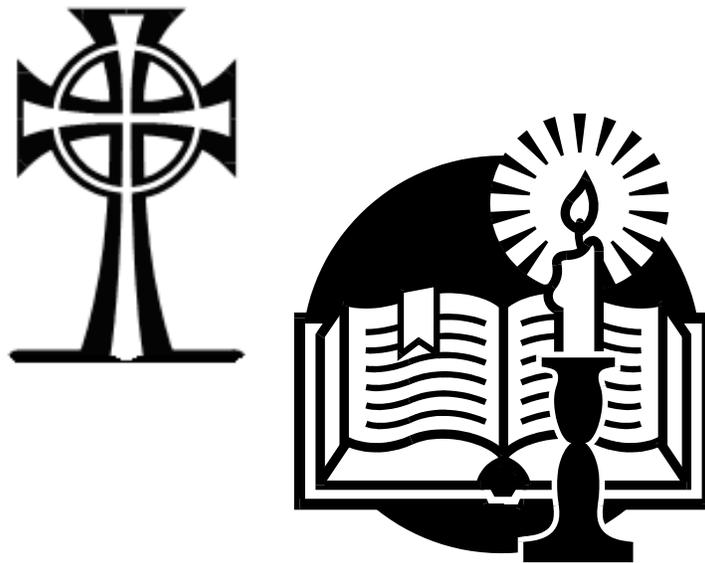


Lenten Devotional

Stewardship Principles



As baptized members of the body of Christ, we gratefully confess Jesus as Lord and Savior. We boldly proclaim the gospel as the Word of God. We clearly recognize the gifts that God has first given us through grace, and we joyfully accept our role and responsibility as stewards.

The following principles provide a foundation for the life of a faithful and generous steward.

We walk together as stewards in God's church.¹

¹ Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, © 2006
Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, © 1989,
National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA.

Lenten Devotional – Stewardship Principles

How to use:

Bible: During Lent, daily read the scripture lessons from the daily lectionary.

Pray: Use the prayer to continue the devotional.

Read: The focal verse, a centering point for the devotional.

Principle: Review the Stewardship Principle (box at upper right hand page edge).

Reflection: Read and think about how the reflection connects to the Bible verses, in particular the focal verse and Stewardship Principle.

This Lenten Devotional follows the appointed daily lectionary readings. These readings are connected to the 10 Stewardship Principles that come from the Apostle Paul's writing to the church in Corinth.

A reflection is provided to enhance exploring the meaning for these Bible verses and the Stewardship Principle. As you read the reflection, consider how the Bible verses (in particular the focal verse) connect with the Stewardship Principle for the day.

What do you hear?

How does it make you feel?

Toward what are you being drawn?

What do you sense you should do?

Questions for Reflection

What do you hear?

How does it make you feel?

Toward what are you being drawn?

What do you sense you should do?

Looking up Bible references:

If you find Bible references confusing, you're not alone. Begin with a Bible reference, such as Matthew 28:19-20. It can be divided into its parts. Book: Matthew, chapter: 28, and verses: 19 through 20. These comprise the three main parts (book, chapter, verse) for a Bible reference.

Find the book, Matthew, in the Bible index in the front. Matthew is the first book in the New Testament. Then find chapter 28 (chapter numbers are larger, often bold type), in Matthew. It's the last chapter. In chapter 28 go to verse 19 (verse numbers are smaller, usually set above the line as superscript). This is the beginning for the reference: Matthew 28:19-20. The 19-20 indicates reading from verse 19 through verse 20. [Note: *alphabetic after verse numbers indicate which sentence: a, b, c = 1st, 2nd, 3rd sentence.*]

Wednesday, February 22: Ash Wednesday

Readings: Joel 2:1-2, 12-17
Psalm 51:1-17
2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10
Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Prayer: *Almighty and ever-living God, you hate nothing you have made, and you forgive the sins of all who are penitent. Create in us new and honest hearts, so that, truly repenting of our sins, we may receive from you, the God of all mercy, full pardon and forgiveness through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen*²

1

Respond gratefully
to what God has first given us. All that we do is a response to God's grace. Everything we are, have, and use comes from God. Best of all, God gives the gift of Jesus Christ and the community of believers. It all begins with God. Our confession of faith in Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior is not of our doing. Grateful stewards put God first.

