and even what movies they like — is somehow related to stewardship. Perhaps the only choices we make that have little or nothing to do with stewardship are the most trivial ones, like deciding what color blouse to wear to school or whether to put on one's left shoe or right shoe first! Remind the group that the flip side of this all-encompassing definition of stewardship is that God loves each one of us, accompanies us, and guides us throughout our lives, wherever we may be, 24/7.

There is a wonderful little chant that many Christian people use to express this simple but profound idea: "God is good! All the Time! All the Time! God is Good!" You and the group may end this activity by reciting it.

### 5 The Stewardship I See All around Me: A Journaling Activity

**Leader preparation:** Read over this activity description before the group meets. Many participants have journals, but small journals can be provided cheaply or simply "built" from different colors of paper and a stapler. Time required to complete this activity: approximately 20 minutes.

**Supplies:**

- journals

Note that we can see examples of good and bad stewardship everywhere. We only have to open our eyes and look — or unstop our ears and listen. Ask group



members to spend the next seven days observing and journaling several acts, behaviors, or overheard conversations reflecting generosity and good stewardship, as well as several greedy or selfish acts, behaviors, conversations, and examples of bad stewardship that they see and hear about them. Write these observations in a journal, and plan to report their findings at the next group meeting. These acts, behaviors, and conversations can be:

- personal
- within their own families
- at school and/or among their friends
- at the mall or at a restaurant
- on television or in a movie

## ⑥ Living Stewardship in Art: “The Orion Nebula”

**Leader preparation:** Examine a copy of the poster “The Orion Nebula,” and read over this activity before the group meets. Time required to complete this activity: 20–30 minutes.

### Supplies:

- poster, Orion Nebula, <http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters6>, by Stocktrek Images
- Bible

Have the group look at the poster without yet identifying it. Encourage participants to be silent for a while and to take a really good look at the image. Then ask them to discuss some or all of these questions: What’s going on in the poster? What do you see? What does this poster make you feel? How does it do that?

Then tell the group that this is a photograph of the Orion Nebula and offer this information about the Orion Nebula:

- The Orion Nebula is visible to the naked eye in a cloudless night sky.
- The Orion Nebula is approximately 1,344 light-years away from earth. A light year is the distance that light travels in a vacuum in one year. And since the speed of light is 299,792,458 meters per second, one light-year is about 5,878,630,000,000 miles. Even so, the Orion Nebula is the closest massive star formation to us.
- The Nebula reveals to us the process of how stars and planetary systems are formed from collapsing clouds of gas and dust.
- The Nebula is part of a much larger nebula called the Orion Molecular Cloud Complex. Stars are forming throughout the Orion Nebula; because of this heat-intensive process the region is particularly visible in the infra-red.
- The Orion Nebula is a “stellar nursery” in which new stars are being born. Approximately seven hundred stars are in various stages of formation within the nebula.

Thus the Orion Nebula is important because it may tell us how our own sun and Earth were formed some four-and-a-half billion years ago. Some of us see life's origin and the universe's origin in the Orion Nebula. This association may take us back to Genesis — and represents our past and all of Christian tradition. The Orion Nebula may remind us of a job or a mission that we have to undertake — that of space exploration. The Orion Nebula may represent our future — where our solar system is headed, and the need for humanity to explore and perhaps



someday colonize other worlds. This photograph of the Orion Nebula may also remind us of God's immensity and our own human frailty. Stewardship begins with humility, and looking at the Orion Nebula makes us very humble indeed! Ask: Does anyone think that perhaps there are other living beings on other planets out there — and that maybe God has entrusted those other worlds to those other created beings in the same way that God has entrusted the Earth to our keeping?

End this discussion by reading aloud the creation story (Genesis 1:1–31) as the group continues to look at the poster. Invite an astronomer, a scientist, or a science teacher — if such a resource person is available — to come and speak to the group at the next meeting about the Orion Nebula.

## Sending & Serving Activities



### 7 Grocery Budgeting and Shopping (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Read over this activity before the group meets. Time required to complete this activity: 20–30 minutes in the group; 2–4 additional hours at home during the week.

**Supplies:** None

One of the best ways to discover what living stewardship is all about is to go grocery shopping. After all, family meal preparation is one of the most common and important activities of stewardship. Many young people know little about this essential family activity (and many adults aren't very knowledgeable or good at it, either). In this activity you will help the group participants begin to plan the coming week's meals and then plan to accompany the family member who usually does the grocery shopping and meal preparation to the market. Some rules for this activity:

- Group members are to plan not only their own meals, including snacks and soda, but also to be involved in all aspects of meal planning and grocery shopping for the entire family.
- Meal planning and grocery shopping must be done with an eye on value in order to stretch your grocery dollar.
- It is usually not a good idea to go grocery shopping when you are hungry. Eat something before you go.
- While store-prepared foods (such as fried chicken) and fast food items (such as frozen pizzas) are convenient and fun to eat, they are often not a good value.
- Planning the week's meals and making a grocery list before you go to the store prevents impulsive purchases.
- If possible, group members should also participate in the preparation of at least one family meal during the coming week. (That means helping to cook, set the table, and/or wash dishes!)
- At the next group meeting, ask participants to report on how they did — and what they learned about being good stewards.

Have each person begin a grocery shopping list. You don't need to include those items you might already have on hand such as condiments and seasonings, although those items are necessary for cooking and eating!



## 8 What's Your Living Stewardship Quotient (LSQ)?

**Leader preparation:** Print copies of the Living Stewardship Quotient (LSQ) and the Living Stewardship Quotient Answer Key. Look over these items before the group meeting. Time required to complete this activity: about 45 minutes. Time-saving alternative: You can shave half this amount of time if you hand out and go over the LSQ in the group and assign it as homework. Be sure to allow time at the start of the next session to discuss this activity with the group as well as for participants to share their individual learnings.

### Supplies:

- pencils or pens
- copies of the Living Stewardship Quotient (LSQ), Attachment: Activity 8

This is intended as a fun way to learn more about Living Stewardship and to evaluate practices. The LSQ is not a scientifically accurate measuring instrument, but it is a "snapshot" of current individual faith attitudes and practices, particularly as they are related to stewardship. Explain to the group that the LSQ is a "snapshot" or a "mirror" of an individual's current attitudes and practices. It is a tool to help them improve their lives and practices. It is not judgment, by God or by the church or by the leader. No one is perfect and no one gets perfect scores. In fact, most who take the LSQ are quite remedial! Therefore, no one should be disheartened by their answers or by their score once the LSQs are graded.

Hand out the LSQ questionnaire and ask participants to fill them out. Encourage participants to treat this exercise seriously with honest answers. To encourage honesty, you may indicate to the group that the LSQ is confidential and that participants will not hand in their sheets when they have completed filling them out. In addition, participants should not write their names on the sheets or talk about their answers with other group members. Participants who do not want to fill out the LSQ may be permitted to silently read the questionnaire and reflect on their answers. Participants may keep the questionnaires. Once group members have completed filling out the LSQ, hand out the answer key and walk through the "grading" of the LSQs with the group. You might consider identifying a few (3–4) of the "safer" questions from the survey and inviting (but not requiring) group members to share their responses.

## 9 Christmas in July: Matthew 2:1–11

**Leader preparation:** Read over this activity before the group begins. (Note: When planning or publicizing this activity, change the title, Christmas in "July," to reflect the appropriate month.) This resource probably contains more content and group exercises than you can use. So please review it before the group meets and customize it for your participants. If you do not edit this activity, you will need 45–60 minutes to complete all of it.

### Supplies:

- Bibles
- hymnals
- a nativity crèche or set with Magi
- a CD player
- CDs of several popular Christmas songs, including "Santa Baby," <http://www.tinyurl.com/2f5hqk> (Earth Kitt); "All I Want for Christmas Is You" (Mariah Carey), <http://www.tinyurl.com/ycl8xcs>; "The Twelve Days of Christmas" (any vocal version), <http://www.tinyurl.com/w2y9o>; and "The Little Drummer Boy" (any vocal version), <http://www.tinyurl.com/2e6c95a>.



Begin by asking the group if they ever think about Christmas, or if they ever sing Christmas music, at times other than Advent or Christmas. Set up the nativity set or crèche and ask: Have you ever wondered why we celebrate Christmas only in December? If Christmas is a holiday of great joy, shouldn't we celebrate it more often? Tell the group that we learn a lot about stewardship, both positively and negatively, from our Christmas traditions and music, and from the Christmas story itself.

Play one or more secular Christmas songs that emphasize Christmas as a season for gift-giving and gift-receiving ("Santa Baby" and "The Twelve Days of Christmas" may be among the most blatant of such songs). After playing the song(s), ask the group: What do these songs tell us about stewardship and about Christmas? The group may offer several responses. For example,

- Some songs tell us that Christmas is about gift-giving and materialism.
- Some tell us that it's better to receive than it is to give.
- Some of the songs tell us that relationships are more important than gifts (but that gifts are nice, too).
- Many of these songs convey the idea that what's important is not the monetary value of the gift ("Santa Baby" aside), but the act of giving itself.

Ask someone in the group to read Matthew 2:1–11. Identify the Magi in the crèche and encourage group discussion around the question of what the arrival of the Magi, and this passage in particular, tells us about the Christmas story. Ask: What, if anything, do these verses tell us about stewardship? The most important gifts that the Magi brought to the Christ Child were not the material gifts, but, first, their gifts of time, energy, and abilities, after having embarked on a very uncertain journey — and second, their gift of worship.

### Reflect

As was noted above, these Faith Practices activities look at stewardship holistically: they envision stewardship as something that has to do with all aspects of life. Yet this simple idea may be difficult for group members to grasp. For many young people, modern life is complex and highly compartmentalized. What happens on Sunday morning has very little to do with the events of Saturday night, and both Saturday night and Sunday morning are irrelevant to the day-to-day happenings of the Monday-through-Friday school week. Because of the strong possibility that group members will fail to grasp this holistic concept of stewardship right away, it will be emphasized throughout many of the activities in the other Explorations. Even so, you may have to work extra hard to help group members understand the all-encompassing nature of stewardship.

Even Herod and his chief priests and teachers had stewardship roles to fulfill — they helped to advance the Christmas story — despite Herod's many fears and his jealousies. Note that Herod was frightened by the birth of Jesus because he saw Jesus as a potential rival king. Although Herod harbored these negative feelings toward Jesus, God used him to help the Magi in their quest. Herod and the Magi saw each other as strangers and may have been suspicious of each other's intentions and good will. (Explain that this fear of and hostility toward strangers is called xenophobia. We see a lot of xenophobia played out in the United States and in the world today.) Ask: Who or what groups of people today are like Herod? Who celebrates Christmas for what we might consider to be "the wrong reasons" or "negative" motives? Examples might include merchants and shop owners for whom Christmas is a season of nonstop selling and "getting into the black" financially; family members and friends who see Christmas only as a sentimental holiday of partying, decorating, and gift-giving and receiving — and who seem to miss the "real meaning" of Christmas; anyone who doesn't seem to think of Christmas, or celebrate it, the way we do.

Emphasize that one of the great lessons of this story is that it is difficult to judge the motives of other people, or to call other people hypocrites, because we don't know what is in their hearts. We too can be xenophobic! Even those who look different or are different from us, even those who think and act differently from us, can help and guide us — whether we are celebrating Christmas, worshiping God, or learning how to fix a flat tire or bake a cake.

Conclude this activity by playing "The Little Drummer Boy" and/or by having the group sing, "We Three Kings of Orient Are."

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### Activity 3: Stewardship Auction Sheet

**Instructions:** Have you ever been to a live auction, or participated in an Internet auction (like eBay)? If you have, then you know that a lot of the fun at auctions is in the competitive bidding. Many of us don't like to lose, and often we will bid up an item to the point where it becomes overpriced — and then we will continue bidding it higher in order to "win" the item. Sometimes, we are surprised by our own bidding behavior—by how much we wanted a particular item; by what we were willing to bid for that item in order to win it; by how badly we felt when we lost a bidding competition; and perhaps, by our "buyer's remorse" — our regret at the terribly high price we paid for an item.

All of this bidding psychology comes into play in the Stewardship Auction. Each bidder is assumed to have exactly 100 zillion dollars, which she or he can spend in any combination among thirty different items that are up for bidding. No bidder has more than \$100 zillion, and no bidder can bid or spend more than \$100 zillion. (Note: Bidders can choose not to spend either all or a portion of their allotted \$100 zillion.)

The thirty items up for bidding are listed below. To the right of each item description is a "Starting Bid" column; an "Order of Priority" column; and a "My Maximum Bid" column. The Starting Bid is the minimal cost (or in eBay terminology, the Reserve Price) of that item. The bidding for any particular item may go a lot higher than the starting bid—particularly if two or more bidders are competing for it—but the bidding must start at or above the "Starting Bid" price.

To the right of the "Starting Bid" column is an "Order of Priority" column. This column is for bidders to prioritize the items they want to bid on. They may do so with a simple numbering system, assigning a "1" to their highest priority item, a "2" to the second highest priority item, and so on until they get to "30" and have prioritized all of the items that are up for bidding (or as many as they want to bid on).

The "Maximum Bid" column provides spaces for bidders to do their budgeting—to apportion their \$100 zillion among the thirty items and assign maximum bidding values to each item they want to bid on.

Bidders are to take their time prioritizing the items they want to bid on, and then assign maximum bid amounts to each item.

Once the auction starts, group members are free to honor or ignore the "Order of Priority" and "Maximum Bid" amounts they assigned to each of the thirty items earlier.



### Activity 3: Stewardship Auction Sheet, p. 2

	Item Up for Bidding	Starting Bid	Order of Priority	Maximum Bid
Item 1.	Go on a world tour with Miley Cyrus, the Jonas Brothers, or Kanye West (or with your favorite music celebrity or band).	\$25 zillion		
Item 2.	Pay for a four-year college education (at any college or university you'd like to attend).	\$35 zillion		
Item 3.	Pay down your family's credit card (or other) debt.	\$40 zillion		
Item 4.	Own and drive a brand new car (make, model, specs, and color of your choosing).	\$20 zillion		
Item 5.	Go on a weeklong all-expenses-paid clothes shopping spree at your favorite, most exclusive stores.	\$35 zillion		
Item 6.	Spend a year traveling through Asia.	\$15 zillion		
Item 7.	Acquire expert-level knowledge of the Bible and of Christian theology.	\$30 zillion		
Item 8.	A lifetime supply of your favorite alcoholic beverages.	\$30 zillion		
Item 9.	Spend a year in poor rural African villages, helping modernize local farms, increase crop yields, and feed millions of starving people.	\$10 zillion		
Item 10.	Make a generous donation to your church, Salvation Army, or some other important humanitarian cause.	\$15 zillion		
Item 11.	Love, romance, and happiness: A relationship with the guy or girl of your dreams!	\$45 zillion		
Item 12.	Incredible eats and culinary delights! A lifetime of the best seven-course meals, including wondrously rich desserts, prepared by a team of world-famous chefs!	\$20 zillion		
Item 13.	Lots and lots of gold and diamond jewelry!	\$35 zillion		
Item 14.	Become a medical scientist, and cure the most deadly diseases; discover a cure for pancreatic cancer.	\$65 zillion		
Item 15.	All the drugs (marijuana, cocaine, stimulants, etc.—anything!) you could possibly want!	\$40 zillion		
Item 16.	A lifetime pass to all of the great theme parks and amusement parks (Disney, Six Flags, etc.).	\$25 zillion		
Item 17.	House and feed all the homeless people in Chicago.	\$50 zillion		



### Activity 3: Stewardship Auction Sheet, p. 3

	Item Up for Bidding	Starting Bid	Order of Priority	Maximum Bid
Item 18.	Restore a broken relationship with a parent or loved one who has died or is no longer in your life.	\$45 zillion		
Item 19.	Make a generous donation to a seminary or school of divinity, to ensure that the next generation of church leaders will have proper theological training.	\$30 zillion		
Item 20.	Spend a year at a monastery or other Christian retreat center and come away with an incredibly rich spiritual experience. What would you be willing to pay for peace of mind and closeness to God?	\$40 zillion		
Item 21.	Be like Donald Trump! Own hotels on Times Square and Sunset Boulevard.	\$30 zillion		
Item 22.	Become an astronaut: Get appointed to the crew of the first manned mission to Mars!	\$40 zillion		
Item 23.	Achieve incredible popularity and fame! Have lots of friends and fun! Be admitted to all the best, most exclusive clubs and restaurants!	\$40 zillion		
Item 24.	Acquire incredible musical talent. Become lead singer or instrumentalist in your favorite band, or sit in the first chair in a world-class orchestra!	\$30 zillion		
Item 25.	Classic good looks or beauty! How much would you pay to be the world's most beautiful girl, or most handsome guy—with a smoking-hot body?	\$50 zillion		
Item 26.	Spend a year traveling through Europe.	\$15 zillion		
Item 27.	Free admission to all the movies you want to see, and free music (CDs, downloads), and free pizza, for life.	\$25 zillion		
Item 28.	World-class electronics! Acquire the world's best gaming systems and games, along with a state of the art entertainment system (an HD television, DVD player, CD player, and Bose speakers)!	\$20 zillion		
Item 29.	A dream vacation for four, anywhere in the world, for four weeks per year, every year, for life.	\$40 zillion		
Item 30.	Save the world! Find a way to reverse global warming.	\$65 zillion		



## Activity 8: Living Stewardship Quotient (SLQ)

What is your LSQ (Living Stewardship Quotient)? Take this inventory and find out. (Please answer these questions honestly. No one but you will see what you write down.)