"... but they gave themselves first to the Lord."
2 Corinthians 8:5

Focal Verse: "Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing." *Joel 2:12-13*

Reflection: Do you really believe that God will provide for you and your family's need?

God is generous, giving, loving, forgiving, and gracious. God desires our loving response to His generosity. God's generosity can be seen most clearly in retrospect. Examine your life. Search to see God's generous hand in it. Take out a pad of paper and write down the times in your life or in the lives of others close to you when God's hand has been present.

What do you hear?

How does it make you feel?

Toward what are you being drawn?

What do you sense you should do?

Now think of some times when your congregation has stepped out in faith and God has been there. Jot down these times

Stewardship is thanksgiving; giving thanks for all that God has given us - our time, our abilities, and our money. Stewardship is the way we manage *all* our time, abilities, and money.

Our stewardship is our decision as to how we live and manage our entire life. What we return to God through the church is only a part of our stewardship. We are given by God the freedom to manage all our time, abilities, and money. That process of management is called stewardship.³

² Evangelical Lutheran Worship, Augsburg Fortress.

³ Cloughen, Jr., Rev. Charles, "One Minute Stewardship Sermons", 1997, Morehouse Publishing, p. 2-3.

2

Obey responsibly

to glorify God as a faithful proclamation of God’s word. We acknowledge our faith and show our faith in the gospel for the glory of God and for the building up of the body of Christ. This takes courage. It involves our life-long obedience, including the ways we treat our families, others, and ourselves.

**“... you glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ.”
2 Corinthians 9:13**

Thursday, February 23

Readings: Psalm 25:1-10
Daniel 9:1-14
1 John 1:3-10

Prayer: O Lord, great and awesome God, be with us, showing your steadfast love toward us. Empower us to trust your word contained in the commandments and in so doing to live your commandments always. In Jesus name. Amen

Focal Verse: “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” *1 John 1:8-9*

Reflection: Trustworthiness ó faithful dependability ó is the mark of the excellent steward.

Christ-centered stewardship is the by-product of a Christ-like attitude.

So Jesus called them and said to them, “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.” Mark 10:42-45

What do you hear?

How does it make you feel?

Toward what are you being drawn?

What do you sense you should do?

At the most basic level, the true steward is a true servant.

Faithful dependability as a Christian steward relates to the management of money, but also to a great deal more. The “portfolio” for which we are responsible includes a wide range of components, and God’s expectation is that we make the most of each one. Think of all the “assets” you have under management: your money, your time, your possessions, your opportunities, your influence, your relationships and much more.

- To be a trustworthy steward, you must handle the small things with the same regard as the big things.
- To be a trustworthy steward, you must see everything in life as sacred.
- Don’t keep the secret things of God; share them liberally.⁴

⁴ Sutherland, Dave and Nowery, Kirk, *The 33 Laws of Stewardship*, NewSource Publishing, © 2003, p. 39-43.

Friday, February 24
Readings: Psalm 25:1-10
Daniel 9:15-25a
2 Timothy 4:1-5



Sacrifice proportionately

as Christ sacrificed for us. For our sake Jesus gave up everything to make us rich through the cross and the resurrection. We are called to sacrifice so others may share in God's word and blessings.

“... gave according to their means, and even beyond their means.”
2 Corinthians 8:3

Prayer: Heavenly Father, you show us grace and mercy beyond reason. As we respond to the gifts we have received may our actions be acceptable. For our giving reflects what you have first given us. Through these actions may others see you and give you glory. In Jesus name. Amen

Focal Verse: ðI solemnly urge you: proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching. ð 1 Timothy 4:1b-2

Reflection: Why We Give

Understanding what the Bible says about financial generosity can help us achieve a balanced plan for our giving.

The faith practice of regular offerings to your congregation is grounded in a ðfirst fruitsð biblical principle (1 Corinthians 16:2). Your offerings express your thankful response to God's gracious presence in your life.

Proportionate Giving

Proportionate giving, or tithing, includes all undesignated giving to your congregation.

Many ELCA members refer to this kind of giving as their Sunday or weekly offering. ðUndesignatedð means that you support your congregation's leadership in their decisions to allocate these funds.

About 90 percent of this giving stays in your congregation. This helps ensure that the ministry of the word flourishes in your community through local outreach and ministries.

Your congregation then shares a small portion of your offering, called mission support, with your synod and the churchwide organization. This financial commitment makes possible God's work through ELCA synodical and churchwide ministries in this country, the Caribbean and around the world.

Our financial generosity is an expression of our love for God, for our neighbor and for ourselves. We are new people in Christ: compassionate and eager to share.⁵

What do you hear?
How does it make you feel?
Toward what are you being drawn?
What do you sense you should do?

⁵ <http://www.elca.org/Our-Faith-In-Action/Stories-of-Faith-in-Action/Explore-the-Stories/Why-We-Give.aspx>

4

Give willingly

as moved by the Holy Spirit. We have been prepared to give ourselves. We give our time, talents, and resources freely.

“For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave ...”
2 Corinthians 8:3

Saturday, February 25

Readings: Psalm 25:1-10
Psalm 32
Matthew 9:2-13

Prayer: *Almighty God, all that we possess is from your loving hand. Give us grace that we may honor you with all we own, always remembering the account we must one day give to Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen*⁶

Focal Verse: *ōMake me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long. All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his decrees. Psalm 25:4-5, 10*

Reflection:

Food Production and Distribution	Problem
The earth is able to produce enough food for everyone to have their nutritional needs met.	1.02 billion people are hungry in the world.
Food production and distribution accounts for one-fifth of the oil consumption in the United States. Oil is used to produce fertilizer, pesticides, and packaging; it is also used for planting, harvesting, shipping, and cooling. Food travels on average 1,500 miles from field to plate.	Human activity, specifically through the burning of fossil fuels, exacerbates climate change. Climate change affects rainfall patterns, which in turn limits the abilities of farmers, especially subsistence farmers, to grow food.
Poorer areas of the United States, both rural and urban, are less likely to have access to affordable and nutritious food. Those who are poor are more likely to live in a <i>ōfood desertö</i> where their only option for food is a convenience store or fast food restaurant.	Obesity and other health problems related to diet (such as Type II Diabetes) are more likely in poorer communities.
In the United States, food is often centrally processed and then shipped across the country and across the world.	If one batch of food is contaminated í it is quickly and widely distributed. ⁷

What do you hear?
How does it make you feel?
Toward what are you being drawn?
What do you sense you should do?

⁶ LBW, p. 44.

⁷ ELCA Hunger Education Toolkit

Sunday, February 26: ***First Sunday in Lent***

Readings: Genesis 9:8-17

Psalm 25:1-10

1 Peter 3:18-22

Mark 1:9-15

Prayer: *Lord God, our strength, the struggle between good and evil rages within and around us, and the devil and all the forces that defy you tempt us with empty promises. Keep us steadfast in your word, and when we fall, raise us again and restore us through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.*⁸

Focal Verse: ðMake me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths.ö **Psalm 25:10**

Reflection: í a theological focus on stewardship is clearly appropriate during the season of Lent.