Scoring: Write an a, b, c, d, or e in the blank space next to each question:

a=absolutely, positively true; b=pretty true; c=it depends; d=rarely true; e=never, ever true

- \_\_\_ 1. When I want something I go right after it. Honestly, I rarely think about whether it will please God, or serve humankind for me to have it.
- \_\_\_ 2. I may be unpopular at school, but I practice sexual abstinence. I respect myself, and I am saving sex and my body for the person I marry.
- \_\_\_ 3. I shop for clothes at Walmart all the time. You know, low prices every day. I don't care where their clothes are made, or by whom.
- \_\_\_ 4. When it comes to movies, the more violence and sex they contain, the better.
- \_\_\_ 5. Junk food? I gotta admit, I eat it all the time. I love chips, pizza, and all kinds of fast food. It's convenient, and it tastes better than regular food.
- \_\_\_ 6. I never, never use slurs and epithets like the N-word. Never! Such words are disrespectful to all human beings — not just the person(s) you happen to be talking about.
- \_\_\_ 7. I'd go to church more often, but homework and sports and family events keep me kind of busy. And honestly, sometimes I'm so tired from Saturday night that I just sleep in on Sunday morning.
- \_\_\_ 8. I drink beer real often — and other alcoholic drinks occasionally.
- \_\_\_ 9. I always think about stewardship — and about serving God and helping people. Especially when I want to buy something, give my money to a cause, or make an important life decision. I rarely do anything without thinking things through in this way.
- \_\_\_ 10. I've made mistakes and done things that I regret. My parents don't know all the things I've done, but God does, and that worries me a lot.
- \_\_\_ 11. I have been known to smoke cigarettes and an occasional joint. I also have tried drugs a few times. So what?
- \_\_\_ 12. I give 10 percent of my allowance and my earnings from part-time jobs to the church.
- \_\_\_ 13. My favorite clothing stores are at the mall. My favorite, favorite store is Abercrombie & Fitch.
- \_\_\_ 14. I blow money as soon as I get it. It seems to burn a hole in my pocket. There's always more, right?



## Activity 8: Living Stewardship Quotient (SLQ), p. 2

- \_\_\_ 15. I go to church every Sunday, but mainly because my family goes. When I'm on my own, I'll still go, but not as much.
- \_\_\_ 16. I recycle *everything* — soda cans, paper, plastic bottles, and cellophane wrappers. Everything.
- \_\_\_ 17. I believe that God loves me and has a purpose for my life.
- \_\_\_ 18. I'm a vegan. I don't eat any meat or meat products — EVER — because I believe that all animals are sacred.
- \_\_\_ 19. I have had sex with various people a few times. It's no big deal. Everybody's doing it.
- \_\_\_ 20. When I save up enough money, I'm going to buy a set of wheels that goes really fast. Screw the gas mileage. I'll probably get a fast car even if my family doesn't want me to.
- \_\_\_ 21. I would never be caught dead in a thrift store. Only poor people — who look and smell funny — shop there.
- \_\_\_ 22. Sometimes I use the N-word when I'm with my friends. We all use it. It doesn't hurt anyone as long, you know, as long as everyone's cool about it.
- \_\_\_ 23. I'm very independent, and I like it that way. I don't pay much attention to what my family, my teachers, or the minister say.
- \_\_\_ 24. I believe that my body is sacred — a temple of the Holy Spirit. So I don't pollute or abuse it with tobacco, drugs, beer, or even junk food.
- \_\_\_ 25. I believe that the Earth is a trust to us from God — and that we have to respect and protect it. God will judge us severely if we don't.
- \_\_\_ 26. I don't know about going to college. After high school, I plan to make a lot of money. I'll do anything, even college, if it'll help me achieve my financial goals.
- \_\_\_ 27. I try to go to church every Sunday. I don't care who knows it or what my friends think.
- \_\_\_ 28. I like instrumental music, like jazz and classical. Popular music has to have socially responsible lyrics — you know, respectful language — or I just won't listen to it.
- \_\_\_ 29. My friends are very important to me. The truth is, I follow them and am influenced by them a lot — maybe too much.
- \_\_\_ 30. Global warming? What's that? I don't worry about pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. I mean, Mother Nature will clean up any messes we make, won't she? That's what rain and storms do — they wash away all our pollution and garbage.



## Activity 8: Living Stewardship Quotient Answer Key

To score questions 2, 6, 9, 10, 12, 16, 17, 18, 24, 25, 27, and 28, give yourself 5 points for every a; 4 points for every b; 0 points for every c; 2 points for every d; and 1 point for every e. Add all of these points up. This is your Positive Stewardship Score.

Positive Stewardship Score (PSS) = \_\_\_\_\_

To score questions 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 11, 13, 14, 15, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 26, 29, and 30, give yourself 1 point for every a; 2 points for every b; 0 points for every c; 4 points for every d; and 5 points for every e. Add all of these points up. This is your Negative Stewardship Score.

Negative Stewardship Score (NSS) = \_\_\_\_\_

Now add your Positive Stewardship Score and your Negative Stewardship Score together. This is your Living Stewardship Score.

\_\_\_\_\_ PSS + \_\_\_\_\_ NSS = \_\_\_\_\_ Living Stewardship Score

### How'd You Do?

- 130–150 points: You are a regular Living Stewardship saint, and your picture will be on stained glass windows in churches throughout the world — which you will think is utterly gross because that's the way real saints are. They don't like publicity. (Either that, or you're the group leader and you peeked at the answer key.)
- 105–129 points: You are incredibly faithful in your practice of Living Stewardship, and your picture will be a permanent fixture on the church bulletin board. You won't like that, either, because you think the bulletin board looks tacky.
- 80–104 points: Like some of us, you are learning to be more and more faithful in your practice of Living Stewardship. Your picture will be on your driver's license. (Sorry! That's the best we could do.)
- 55–79 points: Like most of us, you're really struggling to understand and practice Living Stewardship. If you continue on this pace, your picture will be on this website as a future Faith Practices writer.
- 30–54 points: Aww, c'mon. You're not taking this Living Stewardship stuff seriously. No one gets scores this low. Your picture will be on milk cartons. Either that, or your mug will be splashed across a glitzy 200-foot tall billboard in Times Square when you are named as Jay Leno's replacement on The Tonight Show.

Note: Neither this questionnaire nor its answer key is a scientifically precise measuring instrument of an individual's faith or stewardship. However, the Living Stewardship Quotient may be useful in providing participants with an immediate snapshot of how they are doing in their practice of Living Stewardship!

# Living Stewardship



## Exploration: Scripture

### About this Age Group

Youth (ages 11–15) are caught physically and emotionally halfway between childhood and adulthood. At times they think and act as young adults; at other times they behave and reason like children. Life is a mixed bag for them: They depend on their parents and/or caregivers for guidance, nurture, and transportation, yet increasingly they try to strike out on their own. In addition, youth are often overwhelmed by physical and emotional change. They may be embarrassed by the uneven growth of their bodies and limbs. Their clothes may not fit. They may begin to smell differently, and grow hair in strange places. Their faces may break out with “zits,” and their overactive hormones may produce a variety of strong psychological effects. Partly because of these formative changes, youth are concerned with many of the ultimate concerns of stewardship: Who am I? What is my life all about? How should I relate to other people and to the world around me? As they grapple with these questions, they may turn to the scriptures for guidance — particularly if they find connections to a nurturing congregation, and if they are guided by an interpretation of Scripture that affirms, rather than condemns, their questions and doubts.



## 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***

## Exploring & Engaging Activities



### 1 Simon Says (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Read over this activity before the group meets. You will need 30 minutes to complete all of it.

**Supplies:** None

## Leader Preparation

As you prepare to meet with your group, recall how scripture has been helpful in your own life. Every part of the Bible (but especially the Book of Isaiah, the Gospels, and the Book of James) teaches us about stewardship. Scripture helps clarify our thinking; confronts us with the choices and the decisions that we have to make throughout our lives; emphasizes God’s perspective regarding our possessions and our use of money, time, and other resources; and helps us change course when we are misusing our time, money, and other resources.

The writer of Hebrews calls scripture a “double-edged sword” (Hebrews 4:12–13)—and indeed, the Bible works like that. While scripture can guide us, misinterpretation and faulty application can set our thinking—in fact, our very lives—on a questionable course. We’ve all heard of the person who decided to do morning devotions by using the Bible like a Ouija board: closed eyes, flipping through the pages of the Bible, and randomly placing a finger on a verse in one of the pages. With now open eyes, this is what was revealed:

This activity is an introduction to two important ideas about being stewards and living stewardship: the use and misuse of scripture and free will, and learning how to think and act for ourselves. Begin by asking who has played the game “Simon Says.” Consider actually playing this game for a few minutes. Afterward, inform the group that no matter how “dumb” games are, they are often designed to teach important and valuable life lessons. Ask: What valuable life lessons does “Simon Says” teach us? Participants’ answers may include: Learning to follow a leader; learning to obey instructions; learning to discern between legitimate and authoritative instructions (preceded by the phrase, “Simon Says”), and illegitimate directives (not issued by Simon). Then ask: Does “Simon Says” teach us any bad lessons? Why might some teenagers and adults consider the game to be “dumb”? Answers may include: It is a mindless game; it encourages people to do dumb things, like hopping on one foot; it gets old (boring) really fast. You may agree with the group that “Simon Says” is a silly children’s game, but indicate that adults and teenagers have their own version of “Simon Says.”

Ask: What are some ways that teenagers and even adults play “Simon Says” — in other words, do dumb and mindless things? Group answers may include: Whenever they are influenced by peer pressure (especially when one’s friends encourage illegal, inappropriate, or irresponsible behavior); when they are under the influence of alcoholic beverages or drugs; and anytime they blindly do, believe, or accept what someone tells them to do, believe, or accept, without thinking for themselves.

Remind the group that living stewardship is about all life choices. Each of us — not our parents, not our friends, and not “Simon” — has to make our own life decisions. These decisions, both large and small, include:

- who our friends are
- whether or not we go to college, and what we’re going to study
- what our future careers are going to be
- who we will marry or be close to
- whether or not will attend church, and what kind of church we go to



“And Judas went forth and hanged himself” (Matthew 27:5). Not finding much devotional content in that verse, the second attempt revealed these words from Jesus: “Go therefore thou and do likewise” (Luke 10:37). Still dissatisfied, there was a third effort; the finger landed on Ecclesiastes 9:10: “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.”

This is, perhaps, a silly example of how not to do Bible study, but how many times have we carelessly used the Bible by reading isolated verses out of context? We need to read Scripture in light of the overall context of the Bible’s message, in light of the culture and history of the particular passage we are examining, in light of the Holy Spirit’s guidance, and in light of church’s tradition and practice.

*Prayer: O God, we pray now for these I am preparing to meet. Grant wisdom. Grant insight into the scriptures. Grant wisdom to use the Bible in an honorable manner that also encourages participants in their own authentic use of scripture. Calm me and help me to love and seek to understand the youth with whom I will be meeting. Amen.*

## Session Development

For each session, leaders may choose from nine activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. 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.” The first activity in each category is designed for “easy preparation” (able to be done with minimal preparation

Ask the group if there are any exceptions to this idea that we all have to make our own decisions and choices. For example,

- How are our parents “Simon”? Granted, some of our parents are pretty strict, but do we have to obey them unthinkingly, or can we discuss our desires and choices with them?
- In what ways should our parents, loved ones, or close friends have any influence over the decisions we make?
- How is the church, or the pastor, or even the teachings of the Bible “Simon”? Must we obey them uncritically, without thinking about what they are telling us to do? How do we know they are right? There are many different churches with vastly different teachings. Also, there are many, many ways to interpret Scripture; how do we know that we are reading the Bible correctly?
- How should the church, our pastor, or the Bible influence our decisions? Do not ask these questions rhetorically, but allow the group to discuss them.
- You may indicate to the group that we all have to make our own decisions about things, but that it is helpful to listen to the advice of our parents, loved ones, close friends, church, and pastor—and it is often helpful to be guided through the reading of the Scriptures.

## 2 Creation Dance

**Leader preparation:** You will need 20–30 minutes to complete this activity.

### Supplies:

- Bibles
- a CD player
- a CD of soaring and imaginative orchestral music, such as that composed by Igor Stravinsky <http://www.tinyurl.com/ycd7cmr> or Gustav Holst, <http://www.tinyurl.com/6e82e8>
- a room with lots of open floor space

This movement and activity is designed to help participants examine the creation story and the responsibility that God has given each of us to care for the earth. Distribute Bibles and invite someone to read aloud Genesis 1:26–31. Note that, according to this passage, each of us is created in God’s image and is entrusted with the care of both the earth and the animal world. God blessed the first humans and told them to fill the earth and subdue it. At the end of creation God pronounced all that had been created (and particularly, the creation of human beings) as “very good.”

Invite everyone to stand up, take three or four deep breaths, relax their bodies, and begin, when they are ready, to recreate the Genesis 1 story, as well as their worshipful response to God, through their own bodily movement. Play some soaring and imaginative orchestral music — perhaps from Gustav Holst’s *The Planets* or Igor Stravinsky’s *The Rite of Spring* — to inspire group members to let their bodies move about the room, worshipfully and without inhibition. Ask: How does it feel to know that you have been created in the image of God? What does it feel like that God calls your creation “very good”?

Group members should not be forced to participate in this activity. However, encourage those who protest that they “can’t dance” or who feel that they have “two left feet” that this activity does not assume that anyone is a good dancer. It



with supplies normally found at the church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.

- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose three activities, using one activity from each category.
- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose four or five activities, using at least one activity from each category.

is not a dance performance, but a movement and worship activity. Nothing has been choreographed; no one's movements will be a polished dance. Group members should be told that “no one is going to be looking at you,” and, in turn, they should not be watching one another. Rather, each participant should be in her or his own worship “zone,” communicating directly with God through bodily movement and dance.

Join in the movement and dance — particularly if you are not an exceptional dancer—in order to encourage those group members who are hesitant. After several minutes, invite group members to comment on their own personal feelings as they were enacting the creation story with their bodies.

### ③ Cookbooks and Recipes

**Leader preparation:** Arrange for access to the church kitchen. Be aware that there is a lot of material (content and group exercises) in this activity, so please examine it before the group meets, and feel free to “use what's best, and chuck the rest!” If you do not edit this activity, you will need 2–5 hours to complete it.

#### Supplies:

- one or more cookbooks
- appropriate ingredients to use in making a cake, casserole, or other dish that the group chooses
- pots, pans
- a refrigerator
- a stove
- various kitchen utensils
- Bibles

Supervise the learners as they look through a cookbook, select an appropriate recipe for a casserole or other entree or for a dessert, shop for the ingredients required by the recipe, and prepare and cook that food item.

This activity may require a half day to accomplish, particularly if all the members of the group participate in all the steps of the activity. Time-saving alternative: Some of these steps (such as the recipe selection and/or the shopping) can be done by you before the group meets.

Bring in one or more cookbooks and inform the group that together they are going to prepare and cook a selected entree, casserole, or dessert out of one of the cookbooks. Ask the group to select a recipe that all group members can participate in making (and eating). Be sensitive to any allergies in the group. You may want to supervise this process, ensuring that a recipe is, in fact, selected, and that the recipe is not too difficult for the group to make. Take the group shopping for the recipe ingredients. At a designated time (either during the next meeting, or on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon), lead the group into the church kitchen and guide them in preparing and cooking the identified entree, casserole, or dessert item.

Once the meal or dessert is completed, ask the group what they learned during this process. Read aloud Isaiah 55:1–3. In this passage, Isaiah, speaking in the voice of God, invites us to partake of spiritual food that is both nutritious and abundant. Ask the group where such spiritual food can be found. One place is in the Bible. Many consider the Bible to be a kind of cookbook. Ask the group what they think of that idea: Does the Bible contain “recipes” that have to be followed exactly, literally, and precisely? How is the Bible a different sort of cookbook?



How is the Bible a book that encourages everyone from the most talented chefs to those of us who barely know what to do with a frying pan? How does it help us to think about food, to experiment with it, and to prepare different kinds of food in different ways? What kinds of recipes are in the Bible? Only the most difficult and challenging ones that are easy to mess up, or easy and forgiving ones that anyone can follow and that produce delicious meals?

You may note that during the group's cooking experience, the recipe had to be followed almost exactly or the food might be ruined. For example, what would have happened to the meal if the group, for example, had put a half cup of salt into the food rather than a half cup of sugar (after all, salt and sugar look the same)? How is life like this? Do people have to follow God's recipe, or the rules that are in the Bible, exactly, or can people live a carefree and a spontaneous life, following few or no rules?

At the end of this activity, the group may enjoy the meal or dessert and interact socially.

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### 4 If God Is Like My Dad or Teacher or ... (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Depending on how deep you think this conversation may go, assure the group that everything shared in the meeting is confidential and not to be discussed outside of the group. In addition, invite any group member who would like to talk further, or privately, about these topics to see you after the meeting. Feel free to customize and adapt this material to the needs of your group members. Since this activity probably contains more content and activities than you have time for, use only what you think is best. If you do not shorten this activity, you will need 30–45 minutes to complete all of it.

**Supplies:** None

How we think about the Bible and how we think about God often depend, for good or for ill, on our relationships with our parent(s) or grandparent(s), our teachers, and our minister. Psychologists tell us that most of us tend to “project” our feelings toward the important authority figures in our lives onto the church, the pastor, and ultimately, onto the Bible and onto God. What this means is that if we have easygoing, healthy relationships with our parent(s) or those who raised us, with our teachers, and with our pastors, we will likely have a similarly positive relationship with God and a positive view of the Scriptures. If, on the other hand, we see our parent(s), teachers, and/or ministers as stern, unforgiving, uncaring, or as “not having been there for us” when we really needed them, we may tend to view the Bible and God in the same way.

Ask the group to put on their imagination caps and discuss the following questions:

- If God were just like your mother, grandmother, or aunt, what would God be like?
- If God were just like your father, grandfather, or uncle, what would God be like?
- If God were just like your pastor, what would God be like?
- If God were just like your favorite teacher at school, what would God be like? How about if God were just like your least favorite teacher?



- Similarly, what would you think of the Bible, if it were written by: Your mother? Your father? Your pastor? Your favorite teacher? Your least favorite teacher?

Our relationships with the most important authority figures in our lives — especially with our parent(s) or with those who raised us — color our relationship with God and our attitude toward the Bible. This is why people who have had a bad relationship or no relationship with their father often find it hard to think of God in the traditional way that the church has often depicted God, as "our heavenly father." This is why we need multiple images for and ways of thinking about, God. Some best relate to God as father. Others prefer to think of God as mother. Many prefer altogether different symbols and images of God. If you have a hard time thinking about God or relating to the idea of God, it may be because your images of God don't work. One reason they may not work is because of your relationship with your parent(s) or those who raised you, your teachers, and your pastor. You may have the same struggle with your attitude toward the Scriptures. If you tend to think of those significant others as stern and uncaring, you may find the Bible to be an impersonal book of rules. On the other hand, if you have had a positive relationship with those significant others, you may see the Bible quite differently — perhaps as God's personal love letter to you.

Conclude by asking group members: How do you think of God? How do you think of the scriptures? Invite the group members to think about these two questions during the coming week.