During the season of Lent it is appropriate for each believer to examine her or his faithfulness to attributes that define God. We say that God offers providence, which verbalizes simply that God takes care of us. Jesus puts this concept in the form of a question: ðLook at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? **Matthew 6:26**

Psalm 25 at its heart addresses the one who prays out of a sense of sinfulness and need for forgiveness. The one who prays asks that God steer his or her life: ðLead me in your truth, and teach me.ö But the petitioner also suggests even more by way of confession: ðFor you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long.ö The promise to wait is in itself revealing. The one who prays offers persistence and endurance as a means to obtain what God alone can deliver. Persistence and endurance also reveal earnestness. Jesusøparable of the Unjust Judge (Luke 18:1-5) praises a woman who received justice only because of her dogged resolve. Likewise, the psalmist promises to wait ðas long as it takes.ö

For stewards, Psalm 25 offers several divine attributes that conceivably those who give and serve faithfully might mimic. Among those divine traits offered by the psalm, we read about Godø mercy, truthfulness, steadfast love, and faithfulness. When the psalmist prays to God, ðTeach me your paths,ö he asks for a portion of the essence of what makes God what God is for us. Later in the incarnation, Jesus becomes the character of the Godhead ó divine traits assuming human flesh. Christ, consequently, answers Psalm 25ø prayer. To learn of God means that stewards assume Godø traits with the faithful intention to share those Godlike traits with the world.⁹

What do you hear?

How does it make you feel?

Toward what are you being drawn?

What do you sense you should do?

⁸ Evangelical Lutheran Worship, Augsburg Fortress

⁹ Mosser, David, Stewardship Services, ©2007 Abingdon Press, p. 106-7.

Monday, February 27
 Readings: Psalm 77
 Job 4:1-21
 Ephesians 2:1-10

5

**Share
abundantly**

as we have received. The purpose of these gifts is for the good of the community of God. We give to build up the body of Christ. We use and share our gifts for the benefit of all.

“... and God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work.”
 2 Corinthians 8:3

Prayer: *Open our hearts, O Lord, and enlighten our minds by the grace of thy Holy Spirit, that we may seek what is well-pleasing to thy will; and so order our doings after thy commandments, that we may be found meet to enter into thine unending joys; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*¹⁰

Focal Verse: ðBut God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christô by grace you have been savedô ð
Ephesians 2:4-5

Reflection:

We need to give and we need to give gladly. What else does Scripture have to say on the subject?

On the first day of every week, each of you is to put aside and save whatever extra you earn, so that collections need not be taken when I come (1 Corinthians 16:2).

The faith practice of making a regular financial offering to your congregation is grounded in a ðfirst fruitsö biblical principle. Your generosity is í part of your day-in-and-day-out joyful response as a child of God.

Offerings refer to giving that is above and beyond, and never in place of, your commitment to regular congregational giving í

Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroy (Luke 12:33).

Alms are our compassionate, heartfelt response to the people Jesus mentioned in Matthew 25: those ðleastô of our sisters and brothers who are ðlessö than we in circumstance only and always our equal in their humanity. Your outreach makes Godø love for them feel very real and very immediate; your kindness reveals Christø presence within them as well.¹¹

What do you hear?

How does it make you feel?

Toward what are you being drawn?

What do you sense you should do?

¹⁰ Bede (The Venerable), For All the Saints, © 1995, American Lutheran Publicity Bureau, p. 32.

¹¹ ELCA, Stories of Faith in Action ó 2010, p. 7.

Tuesday, February 28
 Readings: Psalm 77
 Job 5:8-27
 1 Peter 3:8-18a

6

Give proportionately

is our way of giving in relation to our abundance. We are to give according to our *ōmeans,ō* not according to an income or a budget.

“If the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has – not according to what one does not have.”
 2 Corinthians 8:12

Prayer: *God of wisdom and love, source of all good, send your Spirit to teach us your truth and guide our actions in your way to peace. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.*¹²

Focal Verse: *ōAs for me, I would seek God, and to God I would commit my cause. He does great things and unsearchable, marvelous things without number.ö*
Job 5:8-9

Reflection: The Law of Proportionate Participation

Jesus said that the poor would be with us always, and He declared that the priority, regardless of one’s lot in life, is to glorify God and trust Him explicitly. Whatever the situation, whatever the limitations, we are to worship and serve the Lord wholeheartedly. Just as Jesus loved without limits and gave without restriction, so are we to love and give in proportion to His provision for us.