### 5 Rules, Rules, Rules.

**Leader preparation:** It may take 20–25 minutes to complete the entire activity.

#### Supplies:

- Bibles
- newsprint or white board and markers

Ask the group to identify all the rules and laws that they have to live under—at home, at church, at school, on the athletic field or court, and in society at large. List these rules and laws on newsprint or a whiteboard as the group brainstorms. As follow up, consider asking the group about the relevance and practicality of all these rules:

- How many of the rules and laws that you live by are sensible? Tell me a rule that you have to keep that makes good sense.
- Are any of the rules that you have to keep idiotic? Which ones? Why don't you like those rules? Why are they dumb?"
- Are you able to keep all (or most) of these rules and laws without breaking them?
- How many of you break the rules? What happens when you get caught?

Indicate that many young people today view the Bible as a book of rules that doesn't have much purpose or meaning. Ask the group if they can think of any rules or commandments in the Bible that seem harsh. (Often, our harsh reading of the church's rules, and our misreading of scripture, encourages guilt and legalism more than stewardship.) Note that despite their unpopularity, many rules and laws exist to protect us, and some are like the law of gravity. We don't break them; they break us if we ignore them. In reality, the Bible is really not an oppressive rule book. Jesus summarized the two greatest commandments in all of scripture as, first, loving "the Lord your God with all your heart, and with



all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength"; and, second, loving "your neighbors as yourself" (Mark 12:30–31). These two commandments, Jesus added, summarize all the others.

In 1 Corinthians 10:23, Paul writes that "all things are permissible" for the Christian, "but not everything is beneficial," or constructive. This doesn't mean that we should stop abiding by our parents' or teachers' rules, but it does mean that the Christian life is meant to be lived freely, with joyful abandon. We should not be experiencing any guilt or legalism; those feelings are not from God.

Ask the group how this discussion and these scripture verses have given them a new perspective concerning rules. Invite participants to share their thoughts.

### 6 Living Stewardship in Art: The Baobab Tree

**Leader preparation:** Study the poster before you use it with the group. This activity will take 20–30 minutes to complete.

#### Supplies:

- Bible
- poster, Baobab, Okavango Delta, Boswana, <http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters5> by Pete Oxford

Hold up the poster of the baobab tree and ask the group: Who can identify what kind of tree this is? Does this tree look strange or different to you? In what way? What is unusual about this tree? This is a baobab tree, and it grows in mainland Africa, Australia, and Madagascar. Some species of baobab live thousands of years. The trunk is very thick — it can be 23 to 36 feet in diameter. Why do you suppose its trunk is so thick? What do you suppose is inside the trunk? (Answer: water.) It can be thousands of years old. What lessons might the baobab tree teach us about stewardship? Some possible answers are:

- It stores water. It is a steward of life in a dry and parched landscape.
- Its branches spread out everywhere.

The baobab tree also reminds us of scripture — in the same way it reminds us of stewardship:

- It is a source of living water in a dry and parched landscape.
- It can be thousands of years old.
- If the trunk is like the scriptures, the branches are like all the different churches and denominations within Christianity. There is one trunk but there are many, many branches. There is one Bible but there are many different churches and doctrines.

Emphasize that the baobab tree's many branches might suggest to us that no one person, church, or denomination has the last word in understanding Scripture. There is no exclusively right way to understand the Bible's teachings. The Bible consists of many testimonies and stories of faith. Note that the Bible's stories are not prescriptive; rather, they are descriptive. Each story is but a single perspective — one of many different perspectives that are found in the Bible — concerning faith. We must not follow or obey any one harsh Bible story slavishly, to the exclusion of all the other stories of grace and reconciliation that are also found in the Scriptures. Invite participants to share any other observations or reflections on the poster of the Baobab tree. Wait several moments as participants think and share.



## Sending & Serving Activities

### 7 Traffic (Easy Preparation).

**Leader preparation:** There may be more content and elements in this activity than you will want to use. Review this activity before the group meets and to customize it for your participants. If you do not edit this activity, you will need 30–40 minutes to complete it. In addition, participants will need 1–2 hours during the week for journaling. Provide a small, inexpensive notebook, or allow the group to build their own journal with construction paper and a stapler.

**Supplies:**

- a journal

Invite group members to think about how many hours they spend in traffic during a typical day, week, month, and year. How do they spend this time — whether they are on a school bus, in Mom's van on the way to soccer practice, or going to the mall? Do they sleep? Eat? Socialize with friends? Do homework? Goof off?

Invite group members to journal every commuting experience they have for an entire week. Journal entries may include beginning and ending times of the commute, the starting location and destination of each trip, what they did during the bus or car ride, and perhaps all the words and messages (road and street signs, signs on store windows, bumper sticker messages, songs and advertisements on the radio, conversations in the bus or car) that they remember reading or hearing during each car or bus ride. At the next group meeting, ask participants to discuss what they learned from this journaling experience.

In biblical times, and even as recently as 150 years ago in "modern" countries like the United States, people took shorter trips, and most of those trips were either on foot or on the back of a horse or donkey. Thus, Jesus and Paul traveled from town to town on foot. Such earlier modes of travel may seem far less efficient and convenient than modern transportation. On the other hand, Paul never had to pay \$3.00 per gallon for unleaded gas.

Similarly, Jesus might not have had the leisurely time to teach his disciples or write his "Sermon on the Mount," if he had to sit at intersection after intersection, waiting for red lights to change and for rush hour traffic to start moving again. People in earlier times were able to "multitask" much easier than they can today; 150 years ago, some ministers even read the Bible and wrote their sermons on horseback! Today it is difficult, not to say dangerous, to do any of those things in a car or bus — especially if you are driving.

Back in the old days, a person could not go to as many places as quickly as possible today. In biblical times, or even 150 years ago, teens did not go to the mall to "hang out." Nor did they go long distances to work part-time jobs; they had chores to do on the family farm. So, how might it be a good thing or a bad thing to be able to travel to a lot of places in a single day? How might life and stewardship have been better in the past, when there were no cars, and how might they be better now?

Life was surely harder in the past, but perhaps people were healthier in earlier times. Today, many of us drive everywhere we go and get much less exercise. Considering all the advantages and disadvantages of modern travel, which mode of transportation is more efficient? Why? How is all the time we spend on buses or in cars, waiting for red lights to change and for traffic to start moving again,



good stewardship? Ask if they think that someday the world may run out of gasoline and people will have to walk, ride on horseback, or in a carriage or wagon to get to their destinations again. Would that be a bad thing or a good thing? Why? Or, is it certain that someone will discover a new type of fuel or a new kind of engine to replace gasoline and the internal combustion engine?

You may conclude this activity by asking how the youth can be better stewards of the time they spend commuting back and forth from home to school, and in traffic, every day.

## 8 What's the Bible Got against Rich People?

**Leader preparation:** Read this activity over before the group meets. Time requirement: 20–30 minutes.

### Supplies:

- photocopies of 1 Timothy 6:6–10, 17–19 in several different Bible translations and paraphrases
- color highlighters
- pens and pencils

Hand out photocopies of 1 Timothy 6:6–10, 17–19. These verses should be copied from many different translations and paraphrases of the Bible in order to give the group a diverse way of reading and understanding this passage. Ask group members to read this passage silently and to underline or circle key words and phrases that strike them as surprising or important, using the colored pens or highlighters. Encourage them to be creative in what they draw, write, or underline on their pages. The important thing is that they interact in some meaningful way with what these verses say.

After ten minutes, ask someone to read the entire passage. Then ask other group members what their versions and paraphrases say: Are the wording differences substantial? How? Next, ask the group several leading questions about this passage:

- What does this passage say to you?
- What do God and the Bible have against rich people? Does God dislike the rich? What is the real issue that Paul is driving at in this passage? Is Paul concerned about money and wealth themselves or is he saying that people should not get overly preoccupied with their money or addicted to their wealth?
- Some ministers and Bible scholars say that God has a preferential option for the poor — in other words, that, God prefers poor people. Do you agree with this idea? Why or why not?
- What exactly is “poor”? What income level defines poverty? And what is “rich”? How much money do you need to be considered wealthy? Suggest that by global standards, the vast majority of people in the United States are rich!

## Reflect

All of the activities in this Exploration deal in some way with our use and misuse of scripture. This should be of fundamental concern to all of us who say that our sole authority (or a major authority) for both what we believe and what we do is scripture. If we rely on scripture (either a lot or just somewhat) for moral guidance, then we should get it right. We have to understand it properly. There is a

Ask what these verses and this discussion have to do with stewardship. Is God telling you to do or stop doing something? What might that be? Are you going to start — or stop?



sense in which we can make the Bible say almost anything that we want it to say. We can even make it condone suicide. Indeed, there is no end to the number of arguments that we can have or to the number of Bible scholars who insist that their views about any one particular interpretation of a Bible passage are the right ones. There are many reasons why we don't get scripture right: We misinterpret the Bible when we read verses out of context, in an isolated way; insist on reading all parts of the Bible literally, failing to understand that much of scripture is symbolic and metaphorical; ignore the historical and cultural circumstances of what was written and apply the Bible's teachings directly and literally to today's circumstances; use scriptures to proof-text our own political and/or social biases and viewpoints; and ignore the psychosocial dynamics of family systems theory, which suggests that many of the things that happen in our family units affect how we think about the church, about our pastor, and our church family — not to mention how we think about God and how we read the Bible. The bottom line is that while we cannot all become full-time Bible scholars (which would probably be counterproductive anyway, since even Bible scholars get the Bible wrong), we can all be more cautious when we read and study the Bible. We can all be more aware of our capacity to misinterpret and misapply the scriptures. We can increase our chances of interpreting a scripture passage correctly when we read it carefully; when we consider its cultural and historical context, as well as the context of the rest of scripture; and when we test our interpretation and application of that passage by talking about it with our parents and loved ones, with our pastor or Christian education teacher, and with wise friends at our church!

### 9 What Do I (or Can I) Give God?

**Leader preparation:** Time requirement: 30–40 minutes.

**Supplies:**

- white paper
- construction paper
- pencils and pens
- crayons
- scissors
- glue

Remind the group that stewardship is about all of life. It is not only about giving money to the church on Sunday morning; it is also about how we spend our money on Saturday night. Stewardship does not happen only at church; it happens everywhere we go, on any day of the week. Explain that we serve and give to God by taking care of our bodies and by helping our neighbors. We serve God and give to God by not wasting energy and by caring for the earth. What are other ways we serve and give to God? Brainstorm with participants about all the possible ways of doing stewardship.

We serve God and give to God, not because we have to and not because we owe God something (when we owe something, it's no longer a gift; it becomes an obligation), but because we want to — because of all that God has done for us and given to us. What has God done for us and given to us?

Invite participants to write a poem or a brief statement, to draw a picture, or to cut out a picture from a piece of paper telling what they give, or what they want to give, to God. You may add that giving to God may be about money, but it may be other things, too, like using a special talent that we have in a special way. We can give our time to God by volunteering to clean up a room in the church or by taking groceries to a food shelter.

After a suitable period of time, ask individuals to share their art or read what they have written with the group and to talk about their understanding of stewardship.

# Living Stewardship



## Exploration: Discipleship

### About this Age Group

Finding themselves trapped physically and emotionally halfway between childhood and adulthood, youth (ages 11–15) are concerned with the ultimate big questions of stewardship and discipleship: Who am I — and whose am I? What is my life purpose? How am I related to God, to other people, and to the world around me? Sometimes they think and behave like young adults, but at other times they act and reason as children. Thus, they find life to be something of a mixed bag: They rely on Mom, Dad, and/or their caregivers for nurture, guidance, and rides to school or the mall, yet increasingly they try to negotiate life on their own terms. In addition, youth are often overwhelmed by their own physical and emotional changes. They may be embarrassed by the uneven growth of their bodies and limbs. Their clothes may not fit right. They may begin to smell differently, and grow hair in odd places. Their faces may break out in “zits,” and their raging hormones may produce a variety of other strong psychological and behavioral effects. Partly because of these formative changes, many youth seek to deepen their faith and become followers of Christ. Both their discipleship as well as their understanding of stewardship will be enhanced if they are connected to a nurturing congregation that allows them to voice their questions and doubts, and particularly if their parents or friends also attend church.



## About this Exploration

Generational and experiential differences condition how we perceive, understand, and practice discipleship. Being 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***

## Session Development

For each session, leaders may choose from nine activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. 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.” The first activity in each category is designed for “easy preparation” (able to be done with minimal preparation with supplies normally found at the church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.

- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose three activities, using one activity from each category.
- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose four or five activities, using at least one activity from each category.

## Leader Preparation

Discipleship is followership. Quite simply, it is about learning how to follow Jesus and his teachings. As such, discipleship is a journey on which every Christian, from the youngest child to the oldest saint, is walking together. We are all following Jesus — some of

## Exploring & Engaging Activities

### ❶ Blessing Children and Confounding the Rich: Mark 10:17–22 (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** If you do not shorten this activity, you will need 30–40 minutes during the group meeting and an additional 2–3 hours of homework.

#### Supplies:

- Bible

Ask group members to close their eyes and listen as the two stories are read—first, a story about Jesus blessing a group of small children (Mark 10:13–16), then the story immediately following of Jesus' encounter with the rich young man (Mark 10:17–22). Stimulate discussion by asking several key questions:

- What did you hear? What are these two stories about? Why are these two stories side by side in the Bible?
- Why do you think Jesus praised the little children but criticized the rich young man? What spiritual qualities did the small children have that were hidden or absent in the rich young man? Put another way, what's so holy about sniffling little children who own nothing, are completely dependent, and aren't very useful? And what's so bad about a rich person who follows the law, is socially conscious, and tries to please God?
- What did Jesus love about the rich young man? What did Jesus find lacking in him?
- Is this passage about money? If not, what? If it is, what is the message?
- What is this story telling you and me to do? Does God prefer the poor? Does God want us to be poor? If so, in what sense?

Suggest that although we may not feel economically affluent, each of us is wealthy by global standards. Following this discussion, encourage participants to conduct a self-inventory during the coming week. They may do this creatively by writing a spiritual resume and a letter of introduction, addressed to God. Job applicants often write a one-page letter of introduction and a resume to describe their skills and qualifications for a certain job, and to tell prospective employers why they should hire them. During the next week, apply to God for a job. As part of that, write a personal resume and a letter of introduction, telling God why you are the right person for this job.

An alternative assignment might be to encourage participants to spend time with their younger sisters or brothers, to volunteer in the church nursery, or to help teach kindergartners in the church's Christian education program during the coming weeks. They might visit a playground or volunteer at a day-care center. Then, ask participants to spend some time with adult church members who are “rich” or financially affluent. (This part of the assignment may be more difficult



us quite closely, and others a bit behind. We are all fellow pilgrims, walking on the path of discipleship. There is an old saying that discipleship is easier caught than taught. This is true of stewardship as well. What this means is that discipleship and stewardship are not mere classroom subjects that we teach and participants learn sitting behind a desk—the way that a lot of teaching occurs at school. Rather, the best way for us to learn about discipleship and stewardship is the same way that Jesus’ disciples learned about discipleship and stewardship: We learn by following.

Jesus taught his followers as he lived with them, ate with them, worshiped with them, rested with them, and laughed, cried, and yawned with them. This is how the participants can best learn about discipleship and stewardship: by putting these spiritual disciplines into practice. Our role as leaders is not to “teach” our group members, or to knock certain facts or content into their heads, but simply to be with our groups and to “do” discipleship and stewardship with them. This is why most of these activities have didactic (“talky”) elements, but their focus is on practical and experiential learning.

*Prayer: God, you call all of us to be disciples of Jesus. Help me to follow him — not because I have to, but because I love you and want to be Christ’s disciple. Help me now as I prepare to meet with my group. I acknowledge that I am not perfect in my own discipleship and stewardship, but I want to do better. Help me, so that my discipleship and stewardship may be contagious, and the young people with whom I interact will “catch” the same desire that I have to follow Christ. Amen.*

than spending time with children.) At the next meeting, ask participants what differences they saw between the children and the adults.

Point out that it is probably not money per se, but the love of money that gets us into trouble (1 Timothy 6:10). Put simply, we can either use money to serve people and God, or we can try to use people and God to serve the interest of making money. In the end, it may come down to where our heart is, and to how much time and availability we have for people and for God.

### ② “Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love”

**Leader preparation:** Depending on how your group might react and to make this a little more interactive, try foot washing in this session (for those who are willing), or at least act it out so they can visually see the vulnerability needed to lean over and wash another’s feet. Time requirement: 30–40 minutes.

#### **Supplies:**

- copies of the hymn “Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love” (tune: Chereponi), <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong4>

Ask the group to look at the words to “Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love.” Explain that this hymn was written in 1963 by Tom Colvin, a career missionary in Chereponi, Ghana. The tune is based on an African folk melody. Colvin wanted to write a hymn about Christian love — especially about the humility needed on the part of rich, Western (and white) Christians as they worked with the poor in Africa. “Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love” was the result. Colvin shared the hymn with the Iona Community in Scotland. From there, its popularity quickly spread.

Ask a group member to read the lyrics slowly. Use these questions for discussion:

- What is this hymn about? What does it say to you?
- What are all these references to foot-washing (in the first and fifth verses) about? What is foot-washing and why was it done? Where did the tradition start? (See John 13:1–16, Jesus washing the feet of his disciples; this has become one of the faith practices of many churches, an expression of humility and love.)
- Is foot-washing something we should be doing today? How? Some would say that foot-washing doesn’t translate well into twenty-first-century American culture. What do you think? Why does this hymn emphasize it as something that we should be doing?
- If foot-washing is only a metaphor (that is, a symbol) for serving others and for discipleship, what might some twenty-first-century “equivalent” acts be? What can you and I do for others, to demonstrate our love for God, our humility, and our discipleship without literally taking off their shoes and getting our feet wet? Does anyone have any ideas?
- Ask participants to have this discussion sometime during the coming week with someone they know and respect outside the group (perhaps with a parent, a pastor, or someone at church). What do they think some “equivalent” acts of humility, service, and discipleship might be? Perhaps washing the dishes after a meal? Then group members may arrange to perform that act for someone.

Sing “Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love” together.



### ③ Stewardship in Popular Music

**Leader preparation:** Read this activity before the group meets. Time requirement: 30 minutes. Gather some of the popular music that the youth listen to, or ahead of the session contact the youth and ask them to bring their favorite songs.

**Supplies:**

- newspaper or white board and markers
- CD player
- CDs of popular music that group members listen to

Remind the group that stewardship is not simply about giving money to the church; more basically, it has to do with all of the decisions that we make in life. Point out that popular culture (the movies and television shows that we watch and the music we listen to on the radio, on MTV, and on our iPods) conveys important messages to us and influences our values, concerning stewardship. Indeed, popular culture may affirm positive and generous stewardship values, or it may impart self-centered and materialistic messages. What values and messages about stewardship are transmitted in the popular music that we listen to? To find out, ask individuals in the group to brainstorm and list some of their favorite songs. The responses to this question may fall in the country, rock, metal, hip-hop, or rap genres — or they may fall into other categories. Regardless of what style of music, write the song title and the singer's or band's name on the newsprint or whiteboard.

Give several examples or play each song on the CD player. Examples of songs that you may want to list and/or play for the group may include:

- "With or Without You" <http://www.tinyurl.com/2dzbk2k> and "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For" <http://www.tinyurl.com/5nopdl> by U2,
- "Born to Run" by Bruce Springsteen, <http://www.tinyurl.com/29ze4dq>
- "Home," <http://www.tinyurl.com/d9drl9>, and "Over You," <http://www.tinyurl.com/333mjgk> by Daughtry
- "How Do You Like Me Now," <http://www.tinyurl.com/2appcqz>, and "Nights I Can't Remember, Friends I'll Never Forget," <http://www.tinyurl.com/2cyg7mq>, by Toby Keith
- "You Belong to Me," <http://www.tinyurl.com/24qcjsf>, by Taylor Swift
- "Street Jeopardy," <http://www.tinyurl.com/29bofl4>, by Wyclef Jean

Invite discussion around the overall message of some or all of these songs regarding stewardship. Ask participants to contribute their own favorite songs to the list. Encourage them to recite (or paraphrase) the lyrics of each song that is listed, and to discuss the song's message with regard to stewardship. At the conclusion of this brainstorming session, ask participants if they had any other favorite songs that they might name. Maybe they left them off the list because of their risqué or abusive lyrics and message.

Continuing practice assignment 1 (optional): Announce that at the next group meeting you will bring in CDs of some of these songs and play them. (Alternatively, you may ask group members to bring their own CDs to the next meeting, but you must be sure that they will.) At the next meeting, play these songs and ask the group to evaluate the stewardship message contained in their lyrics: Do the songs convey a healthy sense of stewardship? Are they oriented toward serving others? Or do they promote selfish, violent, hostile, or offensive behaviors and attitudes?



Continuing practice assignment 2 (optional): Encourage group members to write a poem or a song about stewardship during the coming week and to bring it to the next meeting to share it. Since many group members may be too embarrassed to perform a song, or even to try to write one, encourage group members to simply do their best: no one is expecting them to give a polished performance, and indeed, they do not have to sing if they do not want to. You might also suggest this as a project for groups of two to four persons.

## Discerning & Deciding Activities

### 4 How Much Junk Food Do I Eat? (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Read over this activity before the group meets. This activity will require 20–30 minutes during the group session to complete, and another 1–2 hours of homework during the week.

**Supplies:**

- journals

Remind the group that living stewardship is about all of life and not just about finances. Indeed, one of the most important aspects of living stewardship is about how we treat our bodies: how much rest we get; whether we use addictive and/or illegal substances, such as alcohol and drugs; whether we engage in sexually promiscuous behaviors; and how much "junk food" we eat.

Ask group members to record or make journal entries of everything that they eat over the next week. "Junk food" is defined as food with high caloric content with little nutritional value, such as chips, candy, desserts, donuts or pastries, and ice cream products. It also includes food (such as burgers, fries, wings, fried chicken, etc.) that can be purchased at "fast food" restaurants. Pizza may or may not be in the "junk food" category, depending on how it is prepared. "Junk food" also may include similar food items that are purchased at the supermarket for home consumption.

Group members are to "eat normally." They should not consciously eat either a healthier or greater "junk food" diet than usual. At the next group meeting, participants will report their discoveries, insights, and findings. At that meeting, ask if they were surprised by the quantity of junk food they had consumed over the course of a week. Remind the group that while North Americans and citizens of many Western and Asian countries have access to a great many fast food restaurants, and to a wide variety of "junk food," there are many poor people in underdeveloped countries in Africa, Latin America, Asia, and elsewhere, who do not have very much to eat.

When we North Americans eat meat from other countries, the overseas producers of that meat have to grow crops to feed their livestock, rather than growing crops for food for themselves. We assume (but don't know for sure) that many overseas food producers are poor, and perhaps hungry, and would be better off eating the food they grow rather than exporting it to the United States. What are the costs that those overseas producers incur, and what kind of profit do they make? Would they be better off economically if they did not export meat to North America, or would ending such trade create economic hardship for overseas farmers, ranchers, and meat producers?



When we eat fruits and vegetables out of season, where are they coming from and at what cost to the growers?

There are many correlations between what North Americans eat and the world hunger problem. However, you don't have to overeat or eat things you don't like just because people are starving in some remote corner of the Earth.

Note that even though our eating habits did not cause the world hunger problem, there are still important stewardship issues here for us. Invite the group to discuss this important question: What do you think? What can we do to provide food for those without enough?

### 5 Reading Our Money

**Leader preparation:** Make a copy of the story "The Rock Star." Since this activity is intended to be a resource for you, it probably contains more content and group exercises than you can use! If you do not edit this activity, you will need 45–60 minutes to complete all of it.

**Supplies:**

- pocket change: some coins, a dollar bill, maybe a five- or a ten-dollar bill;
- a copy (or several copies) of the story, "The Rock Star," Attachment: Activity 5

Ask participants if anyone has any money in their pockets. If your relationship with the participants is familiar and easygoing, you may improvise a joke, such as, "Good. Let me have it! Everybody, pass your money forward!" This will spark howls of laughter and good-natured protest from group members. You may then add, "Well, they told me to do something religious, so I thought I would take an 'offering'!" If your relationship with the group is less familiar, you may comment on the fact that most people are very protective of their money, and many get nervous — if not turned off — when the church takes an offering or asks them to contribute financially to its ministry. You may want to assure the group at this point that an offering is not going to be taken during the meeting.

Then ask the participants to think about how they felt when they were asked to surrender their money (or when the subject of church offerings came up): You know, many of us get a funny, queasy feeling when someone asks us to loan them money or hits us up for dollars. Some of us even get uptight when the church takes an offering. Why is that? Encourage group discussion regarding this question. Then suggest the radical idea that our money is not really ours. Someone once said that all money is tainted: "Tain't yours. 'Tain't mine. 'Tis God's." What do you think of that idea? Is our money really ours — or is it God's? Why did you answer as you did?

Show the pocket change you have brought. Ask: How many of you read your money? Take a good look these coins and dollar bills. What messages and pictures do you see? At this point, focus on the phrase "In God We Trust," which is found on all United States currency. Ask: Why does it say "In God We Trust" on this money? Does everyone in the United States really trust in God? Someone has suggested that when they wrote those words, they misspelled the word, "gold" and what they meant to say was, "In Gold We Trust." What do you think of that idea? Do you think that maybe Americans think about money too much — that we trust in our gold more than we trust in God?

Now ask the group to look at the back side of an American dollar bill. In addition



to the “In God We Trust” inscription, there are two circles on either side of the large word ONE. These circles are the two sides of the Great Seal of the United States. In the circle on the left, there is a pyramid with the eye of God positioned directly over it, looking out, presumably, at you and me. The Latin words, *Annuit Coeptis*, on either side of this all-seeing eye, literally mean “God approves of our undertakings.” The phrase at the bottom of this circle, *Novus Ordo Seclorum*, means “a new order for the ages.” Ask: So, what do you think of these phrases and of the picture of God’s all-seeing eye? Does God really keep an eye on people like that, 24/7, 365 days a year? And does God really approve of everything that we do? Some Christian people say that, yes, God always watches us and approves of everything that “our” country does. Other Christian people say that, no, God’s eye is not constantly watching us, and that God does not necessarily approve of everything that we do. What do you say?

To summarize, ask: So now that we’ve finished reading our money, what conclusions can we draw? What does God have to do with our money? Encourage discussion on this point. Remind the group of that old saying that “all money is tainted: ‘Tain’t yours. ‘Tain’t mine. ‘Tis God’s.”

Conclude by reading the story of the “Rock Star” to the group.

## 6 Electronics

**Leader preparation:** Read over this activity before the group meets. Time requirement: 20–30 minutes of group time and another 1–2 hours of homework.

**Supplies:** None

This activity has to do with our relationship with electronics. In particular, it is about the amount of time that we spend using electronic devices, such as cell phones, iPods and other portable music players, computers and gaming systems, and television and DVD player systems. Trigger discussion by asking: If you were on a deserted island and you could only have three electronic devices with you, and those devices were guaranteed to work, which three electronic devices would you want with you? Why would you want those three devices?

Ask the group how many of them are on Twitter or MySpace or Facebook. Ask: How, do you think previous generations of people who did not have these devices and did not have online social networking get along? How do you suppose they communicated with one another? How did they listen to music? What did they do for fun and entertainment?

Acknowledge that the virtual world that we access through our electronic devices sometimes seems better or more attractive than the real world. Often, the virtual world is easier or more convenient to function in. For example, some of us are not natural athletes, but all of us can play electronic basketball. In addition, we can communicate with our friends conveniently with our cell phones and computers. Ask: What, do you think, does this discussion have to do with stewardship? How many of your parents restrict your use of electronic devices, such as television and video games. Why do you suppose your parents are concerned about how much television you watch every day, or how many hours you spend playing video games?

Remind group members that stewardship is about nearly everything that we think about and do in our daily lives. It is about the choices that we make, and it is about the choices that we don’t make because we choose to do something



else. Stewardship is also about our use of time, and it is about what we spend our money on. Therefore, our use of electronic devices has some relationship to stewardship.

Suggest that the use of electronic devices is not automatically right or automatically wrong, or “good stewardship” or “bad stewardship.” Rather, the question of whether anything that we do is good or bad stewardship is related to how much time we spend doing that thing, and whether we are avoiding something else (like homework, or household chores, or face-to-face human interactions) by doing that thing.

Invite the group to keep a journal for a week, detailing as accurately as possible their daily use of personal electronics devices, including cell phones, iPods and portable music playing devices, computers and gaming systems, and television and DVD players. In making these journal entries, participants may especially want to note how many times, and the amount of time, each day, they used such devices. At the next group meeting, plan to ask participants to report on how their journaling went and what they learned in the process.

## Sending & Serving Activities



### 7 How Much Money Do I Give? (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** This activity is very simple, yet provides a fairly deep and rich spiritual experience for participants as they explore the various aspects of their giving and stewardship. This activity will take 15–20 minutes to complete.

**Supplies:** None

Invite group members to discuss how much money they actually give to the church, to missions, or to charities of any form (even nonreligious ones), and how much money they spend on themselves. (Perhaps this could be written anonymously on index cards and then tallied by you so that no one is embarrassed.) After some discussion of these topics, ask group members what they think their answers say about their level of generosity or stewardship. Are you surprised at the total, or is it what you expected? Why it is so much easier for us to spend money on ourselves than to donate our money to the church or to charity?

Assure the group that none of these criteria — not the amount of money we give, nor whether we give anything to the church or to charity (nor whether we spend our money on ourselves) — automatically determines that we are good or bad stewards. So, too, none of our answers can make God love us any more or less. But our patterns of giving and spending are worth thinking about.

### 8 A Lot of Fuss over a Little Communion

**Leader preparation:** Consider holding this group meeting in the church sanctuary and inviting the pastor to participate in this activity. You may coordinate with the pastor to have a full communion service (including bread and juice) set up for demonstration purposes. If you do not edit this activity, you will need 60–90 minutes to complete all of it.



## Supplies:

- Bibles
- communion ware used by your church
- communion elements (optional)

Note that eating together is an important tradition, both in the life of the church and in family life — and that most of us already spend a lot of time each week thinking about, looking for, preparing, or eating food. Invite your group to share some of the “eating together traditions” within their own families and within the church. For example: Some families eat breakfast and/or dinner together every day. Even busy and scattered families who cannot eat together every day have special traditions involving food. Perhaps they eat dinner together on certain evenings of the week. Maybe Dad, or Grandma, takes everyone out for pizza or to McDonald’s every Saturday afternoon. Many families have their traditional Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, or birthday meals. Similarly, many churches have regular as well as special dinners, potluck suppers, and/or dish-to-pass luncheons for purposes of fellowship. Many churches offer chicken-and-biscuit dinners and spaghetti suppers to the community as fund-raisers or outreach.

Then ask: What traditions involving food do you celebrate, or remember celebrating, either at home or at church? After some discussion, ask: How many of you think of Holy Communion as a church tradition involving food? Should we think of it in this way? Why or why not? You may note that in nearly all churches, communion is a very special commemoration and is connected to the worship service. Yet our current celebrations of Holy Communion are not real meals, at least not in the same way that our potluck suppers are. Rather, in many churches they are highly stylized rituals, and the portions of bread and juice that are distributed are thimble-sized. This raises several important questions:

- Should Holy Communion be a real meal?
- Is the church inadvertently sending a message of scarcity and even stinginess to congregants when it dispenses Holy Communion in such tiny quantities?
- How might it be possible that the church’s best and most faithful celebrations of communion are, unwittingly, its potluck suppers and its spontaneous and messy “dish-to-pass” luncheons?

Then discuss some of the variations in how people come to Christ’s Table:

- Some churches celebrate Holy Communion by intinction. In this kind of service, the pastor (and possibly an assistant) stands at the front of the church, holding the chalice (or communion cup) and the bread, and the congregation walks up the aisle to be served by dipping the bread into the cup.
- Some churches prefer to serve Holy Communion in individual little cups, stacked on trays, that are passed up and down the rows of pews. In this tradition, people are served right where they sit.

Ask group members which of these variations make the most sense to them and why.

In addition, there are variations in how churches think theologically about Christ’s Table:



- Some churches (including Roman Catholic churches, Episcopal churches, and various Protestant churches) root their commemorations in scriptural accounts of the Last Supper and Christ's passion (see, for example, Matthew 26 and 27, and especially Matthew 26:17–30). Not surprisingly, such churches focus the communion service intensely around Christ's sacrificial death on the cross. Thus the juice or wine symbolize Christ's blood and the bread symbolizes Jesus' bruised body. Often, these communion services, based as they are on atonement theology, are very serious (if not somber) and involve a lot of rules about how communion is distributed, how people are supposed to eat and drink it, even who can participate. The focus in some churches that commemorate Holy Communion in this way is on doing the service the correct way.
- Other churches embrace a theology of God's grace that endures even in the midst of the worst of human actions. These churches see the bread not only as broken, but as living within us. They see the cup as a cup of hope in the midst of despair. In stark contrast to the dark somberness of atonement theologies, these churches may envision Christ's Table as a table of abundance and festive celebration, a place where there are clowns and balloons, and fun and laughter. They base such ideas about Holy Communion on scripture passages that speak of God's abundance (for example, Isaiah 55:1–3) and of God's extravagant welcome and generous invitation to everyone — old and young, members and nonmembers, saints and sinners — to attend a royal banquet or party (for example, see Matthew 22:1–14).

Once again, ask group members which of the different ways of thinking about Holy Communion make the most sense to them and why. You or the pastor may describe or demonstrate how Holy Communion is served and understood theologically at your church. Then have the group read Isaiah 55:1–3. Tell the group members that despite all the differences in church traditions regarding Christ's Table, most churches agree that God's emphasis is always on abundant spiritual resources that are available to all. God's emphasis is never on scarcity or exclusion. It is noteworthy that whenever Christ ate and drank with his friends (which they did all the time), they ate and drank a full meal together. Jesus excluded no one from the table, and he and his friends never consumed just a symbolic thimble-sized portion of bread and wine. Despite this truth, some Christian traditions today insist that nonmembers or Christians of other traditions are not welcome to the table at their church.

Such suspicious, ungenerous, and exclusionary practices regarding Holy Communion do not nullify or disprove this principle that God's emphasis is on abundance and not scarcity or exclusion. Local churches are both divine and human institutions, and sometimes — quite often! — their practices are at variance with the teachings of Christ.

Group members should not be surprised to learn that some of their friends may attend churches that have a different understanding of inclusion.

Participating in the commemoration of Christ's Table deepens both our discipleship and our stewardship. It makes us aware of Christ's sacrificial suffering and death on the cross for us, and of God's extraordinarily generous invitation to a festive party or banquet where we may eat, drink, and be satisfied. Isaiah 55:1–3 is about the spiritual resources that God provides to us. This passage reminds us of Christ's Table — but it also reminds us that many people in today's world still do not get enough to eat, physically or spiritually.



Isaiah 55:1–3 tells us that God’s eternal covenant with us is tied to, and conditioned on, our providing food (and other life essentials) freely to those “who have no money.”

Ask the group if verse 2 is telling us that we shouldn’t purchase or eat “fast food” or “junk food.” (After all, the passage does say that God wants to give us — and wants us to enjoy — the very best food and spiritual resources.)

Ask questions such as:

- Why are bread and wine (bread and grape juice) the central elements in our celebration of Holy Communion? They were staples in ancient Israel and in the diet of Jesus and his friends.
- Is it better to use wine or grape juice in our celebrations of Holy Communion?
- Why are the bread and juice portions in the communion service so small?

Invite the group members to pose any questions they may have. If possible, have the group participate in sharing communion following the traditions of your church.

### 9 Living Stewardship in Art: "The Banjo Lesson"

**Leader preparation:** Have the poster on hand. Read over this activity before the group meets. Time requirement: 20–25 minutes.

**Supplies:**

- poster, The Banjo Lesson, <http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPoster4>, by Henry Ossawa Tanner

Invite your group to spend some time with poster “The Banjo Lesson.” Encourage participants to be silent for a while and to take a really good look at the image they see before them. Then ask them to discuss some or all of these questions:

- What’s going on in the poster?
- How does this poster make you feel?
- What can you tell about the older man and the small boy just by looking at the poster? Do they have a relationship? What kind of relationship? What sort of people are they?
- Do you have someone in your life who has been “there for you,” just like the older man is there for the young boy in the poster? What is/was that experience like for you?
- Does anyone play a musical instrument, or cook, or hunt, or sew, or fish, or play some kind of sport or a game, or have a special gift, talent or hobby that they’re really good at? Who taught you that gift, or hobby, or talent, or sport, or game? Who helped you get started in it? (Note: You might go around the room and ask each participant these questions individually, if you can garner such personal discussion in a comfortable and nonintimidating manner.)
- Is this a picture of discipleship? Why do you think it is or isn’t?
- Is it possible that the young man could be teaching the old man how to play? How does that change the dynamic?
- Does the older man remind anyone of God? Does he remind anyone of a mother, or teacher, or of a special friend or family member who spent time with us and taught us how to cook, or play games? Do you think

### Reflect

There are many ways to walk the journey of discipleship, and Christians often disagree on the specifics of what discipleship entails. Indeed, some Christians believe that the journey



takes place along a very lonely road, because few Christian believers are actually on it. Most Christians, they insist, are not following Jesus. Other Christians (and these Faith Practices activities fall in this camp) say that all of us are disciples, following Jesus in our own individual way, and walking our own individual journey. Similarly, some Christians believe that discipleship entails giving up sinful practices and separating ourselves from sinful associations. Stewardship, in this “giving up” context, involves choosing not to waste our time, money, and other resources on sinful or counterproductive purposes and goals, but using our resources in ways that please God and help our neighbors. Other Christians believe that discipleship is not about giving things up, but about taking more things on. They say that discipleship is all about choosing to pray, choosing to go to church, choosing to read the Bible, and choosing to serve God. Stewardship is understood similarly, as involving a positive choice to serve God and humanity, whether for a long and indeterminate period of time, or for a short and set period of time, with our time, money, and other resources. Finally, Christians disagree over the motivation for discipleship and stewardship. Some insist, rather legalistically, that we must follow Jesus and give our money and our time to God’s work—and if we don’t, we are probably not true Christians. Others say that our discipleship and our stewardship must be motivated by love and by a sincere desire to serve God—otherwise our service and our gifts will be based on legalism and guilt, and therefore be hollow.

- that maybe God provided those special people to spend time with us and teach us all of those things? Are we God's disciples or Jesus' disciples?
- Does discipleship involve anything else that you see on this poster? Does discipleship involve anything that is not on this poster? If so what?

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**Attachment: Activity 5**

## **The Rock Star**

A lot of people think that making money is life’s ultimate goal — the most important thing in life. But listen to this story. There once lived a rock and roll singer who loved Rolls Royce automobiles. But he couldn’t afford to buy one. In fact, all he could afford was an old beat-up clunker — which was what he had. Most of the time he was broke. He was lead singer, and he played guitar in a rock band, but the band wasn’t very successful. In fact, the group was so unsuccessful that the band members thought seriously about calling it quits.

But they didn’t quit. They hung in there, and after years of hard work, they wrote a great song that turned out to be a hit, and they became world famous. When our friend, the lead singer and guitarist, realized that he was rich, he bought a big, solid gold Rolls Royce — the most ostentatious and tacky-looking car imaginable. And he purchased a fancy home and several outfits and all kinds of jewelry — but his favorite toy was his solid gold Rolls Royce. (He kind of overdid it with the car, clothes, and jewelry, don’t you think?)

But then, as luck would have it, he had a massive heart attack and died. Well, everyone was shocked, and no one was too sure how it happened. Some people thought that he was partying too much and accidentally overdosed on drugs, while others said that he probably had had coronary disease but didn’t know it. At any rate, when his family got over the initial shock, they began planning his funeral — and they knew full well how much he loved his car and his new rock and roll threads, and his jewelry. So the family decided that it would be most fitting to bury him in his new clothes, sitting behind the wheel of his gold Rolls Royce. They all thought that he would have wanted to “make his final exit” that way.

So at the cemetery they dug this really enormous hole, and during the service they had a crane lower the dead rock and roll singer and his entire car, with him sitting behind the wheel, into the grave. And as mourners were looking on at the spectacle, one of them was heard to exclaim, ‘Man, that’s living.’”

# Living Stewardship



## Exploration: Christian Tradition

### About this Age Group

While youth (ages 11–15) are vitally concerned with the ultimate big questions of faith and stewardship—Who am I? What is my life purpose? How am I related to other people and to the world around me?—they tend to live in the “Now.” Caught physically and emotionally halfway between childhood and adulthood, they sometimes think and act as young adults, but at other times they behave and reason like children. Consequently, life tends to be a mixed bag for them: They depend on their parents and/or caregivers for guidance, nurture, and rides to the mall or to after-school activities, yet increasingly they try to function independently. In addition, youth are overwhelmed by an array of frightening biological changes. They may be embarrassed by the uneven growth of their arms, legs, and bodies. Their clothes may not fit right. They may begin to smell differently, and to grow hair in funny places. Their faces may break out with “zits,” and their raging hormones may produce a variety of strong emotional and behavioral effects. Partly because of their intense focus on such immediate formative changes, youth may benefit from the longer-term perspective that Christian tradition provides. They may be encouraged by stories of God’s faithfulness, over a period of many centuries, to other young women and men who have faced similar life changes, struggles, and temptations.



## 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, about 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

Young people dislike hypocrisy of all stripes — and they are especially turned off by religious hypocrisy. They can smell it from a hundred miles away, and they will pounce on or run away from anyone who tries to defend or camouflage it. This may be problematic, because the nine activities in this Exploration focus on Christian tradition. On the one hand, Christian tradition recalls the faith and the spiritual endurance of people who have loved and served God during every decade and century since Jesus walked the earth. Christian missionaries have fed the hungry, housed the homeless, built hospitals, cleaned up slums and blighted neighborhoods, started schools, cared for widows and orphans, and preached the gospel in every nation of the world. Moreover, followers of Christ have visited prisoners, ministered to the ill, defended the oppressed, fought for social and economic justice, and brought comfort to persons in distress, literally millions of times over the past two millennia. In the process, these people endured personal hardships, ridicule, persecution, and martyrdom. These are not small

## Exploring & Engaging Activities



### 1 Identifying Our Church's Traditions (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Read this activity over before the group meets. Time required: 20 minutes.

**Supplies:** None

Encourage group members to think about their church’s, their family’s, and their personal traditions. Begin by defining “tradition” as similar to a custom or a habit. A tradition is an accepted way of doing things. For example, most families, churches, and denominations have traditions regarding how they eat meals together, how they celebrate various holidays, and how they go on outings together. You might share one or more specific examples of church traditions with which you are familiar. Traditions are more caught than taught. As such, traditions may be unconscious. A family may talk about togetherness, but be emotionally or physically distant. A church may think it is friendly, but actually be cliquish and reserved toward visitors.

Invite group members to discuss their own church traditions. How do the members and leaders of their church seem to interact with one another and with guests or visitors who attend worship services. How do the members and leaders behave during worship? What are the church’s traditions with regard to stewardship, serving the community, and mission? In what ways are the practices of church leaders and members consistent with what they say about themselves? How are their words and practices inconsistent?

Ask participants to identify their church’s best and worst traditions. From their point of view, what things does their church do well? What things does their church do poorly and need to improve on? What might be appropriate ways to change or eliminate unhealthy traditions? Whom should you talk with?

### 2 The Truth About Tithing

**Leader preparation:** Read this activity before the group meets. Without editing, this activity will require 30 minutes to complete.

**Supplies:**

- Bibles

Ask the group if they know the best way to give to God. Are there any principles about giving that you or your family feel strongly about? Do you know if there are any verses in the Bible that tell us we should give God a certain amount, or



or insignificant accomplishments. On the other hand, Christian tradition has launched crusades against Muslims, inquisitions against infidels, and countless wars throughout the world in pursuit of ignoble ends. In various countries and periods in its history, the church was more interested in acquiring land, wealth, and political power than in reconciling people to God. Corrupt medieval clerics sold indulgences. In early America, the church hunted down Native Americans and burned witches at the stake. In its more recent history, the American church endorsed slavery and discriminated against black people, Hispanic people, Jewish people, Muslim people, gay people, freethinkers, radicals, and nonconformists. The church has denounced the theories of Galileo and Darwin, as well as women's reproductive rights and global warming — and it embraced Adolf Hitler's National Socialist German Workers' Party, the forces of colonial oppression in Third World countries, and anti-intellectualism. To round off this list, numerous church leaders have, during every century of the church's existence, embarrassed both themselves and the body of Christ by getting caught up in financial and sexual scandal, and by making foolish, arrogant, and judgmental public pronouncements. To add insult to injury, certain passages in the Bible seem to defend intolerance, religious wars, sexual violence against women, slavery, and other sordid behaviors. We can quibble over individual scandals and particular stances that the church has taken, but there can be no doubt that Christian people and the church have, at times, behaved inappropriately. You may not want to dwell on the negative aspects of Christian tradition; for example, reading the preceding list of the church's sins verbatim may not be appropriate for most groups. But it is

that we should give in a certain way? Ask the group to read Deuteronomy 14:22–29. Ask: What is this passage about? What does it seem to be telling you? Allow time for group discussion.

Traditionally, many churches have interpreted these verses as requiring God's people to give a monetary tithe to the church or to charity. Ask: Do any of you believe in 10 percent tithing? What are the advantages of being required to give 10 percent? What are the disadvantages of such a requirement? Allow the group to discuss these questions.

Ask: What do you suppose this passage actually requires us to give to the church? Deuteronomy 14:22–29 tells farmers (but no one else) that they are to set aside a tenth of their harvest, but they are not instructed to give it to the temple or synagogue: they are to eat it in the presence of God, that is, in the temple or synagogue. This passage further instructs those who live far from a synagogue to sell off their harvest so that they can travel to the vicinity of a synagogue, buy food, and eat it there. Deuteronomy 14:22–29 also reminds these Hebrew farmers to remember the Levites (Jewish priests) who had no income, as well as foreigners, orphans, and widows with their agricultural gifts. This passage does not speak to city dwellers; it is only addressed to those who grow crops. We may conclude that this passage is not about donating 10 percent of our annual income to the church. Rather, Deuteronomy 14:22–29 is telling us to hold a big pot-luck dinner — to throw a big party — in the church once a year!

Ask group members if they think tithing is still a good idea—even if the Bible doesn't require it. For many of us in North America, tithing may be a convenient way to give. Ten percent of our income is an easy round number to calculate. But for some people, giving 10 percent of their income may be too much. For others who are wealthy, 10 percent is too little. Tithing may be misleading if it suggests that 10 percent of our income is all that we owe God. What we have been learning about stewardship is that we owe God our whole lives! When we examine tithing from this perspective, tithing is like tipping God. In fact, many of us give a 15 percent tip to a waitress or waiter. Thus, tithing is not even a tip! Tithing can be wrong—even harmful—if we see it as an inflexible and legalistic requirement. In addition to tithing, what are some other ways of encouraging persons to provide support for the work of the church?

In keeping with the spirit of Deuteronomy 14:22–29, plan a pizza party or an ice cream social, and invite the neighborhood (both church members and nonmembers) to attend.

### ③ If I Don't Give To the Church, Is God Gonna Get Me?

**Leader preparation:** Read this activity before the group meeting begins. If you do not adjust this activity, you will need 45–60 minutes to complete all of it.

#### Supplies:

- Bibles
- construction paper
- scissors
- glue
- crayons
- marking pens

Invite the group members to use the paper, pens, crayons, scissors, and glue to draw or construct some real or imaginary place that is perfect or nearly perfect. After some time the group may discuss their artwork. Ask the group if they



crucial that you honestly discuss both the positive and the negative aspects of Christian tradition with your group. You do not need to defend the more unsavory parts of Christian tradition or try to whitewash Christian tradition by presenting only its positive, virtuous side to the group.

*Prayer: O God, we thank you for the church, and for the many loving, generous, and compassionate acts of devotion and service that have been done over the centuries in your name. And we thank you for the saints—both those who lived a long time ago and those who live now—who performed and continue to perform acts of mercy and grace. Help us to follow in their tradition. Help us also to deal honestly with the church's past and current sins and indiscretions. Amen.*

### Session Development

For each session, leaders may choose from nine activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. 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.” The first activity in each category is designed for “easy preparation” (able to be done with minimal preparation with supplies normally found at the church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.

- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose three activities, using one activity from each category.
- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose four or five activities, using at least one activity from each category.

have seen any movies or read any books about someone trying to create a perfect world. Allot time for the group to respond to this question. Here are some ideas that you might use:

- The 1939 musical *The Wizard of Oz*, <http://www.tinyurl.com/6myc2>, and the more modern musical and movie, *Camelot*, <http://www.tinyurl.com/lgumxw>, based on the story of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, are two examples.
- In addition, several classic novels or stories describe the attempt to create a perfect society, including Plato's *Republic*, <http://www.tinyurl.com/22w955v>, Augustine's *The City of God*, <http://www.tinyurl.com/26c9mx3>, Thomas Moore's *Utopia*, <http://www.tinyurl.com/2cbqb8g>, Francis Bacon's *The New Atlantis*, <http://www.tinyurl.com/2cndlb4>, Samuel Butler's *Erewhon*, <http://www.tinyurl.com/27alxb3>, and B. F. Skinner's *Walden Two*, <http://www.tinyurl.com/22s6z4q>.
- Such attempts to create perfect societies as *Oz*, *Camelot*, and *Erewhon* are called utopias. A definition of utopia is “a perfect place that does not exist.” In other words, the human imagination keeps yearning for utopia.
- It isn't wrong to hope and dream for a better world. It is not wrong for Christian people to entertain such hopes and dreams. It was appropriate for the early church to want to live as a loving, egalitarian, “perfect” society, and it is right for modern day churches to have such ambitions. What is wrong is the use of coercion to force obedience to the rules.
- God does not call the church to be perfect; rather, God calls the church to be faithful and humble, ever conscious of its potential for sin and human willfulness.

After hearing what participants identify as perfect societies, and the discussion that develops around that idea, ask if they believe that perfection is even possible. Do you think there will be a time when social justice and peace are completely achieved, and our church and country are perfect? Or are social justice and peace goals toward which we will always be working? God's call to social justice is for all people—but particularly to people of faith — to be advocates of compassion and justice for all people. Social justice is an attitude and a way of life (Micah 6:8; Psalm 11:7), as well as a reflection of God and how God acts. It is the outworking of our relationship with God in our relationships with others. It is not an option, but a necessary part of our Christian identity and ethic. Perhaps neither our country nor our church can be perfect as long as they are populated by human beings. There is an old saying that says, “If you ever find a perfect church, don't join it — you'll ruin it.”

Ask the group to read Acts 4:32–5:11 and then point out or ask questions that will open up this text:

- The leaders of the first century church were interested in constructing a Christian society. Soon after Pentecost, they initiated a communal living arrangement. This is evident in the first four chapters of the Book of Acts, and especially in Luke's comment that all of the early Christians shared their belongings with one another (Acts 4:32).
- The early church's experiment apparently failed, perhaps, some suggest, because it turned repressive. Some see the Ananias and Sapphira account as demonstration of how quickly such a social experiment can lead to punishing nonconformists. It is noteworthy that nothing more is ever mentioned in Acts (or in Paul's letters), after the Ananias and Sapphira ac-



count, about Christians sharing their belongings with one another. Nor is anyone else ever again executed for not giving their money or possessions to the church. After the Ananias and Sapphira tragedy, the whole experiment seems to have been quietly dropped.

- All utopias seem to flounder on the rocks of control. While there is some attempt to create a perfect society, that society is made up of people prone to willful and selfish thoughts and actions. It seems that utopian leaders think they have to control their subjects — ostensibly for their own good.

Conclude with two important ideas. First, our dreams of a better world are not wrong. Neither is it wrong to work to build that better world, as long as people treat each other with love, mutual respect, and kindness — and as long as everyone has a voice in how they go about building that better world. The difference between building a utopia rather than better world may be the treatment of people. Second and most importantly, no one should conclude from Acts 4:32–5:11 that God is going to punish us if we don't give our money (or enough money) to the church. God simply does not work that way.

## Discerning & Deciding Activities

### 4 Stewardship in Your Family of Origin (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Read over this activity before the group meets. If you do not edit this activity, you will need 45–60 minutes to complete all of it.

**Supplies:** None

Remind the group that stewardship is not only (or even mainly) about money, but our use of money may be a good metaphor or reflection of our stewardship of other things. Invite the group to talk about or think silently about their families' and their own stewardship of these "other things." You might ask the group questions like those that follow. (To encourage conversation, consider creating an anonymous questionnaire with these or similar questions.)

- What messages or attitudes have your family members or loved ones conveyed to you about life's ultimate purpose and meaning?
- What has your family taught you about helping other people?
- What have your loved ones taught you about how you should use your time?
- How have your family members and loved ones helped you to discover and cultivate your own interests and abilities?
- What are your family's habits, expectations, and attitudes about:
  - A. Eating fast food?
  - B. Your future career or employment decisions?
  - C. Joining the military after high school?
  - D. Going to college after high school?
  - E. Playing sports and exercising?
  - F. Shopping and hanging out at the mall?
  - G. Pursuing hobbies (and which hobbies)?
  - H. Drinking alcoholic beverages?
  - I. Attending church and participating in religious activities?
  - J. Watching TV?



- K. Sex?
- L. Excelling in school?
- M. Using “recreational” drugs?
- N. Reading books for pleasure?

After this survey, ask your participants to discuss their families’ and loved ones’ attitudes and behaviors regarding money. (Note: No pressure — no one has to divulge information that they don’t want to share. Anyone in the group may feel free to simply think about these questions.) What is most important is to get at the question of how people think about their resources, gifts, and money. Further, saving is not only about setting aside money, valuables, or other goods for later use. It also involves the idea of treating something carefully so as to not waste it, use it up, or wear it out. Pose these or similar questions:

- What do your family and loved ones think about saving money, and have they taught you to save?
- Would you characterize your family or loved ones as highly disciplined about money? saving?
- Do they use credit regularly? If so, do you also?
- What do your family and loved ones think about charitable giving?
- What are your first memories of giving?

You may indicate that giving generously has nothing to do with being rich or giving a lot of money. Even those of us who consider ourselves poor can give generously. Generosity is defined proportionally: Even a gift of a few dollars can be very generous for a person who has very little. You might explore other questions:

- Is money a source of worry in your family or among your loved ones?
- How important is money in their lives? How important is money in your life?
- Do you and your family see money as a means to an end—or as an end in itself?
- Does your family live modestly, despite having considerable economic resources? Do you?
- Are any of these questions talked about, openly or quietly within your family? Why do you suppose some families are uncomfortable discussing these issues?

Remind the group that you are asking these questions in order to make two important points: First, that our families and loved ones do influence our stewardship habits; and second, that our use of money may be the best single way to examine our stewardship habits concerning all that God has given us.

If you use the questionnaire format, say that you will take home the completed questionnaires and compile the results for sharing and discussion at the next meeting. Whether or not you use the questionnaire, invite the youth to suggest tentative conclusions on the basis of our discussion today. Encourage group members to continue thinking about these questions after the meeting is over.

### 5 Gettin' Neighborly

**Leader preparation:** This activity involves taking the group on a walk through the church's immediate neighborhood. If you cannot participate in this activity, or if you do not know the neighborhood well, ask another adult church member to lead the group walk. Whoever leads the walk may do well to review this activ-



ity in advance. Feel free to customize and adapt this neighborhood walk or tour to the needs of your group members. Note: If you do not edit this activity, you will need 2–3 hours to complete all of it.

Walking the church's neighborhood could be risky — particularly if the church is located in an urban neighborhood or next to a busy highway. To ensure group safety, invite other adults who know the neighborhood well to participate. If the church is located in a suburban, exurban, or rural setting, you may need to arrange for a van, bus, or two or three large cars, with drivers. Make sure you have at least one cell phone in case of an emergency. Route your trip and provide everyone with a map.

### Supplies:

- pencils, pens
- small pads of paper
- copies of the route

Many church families do not actually live near the church they attend. This is particularly true of suburban and urban churches, but it can also be true in rural congregations. It is not uncommon to find families commuting ten, twenty, or thirty, or more miles each way on Sunday mornings. Quite often, these are families who once lived near the church and have since moved away, but do not want to leave "their church family." Other families may live near the church, but still not know the community or the church's immediate neighborhood well. This activity may help group members get in touch with the church's immediate neighborhood. Of particular concern during this walk:

- Take this walk on a Saturday or a Sunday afternoon.
- Some of the adults participating in the walk who are familiar with the neighborhood's history may be able to help the group reflect on how the neighborhood has changed over the years. Alternatively, the group may learn about the neighborhood's history by interviewing other long-time church members who cannot or will not participate in the walk.
- The pastor and church leaders may have useful information about the community to share. Consider interviewing the police or sheriff's deputies who patrol the neighborhood.
- Suggest that walkers look specifically for some of the neighborhood's current problems and needs (such as urban blight; unemployment; a lack of strong youth programs). Look also for the neighborhood's strengths.
- Ideally (and if it is safe to do so), the participants (or some of them) may want to see the neighborhood during the week and at other times of the day.
- Ask the pastor or church leaders to identify what the church is currently doing to address the needs of its neighborhood. Also, ask the pastor or church leaders to identify what the church is currently doing for mission projects that help children in Africa or Central America. Is there a difference? Why?
- What is happening to businesses (and perhaps, farms, if the community is rural) in the area. Are old established businesses closing and new ones opening? If so, what kind of businesses are moving into the community? Is the community growing or declining in population?
- Look for quality of life indicators. Are there adequate schools, parks, hospitals, and shopping centers in the neighborhood? Are there scouting,



- boys and girls clubs, and other good youth programs in the neighborhood? Are young families moving in or leaving the neighborhood? Why?
- Consider interviewing area merchants and residents: Are they happy with current neighborhood trends? How long they have been in the neighborhood? What changes have they seen take place over the years? What do they think the needs and problems of the neighborhood are? How do they perceive the church in the neighborhood—positive, negative, or indifferent?

This activity can easily be adapted to suburban, exurban, and rural settings where there are no sidewalks and the next-door neighbor is two miles away. In fact, most of these questions and topics are applicable, with slight modification, to rural communities:

- Instead of walking, the group may have to tour the church's neighborhood by bus or van.
- Rural and suburban churches (like urban churches) have important historical connections to their neighbors and to businesses (or farms and ranches) nearby. These connections need to be pointed out and discussed with the group.
- Rural and suburban churches (like urban churches) may be located within a mile or two of a town or village center, with gas stations, a volunteer fire station, a sheriff's office, and various shops and restaurants. Don't overlook these businesses and community centers. Your church may have social and historical connections to them.
- Group members may benefit by inviting one or more community and church historians (possibly some of the old-timers in the congregation) to accompany them on the tour. Alternatively, the group may sit down with such persons before or after the van tour to discuss the history of the church or community.

After completing the walk or van tour, ask participants what they learned about their neighborhood, and more importantly, about their church.

- What can the church do to help this neighborhood and community? What does the church need to do? What does our group need to do? What can we do?
- Consider sharing your findings with the pastor and church leaders; consider making recommendations for greater involvement.

### ⑥ Living Stewardship in Art: “The Moorish Kitchen Maid with the Supper at Emmaus” by Diego Rodriguez de Silva y Velazquez

**Leader preparation:** Locate and examine the poster “The Moorish Kitchen Maid with the Supper at Emmaus.” Spend time studying the poster and read over this activity before the group meets. This activity will require 20–25 minutes.

#### **Supplies:**

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

Display the poster of “The Moorish Kitchen Maid with the Supper at Emmaus” in a place where all see it. Invite participants to look carefully at the woman in



the artwork. What is she doing? What kind of clothes is she wearing? What kind of job does she seem to have? Tell them the title of the painting. What does that title tell us about who this woman is? What do you think her socioeconomic status might be? What else is happening in the picture — particularly in the upper lefthand corner? Who are those small figures in the next room? Tell or read Luke 24:13–35.

- Ask the group if the woman seems interested in what is going on in the other room. Does she seem to be listening in on the conversation?
- Some have suggested that this painting could be about any meal with Jesus and the disciples, for example, the "Last Supper." If this were that supper, it may be noteworthy that while Jesus is in the next room, talking about stewardship, washing his disciples' feet, and serving bread and wine to his friends, this woman is also engaged in stewardship activities — cleaning the tableware and performing servant duties. In what ways might the woman be "blessed" by her proximity to Jesus, his friends, and by the conversation she is overhearing? Yet she does not have a seat at the table. She does not participate in the meal that Jesus and his friends are eating. She is not even in the room with them. What difference might that make?
- Ask group members if they think that Jesus knew she was in the next room. Does that matter? Does it change your response if the answer is yes?
- Does the woman seem upset or angry for not being in the other room? How would you feel in this situation? Can you think of a "happy" ending to this story that would be consistent with the good news of Jesus?

Invite anyone to offer any other observations regarding the painting. You might have the youth pose as if they were in this painting. Which person would they be? You might pose the painting several times and give the youth the opportunity to place themselves in more than one place in the painting. What different perspective do you gain by being in a different position in the painting.

## Sending & Serving Activities



### 7 Taking the Offering (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Read over this activity before the meeting begins. Time requirement: 20 minutes. Schedule time to be in the sanctuary for this activity.

#### Supplies:

- a set of empty offering plates

Take the participants into the sanctuary to the chancel and altar area. Note that traditionally, at least for the past hundred years, Protestant churches have taken offerings during the weekly worship service. Encourage discussion with some of the following questions:

- What are some of the rituals (ceremonial habits or customs) that we practice when we take the offering?
- Why is music (a choral anthem or a beautiful instrumental piece) often played or sung during the offering?



- Why is the Doxology often sung during the offering time? (Explain that the Doxology is a sung praise and expression of thanks to God. You might go over its simple lyrics and lead the group in singing it.)
- Why do we take offerings during the worship service? And why do we (or many churches) place the offerings on the altar? What are we saying about money when we do this?
- Why does the minister offer another prayer, after the Doxology, to bless the offering?
- Should churches take offerings? Why not simply put the collection plates near all the doors and let people give when they come into or leave the sanctuary?
- Some churches charge annual "dues" (sometimes called assessments) instead of (or in addition to) taking weekly offerings. What do you think of that idea?
- Why do churches need to ask for money? Should churches ask for money since God said God will provide everything that we need? Doesn't it say, in Matthew 6:33, "Seek first God's reign and righteousness, and all of these other things will be provided you"?

Change the focus of the discussion from current practices to stewardship by inviting reflection on questions such as these: Is there a better way to do the offering? What does the weekly offering have to do with living stewardship?

### 8 Conduct an Energy Audit of the Church

**Leader preparation:** Read this activity before the group session begins. Feel free to customize and adapt this activity to the needs of your group members. Note: If you do not edit this activity, you will need 90 minutes to complete all of it.

#### Supplies:

- clipboards
- paper and pencils or pens

Tell participants that one aspect of stewardship is our use and misuse of energy resources. Ask:

- What are some ways that we use energy?
- In what ways might we misuse or waste energy?
- Why should anyone care if someone misuses energy? Or is it none of our business?
- What do you think God's attitude is about misusing energy? How might our use of energy relate to stewardship?

Suggest to the group that the Bible doesn't say anything directly about wasting electricity, burning coal, or the safety of nuclear energy, but it has much to say about caring for the Earth. The Hebrew word *shalom* and the Greek word *eirene* each convey the idea of wholeness, well-being, and good health. Psalm 24 says, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it." In other words, the Earth is not ours to pollute or use any way we want. Rather, it has been entrusted to our care; it belongs to God. In Genesis 2:15 we read that Adam and Eve were placed by God in the garden of Eden "to work it and care for it." In other words, the Earth is God's garden and humans are its gardeners.

Next, divide the group into smaller clusters of two or three participants, and send them out with clipboards, paper, and pencils or pens to conduct an energy



audit of the church. Schedule your audit at a time when the church is not heavily occupied. If the group is large, assign participants to conduct energy audits on their own, during the coming week, in the church. Similarly, if the church or building is large, assign teams to go to specific locations within the building; otherwise, you can simply turn everyone loose and let them audit whatever parts of the building they wish. Each cluster is to look for ways that the church, school, or public building is conserving and using its energy well and ways in which energy is not used well or is wasted. Examples of what to look for may include:

- Window and door seals: tight or drafty (new windows with double-layered glass are more efficient)
- The condition and age of the furnace (modern ones are much more efficient)
- The use of energy-efficient light bulbs
- The installation of timer switches that automatically turn off the lights when a room is not in use
- The use of energy-efficient LED technology for exit signs
- The condition of faucets: Look for water loss through constant dripping
- Water-saving toilets, faucets, sprinkler systems

Consider asking to meet with the church leaders or the building care committee of the church to share your findings and recommendations. Also consider what this group might do to help.

### 9 The Annual Church Budget

**Leader preparation:** Schedule a meeting with a pastor, church treasurer, or church financial secretary regarding the annual budget. If you are uncomfortable (or not knowledgeable enough) leading a discussion of the budget with your participants, invite the church treasurer or financial secretary to attend the meeting to share the budget. (Extend this invitation well ahead of the meeting and help your "expert" to understand what is happening.) Note: There may be more content and more elements in this activity than you will want to use! For this reason, you are strongly encouraged to review this activity before the group meets and to customize it for your participants. If you do not edit this activity, you will need 60–90 minutes to complete all of it.

#### **Supplies:**

- copies of the most recent annual church budget

One way to examine living stewardship in light of Christian tradition is by looking at a copy of the current church budget. Church budgets are not only about money coming into and leaving the church. They also identify the ministry priorities and, hence, the stewardship of a particular congregation. Hand out copies of the church's annual budget and ask participants to divide into smaller clusters of two or three. Each cluster will have ten to fifteen minutes to examine the budget. You and your invited expert may want to "walk through the budget" with the group (particularly if the budget is complicated). Here are some clues regarding what to look at:

- Many of the things that they take for granted in church, such as youth pastor salaries, heat and air conditioning, church bulletins, and copier toner, all cost money. Without them, ministry would suffer. In today's world, it takes money to do ministry and to have effective church programming.
- Participants may want to examine what percent of the church budget is



### Reflect

Christian tradition is something of a mixed bag. For every generous impulse, we can find an unsavory act — and scripture itself seems to condone violent and selfish behaviors on the part of the saints or the church. Given the church's spotty record, we may be tempted to give up on it, or quietly agree with Mark Twain's dour observation that "the trouble with Jesus was that he had disciples." But such a conclusion is altogether too pessimistic! After all, the shocking discovery that someone has been circulating counterfeit money does not render genuine currency worthless; if anything, it makes real money all the more valuable. So, too, the injustices, the violence, and the intolerant acts that have been committed over the centuries in the name of Christian tradition do not really cancel out or undo the self-sacrificial acts of kindness and humanitarian concern that are also a very real part of Christian tradition. If anything, those evil acts make the church's genuine acts of mercy and kindness shine all the brighter! We would do well to root out and thoroughly repudiate the selfish, violent, and greedy aspects of Christian tradition. We cannot try to hide this darker side of Christian tradition — sunshine is the best disinfectant! But we need not spurn the many generous, compassionate, and loving acts that have been committed in the name of Jesus Christ over the centuries. This is the real Christian tradition that we can all uphold and be proud of!

spent on institutional maintenance, as opposed to spending on ministry and mission. What does the church budget tell participants about the church's priorities and stewardship? For example, does institutional maintenance seem to be "more important" than mission and outreach?

- In what ways does our budget reflect our mission?
- What percent of the church budget is devoted to building and grounds upkeep (custodial; insurance; mowing, snow removal; utilities)?
- What percent of the budget is spent on salaries?
- What percent of the annual budget goes to community outreach and/or to mission?
- How much money is given back to the denomination each year (for regular and special offerings)?
- Do revenues and expenses balance? Or is the church operating at a deficit? How is that deficit reconciled? Justified?
- What surprises did you find in the church budget?
- What, if anything, does the budget reveal about that church's stewardship of its nonfinancial resources? Does the church seem to be using its members' talents and abilities wisely, or taking advantage of their willingness to volunteer their time to the church?

After examining the church budget, the clusters come back together to report what they have learned about the church and about stewardship, and to discuss any surprises they encountered. You may conclude by telling the group that stewardship has to do with a church's entire ministry — everything it does. Even though we can learn a great deal about our collective stewardship by examining the budget, stewardship is not just about money. Although the group examined only the most recent church budget, the church's priorities and its way of doing mission and outreach don't change dramatically from year to year. Thus, a church budget may be a good indicator of a church's long-term traditions regarding ministry, stewardship, and the degree to which it values institutional maintenance over community outreach and mission.

# Living Stewardship



## Exploration: Context and Mission

### About this Age Group

Stewardship drives mission. In turn, participation in mission motivates and deepens our understanding of stewardship. Indeed, it is difficult to talk about one without the other. Youth (ages 11–15) are vitally concerned with the ultimate big questions of both stewardship and mission: Who am I? What is my life purpose? How am I related to other people and to the world around me? What is my responsibility to the community? How can I love my neighbor? But often young people don't understand the context of their community: They don't know who their neighbor is, or what her needs are. In addition, they may not understand their own context: They may feel overwhelmed by the biological and emotional changes that are taking place within their bodies. Stuck physically and psychologically halfway between childhood and adulthood, youth sometimes think and act as young adults, but at other times they behave and reason like children. Consequently, life is a mixed bag for them: They depend on their parents and/or caregivers for guidance, nurture, and rides to after-school activities, yet increasingly they want to strike out on their own. In addition, youth may be embarrassed by the uneven growth of their bodies and limbs. Their clothes and shoes may not fit. They may begin to smell differently and grow hair in odd places. Their faces may break out with "zits" and their raging hormones may produce a variety of strong psychological and behavioral effects. Thus, it is important for youth to begin to understand the local context of their community, as well as their own biological and emotional context, as they engage in mission and endeavor to deepen their stewardship experience. Such new understandings may be strengthened as youth connect to a nurturing congregation that allows them to voice their questions and doubts honestly — particularly if their parents or friends also attend church.



## 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 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**

## Leader Preparation

We don't need to go to some overseas mission field, and we don't need the title of "missionary" to be engaged in mission. We also don't have to formally "evangelize" anyone, or to talk about Jesus or "getting saved" to be engaged in mission. We don't have to "convert" anyone to our culture, to our way of thinking, or to our way of worshiping. As St. Francis of Assisi advised, "Always, always preach the Gospel! If necessary, use words." At the heart of living stewardship is mission. Mission is a central reason — but not the only reason — we need to be stewards. Living stewardship is also a necessary part of our own worship and discipleship. Mission involves service to the community and the world. As such, mission is a call to awareness: It requires us to be aware of the needs of our neighbor and of people throughout the world — and to be aware of the material and spiritual resources that we have to help meet those needs.

*Prayer: O God, we thank you for giving us work to do, both in our communities and throughout your world. May we be about that work. Be with me and calm me. Help me to communicate clearly what stewardship means in the context of the work that you have given each of us to do. Help our young people as they seek to meet the needs*

## Exploring & Engaging Activities



### ① What is Our Responsibility to the Homeless, the Needy, and the Immigrant in Our Community? (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Read over this activity before the group meets. If you do not edit this activity, you will need 30–45 minutes to complete all of it.

#### Supplies:

- Bibles

Invite different individuals in the group to read aloud the following scriptures: Psalm 82:3–4; Isaiah 1:17; Isaiah 58:6–7; Micah 6:8; Luke 4:18–19; and James 2:14–17. Then ask what these verses say to them about our responsibility to the poor, the homeless, the prisoner, the laborer, and the immigrant.

In some ways, this is an "adults only" conversation because what these scriptures tell us are what many adults in the West are arguing passionately about these days. Even though some of these issues are complex, young people need to hear about them and know about them.

Some say that we need to build more prisons and put more prisoners to death. Some believe it is acceptable to torture and deny prisoner rights to terrorists. What do these verses say about the treatment of prisoners?

Some say that companies should lay off more of their labor force (their workers) or "outsource" more jobs overseas where wages are lower, in order to become profitable again. What do these verses say about workers' rights?

Some say that we should forget about the homeless and the poor, because no one can afford to help them. Some say that the poor and the homeless are destitute because they are lazy and inferior. If they would work, they would no longer be homeless. What do you think? What do the scriptures say about our responsibilities, if any, to the poor? To the homeless?

Immigrants are also unpopular today. Many in the West forget their own immigrant roots and say that foreigners are dirty and drain our social welfare programs. What do these scriptures, especially Exodus 22:21–22, say about our responsibility to immigrants?

Ask: What does helping the poor, the homeless, and the immigrant have to do with living stewardship? What does God require of us?

### ② 'God Whose Giving Knows No Ending'

**Leader preparation:** Read through this activity before leading it. Time requirement: 20 minutes. You may need to arrange for an alternative meeting place if you need accompaniment.

#### Supplies:

- copies of the hymn "God Whose Giving Knows No Ending" (Tune: Aus-



*of those they encounter — both near and far. Stretch their meager resources. Help us all to see our true interdependence — that we are our sisters' and our brothers' keeper — and that they are our keepers, as well. Give each young person — and give us all — a heart for people and a heart for service. Amen.*

### Session Development

For each session, leaders may choose from nine activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. 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.” The first activity in each category is designed for “easy preparation” (able to be done with minimal preparation with supplies normally found at the church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.

- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose three activities, using one activity from each category.
- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose four or five activities, using at least one activity from each category.

trian Hymn; alternate tune: Hyfrydol). You can hear the tune at <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong6> and find the lyrics at <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong6a>.

Invite the group to look at the lyrics of “God Whose Giving Knows No Ending.” Ask someone to read the lyrics aloud and slowly. Use these or similar questions for discussion:

- What is this hymn about? What does it say or mean?
- What does the first line say to you about God's gifts to us?
- What does verse 3 tell us about our money and wealth? Where does our wealth come from? How should it be used?
- What does the fourth verse suggest that our attitudes toward God and stewardship should be? What does the fourth verse say to us about the future? What will become of all of our stewardship efforts in the future?
- What does our stewardship have to do with mission?

Sing the hymn together. Challenge participants to write a fifth verse. Encourage them by saying that you are not expecting perfection — just for them to make the effort. The fifth verse may be about how God has blessed their families or their own stewardship efforts. In the following session, either read or sing this fifth verse (making arrangements for an accompanist.)

### 3 Perfume

**Leader preparation:** Read over this activity before the group meeting. Time requirement: 20 minutes.

**Supplies:**

- Bibles in several different translations and paraphrases
- clay, drawing materials, paint supplies

Read, or ask someone in the group to read, Mark 14:3–9. Ask: What did Jesus mean when he said, “the poor you will always have with you” (verse 7)? Was Jesus saying that there's no point in trying to help poor people or condoning religious materialism in this passage — perhaps, extravagant purchases and gifts for the church (or for the clergy)? What might be a literal interpretation or paraphrase of this verse? What does this story say about the relationship between stewardship and devotion to Jesus?

Invite the group to create a work of art based on this story, such as write a play, sculpt a scene out of clay, or draw or paint a picture inspired by the story.

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### 4 Talking About Clothes (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Read over this activity before meeting with the group. Time requirement: 20 minutes.

**Supplies:** None



Ask the group members what kind of clothes they like to wear (naming styles as well as specific brands), and where they like to shop. How does fashion contribute to how they view others? What do they think they can tell about others based on their looks, appearance, clothes, hair, and makeup; for example, urban vs. rural youth styles, or what country western vs. hip-hop or goth fashions, hairstyles, and makeup.

Invite participants to think about the fairness of snap judgments based solely on appearance. For example, how would they like it if someone judged them solely on the basis of their appearance — particularly on a “bad hair” day or a “big zit” day — or if someone saw them when they were dressed in old, torn clothes because they were out walking the dog or doing a particularly dirty job and didn’t expect anyone to see them?

How do they feel about people who do not have enough money to buy the best brands and who cannot afford to shop at the mall or at upscale clothing stores. What if they learned that a friend at school gets her clothes from the local thrift store? Would they think less of her? On the other hand, ask how they feel about kids who wear nicer clothes and shop at better stores than they do and who seem more affluent than they are. Are such kids more popular at school? Are you tempted to “suck up” to them — or are you resentful or envious of them? Finally, ask: What do the clothes we wear and the judgments we make have to do with stewardship? What do you think?

### 5 Shopping for Clothes

**Leader preparation:** Plan a field trip to a nice clothing store at the mall, to Walmart or some other economy “superstore,” and to a thrift or resale store. This activity requires advance planning for scheduling, transportation, finances, and assistance. Because this activity is a field trip, it will take an entire morning or afternoon, if not the better part of a day to complete. It also requires group transportation. These requirements may make this activity impractical for your group; on the other hand, this field trip activity can be combined nicely with a group social event, such as going out for pizza on some Saturday or Sunday afternoon.

Alternate: If you feel that your group cannot take a field trip together because of time, financial constraints, or logistical challenges, an alternative might be to assign this activity as a continuing study project for individuals or small cluster groups of two or three to complete sometime before the next group meeting. Then you can ask individuals and cluster groups to “report” their discoveries at the next group meeting. It is also possible to engage the entire group in a guided discussion using some or all of the questions and discussion points bulleted below. If done in this way, this activity becomes an “Easy Preparation” activity, and requires no supplies.

#### **Supplies:**

- transportation
- spending money

Take the group to a mall or to three different clothing stores. First, visit a mall or an exclusive clothing store. Second, visit a giant economically priced “superstore” in your area. Third, visit a local thrift store. At each store, participants should try to blend in, examine clothing items and prices, but they are not to try anything on or make purchases. Instead, they may casually look at the price tags and watch other shoppers as they come and go. Ask the group to make mental notes of what the shoppers at each store look like: Try to remember how are they



dressed and groomed — do they appear affluent or poor? Could you be friends with them? Why or why not? What kinds of conversations do these shoppers have?

After visiting the mall (or a nice clothing store), the economically priced “super-store,” and a thrift store, ask the participants to discuss their experience. What was it like? What did you learn? What surprised you? When? At what store? How?

Where are high-priced and famous-brand-name footwear manufactured? What the working and living conditions of the factory workers who make the shoes? Most of the clothing and shoes we wear, and many of the other consumer goods we buy, are made overseas, in countries like China, Thailand, and Malaysia, by poor people who receive pennies to the dollar for their labor. This is even true of luxury name-brand clothing items. (They can verify this out by looking at labels in their own clothes.) For example, a famous-name-brand pair of athletic footwear or an exclusive clothing item may have cost \$10 or less to manufacture overseas, yet you may pay \$200 or more for it when you buy it in an exclusive store. Who makes the profit: The worker who made the item, or the famous company that sells it?

Consider asking the group to research the outsourcing of labor to poor countries in the global South and to report on what they learn.

Ask the participants to research the store's hiring and labor practices, as well as the geographical locations where clothing and other items are made and then sold in this store. (This can be done online.)

Explain to the group that there is a difference between “free trade” and “fair trade.” Free trade means that merchants' most important concern is minimizing their costs and maximizing their profit. Thus, they may employ “sweatshop labor” in developing countries, and pay pennies on the dollar to the skilled artisans and laborers who make these items and goods. Fair trade considers sustainability and economic justice to be the most important concerns when merchants hire manufacturers (either domestic or foreign) to make clothing items and other goods. This means employing manufacturing processes that don't destroy our environment and that sustain our planet. It also means paying workers a decent living wage that will help sustain them and their families economically.

### ⑥ Living Stewardship in Art: “Planting” by Rex Goreleigh

**Leader preparation:** Read over this activity before the group meets. This activity will require 20 minutes.

**Supplies:**

- poster Planting by Rex Goreleigh, <http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>

Invite the group to spend a few moments looking at the poster; then help the group process this poster with questions such as these:

- What do you see? Look closely at all elements and corners of the painting. Section out the painting and view each quadrant carefully. Make a list of all that you see, no matter how apparently small.
- Why do you suppose this poster was chosen for an activity on stewardship?
- What is the woman in the painting doing, and might she be a good steward?
- How is the woman's simple act of planting (possibly in a flowerbed, or in a vegetable garden, or in a field — we don't know her context or that of



the artwork) an act of hope, or faith, in the future? How is it an act of mission?

Emphasize that tending the earth is an important aspect of stewardship that many people who live in urban settings never get to experience. Invite the learners to consider the following statements — do they think these are true observations? Why? Why not?

- In some important ways, people who live in the countryside, on farms, and in nonindustrial, "backward" countries, are closer to God than many of us who are wealthier and more westernized.
- The simple act of planting a flower or a garden is a beautiful and a profound act of mission, hope, and faith in the future.

## Sending & Serving Activities

### 7 Looking for the Poor and the Homeless in Our Community

**Leader preparation:** Read this activity over before the group meets. The Bible tells us to help the needy and the homeless, but sometimes we may wonder where they are.

- Urban churches may have no problem finding the poor and the homeless — tragically, they often sleep or beg on the church's doorsteps or in an alley just down the street from the church. These may be the most visible and perhaps even the most "hardcore" homeless. Often, church people avoid these folks because they may be filthy, dangerous, drug-addicted, and in poor mental health. Indeed, they may be all of these things. Are these the people the church should be helping first and foremost?
- To complicate matters, there are other poor and homeless people in the city whom the church rarely sees. Where are they? Is anyone helping these folks? How can the church find them and help them?
- Rural communities face a different dilemma. The percentage of homeless and poor people in small towns and villages may be as high as in the city, but they are less visible. How can the church find them? And if the church finds them, what does the church do about them?

Note: Without editing, you will need 30–35 minutes to complete this activity.

**Supplies:**

- Bibles

Ask the group to read Isaiah 1:10–17. Pose these or similar questions for discussion:

- According to this passage, what kind of religious practice does God hate?
- According to these verses, what kind of religion does God welcome and love?
- What do these verses tell us about stewardship? Is it enough that we simply give our money to the church? Why or why not?
- What does it mean, in verses 16 and 17, when God says, "Stop doing wrong, learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed, defend the cause of the fatherless, and plead the case of the widow"?



Next, ask the group to read Mark 12:30–31. You may tell the group that good stewardship means that we take seriously Jesus' and the Hebrew prophets' "greatest commandment": to love God with our whole beings and to love our neighbors just as much as we love ourselves. Ask these or similar questions:

- Are Isaiah 1:10–17 and Mark 12:30–31 conveying different or similar messages? What are those messages?
- When Jesus tells us to love our neighbor, who are we supposed to love? Who is our neighbor? Is it just the person or the family who live in the next house over from ours? Is anyone else our neighbor? Do you think that Jesus and the prophets might have meant everyone who lives on our street? Could they mean everyone in our entire village or town?
- We may not really know where the homeless and the poorest people of our community are. Even if we see people on the street who we think are poor or homeless, we don't know if they are the most needy or simply the most visible — or even if they actually are. So, how can we find the poorest folks and those who are homeless in our community?
- Are we supposed to love everyone? How do we do that?
- How about poor people and people who don't have a place to live — are we supposed to love them, too? How?
- Do you know anyone in your community or neighborhood (or near where you live) who is poor or homeless? Has anyone tried to help someone like that? How?
- What can the church do to help the poor and the homeless?

After discussion, suggest the following: Sometime before the next group meeting, ask your parents, pastor, or youth leader, perhaps someone from local law enforcement or a community leader to help identify and locate people in the community who are homeless or may need the church's assistance. Also ask these leaders for direction and advice about which group they might best help — or which helping agency they might partner with. At the next group meeting, allow time for individuals to report their findings.

### 8 Helping the Poor and the Homeless in Our Community (Field Trip)

**Leader preparation:** This activity requires advance planning for scheduling, transportation, finances, and assistance. Arrange for the group to volunteer at a local homeless shelter, soup kitchen, food pantry, or food distribution center. If possible, also arrange for someone at the facility to give the group a brief tour and overview of the work of the shelter or food distribution center.

**Supplies:**

- transportation

Lead the group on a local "mission trip" to volunteer at a homeless shelter, soup kitchen, food pantry, or food distribution center. With the group plan a time for this activity. Sometimes coordinating a calendar among a group of people helps us realize how busy and committed we are. What does this say about our stewardship of time?

Talk with the group about where they would like to serve. Whom will they be serving? What do you want to know about the setting before you arrive? Perhaps it would be helpful to role play some of the situations you may encounter, such as serving a meal at a shelter or stocking a food pantry.



### Reflect

If living stewardship is not only a Sunday morning thing, but an everyday-of-the-week thing and an involve-every-aspect-of-our-lives thing, then mission also takes place anywhere our day or week takes us. As the old saying goes, “Wherever you go, there you are!” We have noted in the Leader Preparation section that mission requires awareness — awareness of the needs of folks who may live on the other side of our street or on the other side of our town as well as awareness of the material and spiritual resources that are at our disposal to meet their needs. But our awareness must not immobilize us. One of the things that we will learn very quickly — as all volunteers who provide humanitarian assistance quickly learn—is that the needs of our community and of the world are far greater than our resources to meet those needs. This is always the case. This has been the case, at least, since the time when a teacher and his followers were confronted with a crowd of hungry people and all they had to work with were two fish and a piece of bread. We must do what we can and give what we can. It is tempting to crawl back into our steeped shells and do nothing at all. It is tempting to postpone indefinitely helping anyone, in the name of “husbanding our resources,” or “studying the situation, to see where our meager resources can do the most good, because we don’t want to make a mistake.” But it is wrong. There is an old saying that “when skating on thin ice, speed is of the essence.” That is especially true of mission.

Emphasize that it is pointless to make judgments about people we do not know. We do not really know why some people in our community are homeless with no food to eat. It is simplistic and often highly inaccurate to write such people off by calling them lazy, mentally ill, alcoholics, or drug addicts. Remind the group of the requirements set forth in Isaiah 1:10–17 and Mark 12:30–31 and of the old saying, “There but for the grace of God go I.” Many people in the affluent West are only one paycheck away from homelessness. Do you think Jesus had the folks we helped in mind when he told us to take care of our neighbor?

### 9 Stewardship and Mission in Clay

**Leader preparation:** Look over this activity before the group meeting. Time requirement for completing this activity (without editing): 45 minutes

**Supplies:**

- lots of modeling clay

This is a two-part activity. First, allow 10–15 minutes to work silently in teams of three or four to create a clay image (realistic or symbolic) that represents what a good steward is or does. Each group is to work in complete silence. At the conclusion of this collaborative effort, teams may discuss their clay images (and what they learned during their collaboration) with the entire group. In the second part of this activity, allow 10–15 minutes for members to spread out and work individually, creating a clay representation of something practical that they can do to show their love for their neighbor or to help someone in their community. Ask them to imagine themselves using their unique gifts, abilities, talents, and resources in some act of mission. Give some examples of such mission projects: participating in a Habitat for Humanity build, tutoring someone, delivering food to a local homeless shelter. After 10–15 minutes, ask each group member to discuss her or his clay creation and learning.

At the conclusion of this activity, invite the group to sing the hymn “Have Thine Own Way, Lord” (tune: Adelaide). You can find the lyrics and tune at <http://www.tinyurl.com/2doofgs>.

# Living Stewardship



## Exploration: Future and Vision

### About this Age Group

Youth (ages 11–15) are concerned with the ultimate big questions of stewardship: Who am I? What is my life purpose? How am I related to other people and to the world around me? Many of these questions are both visionary and idealistic in focus, prompted by a sense that a future of infinite possibilities lays before today's young people, beckoning them to advance and take their first steps into it. And many youth are eager to do just that — while others are frightened by the approach of adulthood and new challenges and responsibilities. Complicating this experience is the fact that many youth are caught physically and emotionally halfway between childhood and adulthood. Sometimes they think and act as young adults, but at other times they behave and reason like children. Consequently, life is a mixed bag for them: They depend on their parents and/or caregivers for guidance, nurture, and rides to the movies or after-school clubs, yet they want to be independent. In addition, youth are often overwhelmed by frightening physical and emotional changes. They may be embarrassed by the uneven growth of their bodies and limbs. Their clothes and shoes may not fit right. They may begin to smell differently and grow hair in odd places. Their faces may break out with “zits,” and their raging hormones may produce a variety of strong psychological and behavioral effects. Partly because of these formative changes, a nurturing congregation may be able to help youth step into their future—as they wrestle with those ultimate big questions of stewardship — particularly if they are allowed to voice their questions and doubts, and if their parents or friends also attend church.



## 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 far-ranging questions like: What kind of persons do we want to be? To what purpose do devote our lives? What are our core values and beliefs? That vision will also benefit from 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 on our next explorations.

**BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:**

**1 Chronicles 29:1-19**  
**Revelation 21:10,**  
**21:22-22:5**

## Session Development

For each session, leaders may choose from nine activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. 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." The first activity in each category is designed for "easy preparation" (able to be done with minimal preparation with supplies normally found at the church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.

- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose three activities, using one activity from each category.
- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose four or five activities, using at least one activity from each category.

## Exploring & Engaging Activities



### 1 Back to the Future (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Read over this activity before the group meeting.

**Supplies:**

- Bible

Invite a volunteer to read Deuteronomy 8:7–18. Remind the group that this passage describes how God accompanied God's people and blessed them throughout their journey out of Egypt, through the wilderness, and into the promised land. After the passage is read, ask what these verses say to them. Helpful responses: They tell of God bringing the people into a good land. They tell of God supplying all of their needs. They describe a pretty rough move or trip — the wilderness crossing was long and difficult, but God was with the people. Despite the difficulty of the journey, Egypt was a land of oppression for God's people, so this trip was necessary if they were to be free to worship God as they should.

This scripture is not only about real estate or vacations — and not only about the Israelites. It is about the life journey we are all traveling. One of the Bible's words for that journey, and how we travel it, is stewardship. Remind the group that God has been with each one of us — that God has walked with each member of the group throughout the journey. A central affirmation of the Bible is that just as God was with the Israelites, so God is with us as we journey, every day of our lives. Invite volunteers to tell about a specific instance when God journeyed with them.

### 2. 'Take My Gifts and Let Me Love You'

**Leader preparation:** Read over this activity before the group meeting. If you cannot lead or accompany singing, arrange for an accompanist to attend the meeting and accompany the singing of this hymn. (Note: To facilitate accompaniment, you may need to meet in a different room than your usual one). You can find the lyrics at <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong5>.

**Supplies:**

- copies of the hymn "Take My Gifts and Let Me Love You" (tune: Talvera Terrace; alternate tune: Holy Manna)

Ask the group to look at the lyrics to "Take My Gifts." Ask a group member to read the lyrics aloud and slowly. Pose these or similar questions:



### Leader Preparation

Some years ago, the U.S. Army had an advertising campaign built around the slogan “Be All That You Can Be.” We may question whether military service is the best way for young people to fulfill their potential, but “Be All That You Can Be” is a nice way of expressing a central goal of Living Stewardship. There are many reasons why we need to be stewards. Stewardship is an act of worship — it is giving back to God. Stewardship is also closely related to mission—to giving of our time, talents, abilities, and other resources so that we can alleviate human need. But stewardship is also about the individual choices and decisions that we make in life. In particular, living stewardship is about the choices that young people have to make — how much time and effort they will invest in their schoolwork; whether they will attend church or participate in the church’s youth program; how well they will nurture their relationship with God; how much time and effort they will put into learning how to play the violin or developing their basketball skills; who they will hang out with and who their closest friends will be. These choices are pivotal. Most choices and decisions—and this is especially true of young people, whose decisions are formative — have a double-edged quality to them. Every time we choose to do something, we choose not to do something else — or several “something elses.” In many cases, those “something elses” are not simply opportunities deferred, they are opportunities forever lost. Choices also run in series. One choice leads to another, which leads to yet another. This is true of all choices. A young person who decides to learn how to play the violin may discover that she is good at it — so good

- What is this hymn about? What does it say to you?
- What does the hymn writer mean when she invites God to “take my gifts and let me love you, God who first of all loved me”?
- What is the meaning of the second verse?
- What is “the fruit that I have gathered from the tree your Spirit sowed”?
- What does the last half of the second verse mean—the part that says, “spiced with humor, laced with laughter—flavor of the Jesus life, tang of risk and new adventure, taste and zest beyond belief”? Do these words describe stewardship? Do they describe your relationship with Jesus? Do they describe your future as you see it?
- How can stewardship and the faith journey be about “risk and new adventure, taste and zest beyond belief”?

There is a futuristic tone to this hymn. The hymn writer is asking God to use her. This is most evident in the third verse. How is her prayer also a prayer that you can pray?

Invite the group to discuss their own thoughts, goals, ideas, and prayers with respect both to the future and to stewardship. By now, you may have had several meetings about stewardship. Your youth may have formulated some definite ideas regarding the gifts and talents that God has given them and how they will use them to bless God and help their neighbor. Invite them to share. After the group has discussed the hymn, sing it together.

### ③ What Do You Want to Build for God?

**Leader preparation:** Read over this activity before facilitating it.

#### Supplies:

- Bibles
- several Lego® sets or other children’s building blocks and construction materials
- pens
- writing paper

Invite a volunteer to read 1 Chronicles 29:1–19. This reading outlines David’s ambition to build a temple for God. It recounts David’s public announcement of this ambition and his description of the building materials needed. It recalls the generosity of God’s people in contributing to this effort; finally, it recites David’s prayer of praise and thanksgiving to God. Pose these or similar questions:

- What does this passage say to you? What do you get out of it for you? Us? Now?
- Why do you suppose David wanted to build a temple for God? (You might suggest that the answer is complex just as David was complex.)
- Why do people build ornate monuments, churches, and other buildings? Why do you think it is a good or bad thing to do?
- What real value is there in ornament and beauty? If you think there is real value in ornament and beauty, how would you describe that value? Or perhaps you think the great expense required to build something impressive and beautiful is better used to feed and house the poor or to give to charity?

After this discussion, invite the group to reconstruct David’s temple, using Lego® pieces, building blocks, and other available materials, as they imagine it must



that her teacher helps her get into Juilliard. If she decides to go to Juilliard, she may never join the college soccer team, she may never discover that she also is good at math and could also be a terrific high school math teacher. In this way, a single choice can reverberate into a whole series of choices that have lasting life-changing consequences. Similarly, another young person who decides to get involved in a street gang may find himself unable to be part of the church choir. He may also drop out of after-school clubs (or drop out of school altogether); indeed, he may get implicated in a serious crime that lands him in prison for a number of years. This is also how a single choice can lead to other choices which have long-lived consequences.

*Prayer: O God, as I get ready to meet with my group, calm me. Assure me of your presence. I pray also for the young people in my group, and for all of the important decisions they have to make. They have so many things going on in their lives; they feel pressure at home, pressure from their peers, and pressure from the church and at school. Help them to figure it all out, and help them to make the right decisions for their lives. Inspire the important people in their lives, so that they can give wise advice and be there for them. Amen.*

have looked like.

Or invite participants to write a poem or a prayer of praise, similar to David's. After a period of time, the group members may discuss what they have built or share what they have written. Then ask:

- What do you want to build or accomplish for God? (A literal building or monument or work of art, participate in a soup kitchen or food pantry program, or get a college education.)
- What building materials has God given you to accomplish your project?
- What building materials do you need from others to accomplish your project?

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### 4 Stewardship Blockers (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Read over this activity before the group meets.

#### Supplies:

- 3" x 5" index cards (optional)

This activity will focus on the different athletic games or sports the group members may play or watch on television. Specifically, suggest that they are going to talk about a skill known as blocking. Ask the group members if they know what blocking is in soccer, basketball, or football. Ask:

- In each of these sports, how would a defensive player go about blocking another player from making a big play with the ball? What kinds of blocking plays would a defensive player use in each different sport? Allow the group some time to discuss this question.
- Are all blocking plays legal? What are some illegal blocking plays? Allow time to discuss this question.
- You might also discuss boxing, another sport that requires participants to block or parry an opponent's punch, asking: How does a boxer stop or deflect another boxer's punch? Ask the group if boxers are allowed to use any tactics at their disposal, or to throw any punch they want, to stop their opponent — or are certain kinds of hits considered to be illegal? If so, which ones?
- Consider the actions that the police or local or state highway departments occasionally take in order to close or block a street, road, or highway. How do the police or highway department block a street or highway?

Whichever direction you take this discussion, bring it to closure by asking whether anyone — an ordinary citizen — could put up a barrier or cones and block a street, if, say, we wanted to play soccer out in the street. Could we do that? Why or why not?

Then suggest that stewardship works the same way as football, soccer, boxing, basketball, and the highway department. It is not simply about giving money to the church — nor is it only about money. Stewardship is about our whole lives — all of our choices and decisions. Just as a defensive player can block a ball-handler on the athletic field, just as the highway department or police can close a street or



a road, it is also possible to block our stewardship, effectively stopping our lives short and ending our future. There are many stewardship blockers. Stewardship blockers are like illegal blocks in sports. They are underhanded and hurt both us and others. They prevent us from making good choices about our lives. They prevent us from thanking God with our time, abilities, talents, and money.

As a group, identify some stewardship blockers. Here are some examples:

- Materialism: Excessive shopping; wanting or buying the latest gadgets, electronics, cars — whether you can afford or need them.
- Narcissism: Exaggerated concern over one's appearance and clothing — favoring "me" over others.
- Addictive behaviors: Sexual acting out, the use of drugs and alcohol, gambling, compulsive shopping or spending money.

How can we be more faithful in our stewardship of all that God has given to us? Give each person a 3" x 5" index card to record a personal answer to this question and sign it as a pledge: How can our church be more faithful in its stewardship of all that God has given to it? If you choose to answer this question about the church, then consider how you might carry your answers to church leaders.

### 5 Blank Pages

**Leader preparation:** Read over this activity before the group meets.

**Supplies:**

- inexpensive journals or notebooks with blank paper
- pencils or pens

On the cover of each notebook, inscribe or print a label with the title, [Allison's] Future, [Bryan's] Future, [Meghan's] Future, [Anthony's] Future. (Obviously, the names on the labels should be those of the group participants.)

Distribute the notebooks and ask each person to write a title on the front: (his or her name)'s Future. Say: These notebooks are the detailed stories or accounts of your future. You will notice that they are all blank. So it's up to you to fill them in. What does your future hold for you? What does your notebook say? Emphasize that no one else can write or predict our futures (not even those closest to us can do that). Only we ourselves can do that. Our families and friends influence us, but we each determine our own course.

Instruct the group: On the first page describe yourself in twenty-five words. You might begin by simply writing, "I am ..." and then filling in the rest. Time may be allotted during the meeting for participants to accomplish this small writing task. Invite group members to share what they have written.

Next say: Describe yourself and your world 20 years from now. Where will you be living in 20 years? What will you be doing with your life? What career will you have? Will you have children and a family, or will you be single? Will you be attending church? What kind of church? Will you be happy? What will you do differently from the way your family and loved ones raised you? What will you do the same?

Encourage participants to be as detailed and colorful — and honest — as they can.

Allot time for participants to work on this assignment, or invite group members to spend time working on it at home. If it is homework, emphasize that all partici-



pants should make sure that they bring their notebooks back to the next group meeting.

After participants have jotted down their plans and ideas, invite individuals to share what their pages say. Once group members have shared their visions of the future, ask: Now, how are you going to get from here to there? What key choices will you have to make to realize your future? Provide time for writing and planning. Encourage them to write in as much detail as they can. This phase of writing will almost certainly require more time than is available during the group meeting. Encourage your group to see this as a continuing project between now and the next meeting.

At the next group meeting, ask for group members to report regarding what they have written. Also, ask them to share about how this activity might have changed the way they think about themselves, their futures, and their present.

### ⑥ Living Stewardship in Art: 'With Hoof and Squawk and Squeal and Bark ...'

**Leader preparation:** Examine a copy of the poster "With Hoof and Squawk and Squeal and Bark ..." and read over this activity before the group meets. In addition, be ready to answer possible questions that may arise among the group about those "left behind" — that is, concerning "why God drowned those animals and people who were innocent." (Don't raise this theological discussion if the group does not introduce it; it will easily eat up a lot of time to answer!)

If this question comes up, tell the group that scientists don't really know how or why (or if) the flood happened. Acknowledge that it is a tough question and seems to contradict what we know about the nature of God. It does, however, suggest that life is full of consequences and that many life choices lead to death. Emphasize that after the flood, God's covenant promise to Noah and to all of humankind was to always protect and affirm life — not to deny life.

#### **Supplies:**

- poster With hoot and squawk and squeak and bark ... by Barbara Reid, <http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>

Display the poster where the group can see it and invite participants to describe what they see. Give plenty of time for participants to really look at the poster. Ask: Have any of you seen other pictures and paintings of this event? If so, what is different about this one from those? What is the mood of this painting?

Invite the participants to retell the story of Noah's Ark. Group members may share their memories and reflections of the story. Key elements in the story include:

- The tragedy of the great flood itself; much of life was destroyed.
- God's promise or covenant with Noah at the end of the story to never again destroy the Earth with a flood. The rainbow was given as a sign of God's promise.
- Someone once said, "If it weren't for the calamity outside, humans and animals wouldn't be able to stand the stink inside." Do you suppose the ark became uninhabitable, after all those animals and human beings had been cooped up inside it for 40 days? The ark probably didn't have great bathroom facilities, either for humans or for the animals.
- In the poster, the animals seem a bit eager to get out. Do you think they



were? Why or why not? Would you be anxious to get out too, if you had been cooped up inside a crowded ark for 40 days?

- God's covenant with Noah included a renewal of God's agreement with Adam: Humans are given stewardship over the Earth. They must care for the Earth and not abuse it. An essential premise of the Noah's Ark story was faith in the future: The hope that the humans and the animals inside the ark would survive both the flood and one another. That the animals and humans were so compatible in the ark suggests a picture of how God meant things to be from the beginning.

Noah's Ark is about sustainability — that's a major piece of what it was about then and what it is about now. In fact, we can think of the Earth as a kind of ark or lifeboat.

- What is your response to the shrinking space and resources of our planet?
- Will we all be able to continue living together without blowing up our planet or killing one another? What are the alternatives?
- Will our future be fleeing lifeboat Earth just like the animals tumbled out of the ark because we have polluted it so badly? Scientists and science fiction writers envision the colonization of space — perhaps heading toward the Orion Nebula once we've exhausted the Earth's natural resources.
- Others say that will never be possible and that we have to care for the Earth: If we destroy our planet, that's it. What do you think?

## Sending & Serving Activities



### 7 Teach 'Em How to Fish (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Review this activity before the group actually meets. Time requirement: 15 minutes. Provide the opening quotation for all to read.

**Supplies:** None

Remind group members of the old saying “If you give a hungry person a fish, you have provided that person with a meal. But if you teach that person how to fish, you have fed her or him for a lifetime.” (Write this quote on newsprint or a whiteboard before the participants enter, or on a card to take with them.) Invite the group to discuss this idea and its significance.

Ask group members if they have ever helped someone with schoolwork or with a special project, or if they have ever taught someone a new skill. Ask participants how providing such assistance felt — and how it was received. If these ideas do not emerge from the discussion, help participants understand that it is possible to bless people who need our help in two ways. First, we can give them the help that they need right now. For example, we can feed a hungry person. Second, we can give them the skills and the resources that they will need in order to function independently in the future. For example, we can teach a person how to fish, or how to cook, or how to grow a vegetable garden, or how to repair computers, so that she can eat well and help someone else do the same, and have a marketable skill with which to get a job. Both ways of blessing people are important and necessary.

Challenge participants to teach someone how to “fish” during the next seven



days. Find someone who needs special help or tutoring and offer to provide it. Maybe someone wants to learn how to hunt or fish or cook or paint or draw or write or play a game. Maybe someone at school needs a tutor in a subject that you are good at. Maybe you can help a fellow scout earn a merit badge. Maybe you can teach someone how to tinker with computers, so that they can get a job. At the next group meeting, ask group participants to share their successes or failures in carrying out this assignment.

## 8 Heaven on Earth, the Las Vegas Strip, or a Perfect Place That Can Never Exist

**Leader preparation:** Read over this activity before the group meets. Time requirement: 20–25 minutes.

### Supplies:

- Bibles
- writing materials
- pens
- drawing supplies such as paper, crayons, colored pencils, and colored markers

Read Revelation 21:10; 21:22–22:5. Explain that this passage, probably written during the late first or early second century, reflects John's vision of a future when Jesus would return and all would be well with the world again.

- How realistic or fantastic does this vision seem to you?
- Note that this passage is highly symbolic and metaphorical. Read literally, it may not make much sense and it may not describe a very attractive place. (John's glitzy description of a city that is always brightly lit may remind us of the Las Vegas strip or Times Square—a nice place to visit for a few days, perhaps, but who would want to live there permanently?)
- Is this description of a perfect new Jerusalem a utopian vision? Is a Christianized utopia even possible or is John's dream bound to fail? (Utopia is defined as a perfect place that doesn't exist.)
- Is it helpful or harmful for us to take this vision seriously? After all, the world and its people have many problems to solve—such as environmental pollution and global warming, urban decay and blight, war and violence, and various forms of social and economic exploitation and oppression. These problems are not going to go away magically; they may not be solved in our life time by Jesus' second coming. Does John's vision of a New Jerusalem motivate or discourage us from undertaking the serious work necessary to ensure that our world, our community, and our cities are livable places in the future?
- Note that John's vision is a wonderful reminder to us that God is always with us, giving us new life and a new perspective on life. It was never intended, however, to be read as an easy escape from our responsibility to care for the earth or to work diligently for peace and justice.

After discussing these questions, ask group members to rewrite or to draw a picture of John's vision of a perfect, New Jerusalem for their city or community. To guide this effort, ask:

- What would our community (or some other place where they might like to live) look like if it was perfect? For example, you might say that there would be no pollution or traffic snarls, that there would be more parks



and swimming pools, that there would be no crime and no criminals, and that the old abandoned buildings would be torn down and new ones would be built in their place.

- What do people (including you and me) need to do to make it perfect?
- After a period of time, group members may discuss their writings and drawings.

### 9 Simplicity and Silence

**Leader preparation:** Read this activity over before the group meets. Time requirement: 15–20 minutes during the group meeting, and 24 hours at home.

**Supplies:**

- Bibles

Ask the group to read Matthew 6:19–34, then ask:

- According to Jesus, what are the most important things in life? What does Jesus tell us about those things? What things should we not be worrying about?
- Are simplicity and simple living good or bad things, according to Jesus? Why? What are the benefits of simplicity and simple living?
- This is a complex and a technological world; how can we live more simply? Is Jesus' advice realistic for us?
- Do you think that our world will keep getting more and more complicated and technological or is simplicity the wave of the future?
- A major argument for simplifying our lives and our future is that we are rapidly depleting our carbon-based energy resources and destroying our planet through global warming. Many people say that humans in every part of the world must change their behavior — must live more simply, especially those of us in the industrialized world. What do you think of that argument?

Challenge the group to try to live without noise for 24 hours. They may have meaningful conversations with other people, but should turn off the iPods, televisions, gaming systems, car radios, and all electronics. They should not watch a movie. They should not go shopping to ogle the latest electronic gadgets. Try to shut down all the background noise that they live with. They may try to keep their own company for 24 hours.

### Reflect

One of the many interesting debates that have raged for centuries in Christendom concerns the question of whether God determines our course and the future or we ourselves do. Obviously, in these nine activities, we have tried to make the case for human free will. We have emphasized the idea that the choices and decisions that young people make today are vitally important. We are not pretending that they are important; they really

In addition, ask group members to try to minimize their carbon footprints for a day — perhaps even to try to spend an entire day without leaving a carbon footprint on our planet. Encourage them to use only green transportation systems and green energy sources. (Use an Internet search engine to discover ways to do this.) They may recycle like crazy, but they may not buy or use food or products with plastic packaging.

Warn group members that it may be difficult for them to do this, since it will require the cooperation of other family members who may have the television on or may have planned a family activity that involves the use of electronic devices or nongreen energy resources.

This difficulty is inherently part of the challenge of this activity. The potential noncooperation by family members and friends corresponds to the very real difficulties that persons trying to live simply, avoid noise, and minimize their car-



count—and will directly impact their future. But there are other views about how much influence we have over the future. John Calvin famously built an entire theology around a concept of God's sovereignty that severely limits human choice. Following Calvin's lead, many Christians today say that God is interested in even the most minute details of their lives and helps them find parking spots when driving and open checkout lanes at the supermarket. Incidentally, one notably irresponsible form of this second argument — and it is not just church people who believe it — says that God, in some benevolent and magical way, overrules the dumb decisions that we humans make. Thus, young people can sow their wild oats, but things will turn out okay for them—they always have in the past. Similarly, people can drive under the influence of alcohol and children can be abused by their caregivers, but they'll be okay — after all, God protects fools, sailors, drunks, and children. Oh, yes, we can pollute the earth and make all of the polar ice melt from global warming, but that'll be all right, too — Jesus is coming back soon, and God promised us a new heaven and a new earth! Some people also try to absolve themselves of the responsibility of worrying about world hunger or the needs of their neighbor. Why get involved in missions? After all, if God had wanted people to have food, jobs, or roofs over their heads, God would have provided those things for them. Didn't Jesus say that "The poor you will always have with you" (Mark 14:7)? To reiterate the point: many of these ideas are ridiculous — even harmful. Human choices and decisions — and in particular, the choices and decisions that young people have to make today — are vitally important. They will directly impact their own and the world's future.

bon footprint will have in today's world. Perhaps the best way for participants to attempt this activity is by discussing its requirements with their family members in advance and enlisting their active cooperation and help. (You might think of providing an explanatory note for parents to help participants with this activity.) Similarly, group members are going to have to work around personal scheduling conflicts; for example, they may want to schedule this activity for a day when they don't have to ride the school bus or drive or catch a car ride to baseball practice, or when they have a lot of homework to do on their computer.

At the next meeting, ask group members how their 24-hour experiment in simple and carbonless living went. Participants who tried to complete this assignment but didn't do very well may take comfort in the fact that they may learn just as much (or more) from their failure as they can learn from their success. Encourage those who did not attempt this assignment to consider it and discuss it with their families. And, leader, don't forget to do this yourself.

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