[Paul] wrote to the Corinthians: *“And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord’s people. And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us. 2 Corinthians 8:1-5 NIV*

The young churches of Macedonia were persecuted severely and were materially poor, yet spiritually they lived above the extreme conditions and excelled in giving it their all. Specifically, they gave to a ministry project that the Apostle Paul had initiated; and they gave in a most remarkable way: sacrificially, beyond their ability, willingly and eagerly *ō* of themselves to God and of their resources to God’s work.

The Law of Proportionate Provision *í* teaches us that *God’s provision dictates the believer’s proportion.* In other words, what He provides determines what we give.¹³

What do you hear?

How does it make you feel?

Toward what are you being drawn?

What do you sense you should do?

¹² The Roman Missal © 1973, International Committee on English in the Liturgy, Inc.
¹³ Sutherland, Dave and Nowery, Kirk, *The 33 Laws of Stewardship*, NewSource Publishing, © 2003, p. 91-94.

Wednesday, February 29
 Readings: Psalm 77
 Proverbs 30:1-9
 Matthew 4:1-11

7

Commit intentionally

means making a statement about your intent and following through. As members in the body of Christ, we are asked to make a commitment of our time, talents, and resources as a faithful response to God and as a statement of support for God's work.

**"... arrange in advance for this bountiful gift that you have promised."
 2 Corinthians 9:5**

Prayer: *Almighty and merciful God, in your goodness keep us, we pray, from all things that may hurt us, that we, being ready both in mind and body, may accomplish with free hearts those things which belong to your purpose; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen*¹⁴

Focal Verse: "You are the God who works wonders; you have displayed your might among the peoples. With your strong arm you redeemed your people, the descendants of Jacob and Joseph. *Psalm 77:14-15*

Reflection:

Each one of us must choose and keep choosing the master we will serve – God or wealth (mammon). In *The Challenge of the Discipline Life*, Richard Foster deals with the power of *mammon* – money. It is not neutral; it has power to control and corrupt the creatures of God. He states:

What all this talk about stewardship fails to see is that money is not just a neutral medium of exchange but a "power" with a life of its own. And very often it is a "power" that is demonic in character. As long as we think of money in impersonal terms alone, no moral problems exist aside from the proper use of it. But when we begin to take seriously the Biblical perspective that money is animated and energized by "powers" then our relationship to money is filled with moral consequences (page 24).

Our relationship to money is what concerns God. Whom do we worship? What do we worship?¹⁵

Money has incredible power to do good or evil. We believe that the power can be harnessed for good – to fulfill Jesus' mission.

What do you hear?
 How does it make you feel?
 Toward what are you being drawn?
 What do you sense you should do?

¹⁴ Book of Common Prayer, © 1977.

¹⁵ Cloughen, Jr., Rev. Charles, "One Minute Stewardship Sermons", 1997, Morehouse Publishing, p. 9, 15.

Thursday, March 1

Readings: Psalm 22:23-31

Genesis 15:1-6, 12-18

Romans 3:21-31

8

Contribute regularly

means practicing our stewardship on a daily basis. By doing so this becomes a lifestyle. Paul instructs us:

**“On the first day of every week, each of you is to put aside and save whatever extra you earn.”
1 Corinthians 16:2**

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, you remind us that “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” (Acts 20:35) You have given us the greatest gift, everlasting life in your kingdom. You invite us to participate in your kingdom now as we experience the joy of giving. In all we do, may we be joyful and regular in our giving as we are a blessing to others. Amen.*

Focal Verse: *From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will pay before those who fear him. The poor shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the Lord. May your hearts live forever! Psalm 22:25-26*

Reflection:

St. Paul speaks of two motivations for giving our selves, our time and our possessions to God’s work. In 2 Corinthians 8:9, he appeals to the model and example of Jesus and asks us to give as Jesus did. In 2 Corinthians 9:8, he reminds us that God promises to richly supply all that is needed for us to continue to give.

The model of Jesus and the promise of God’s provision motivate us to be generous.

Our generosity honors God, the source of all generosity. Our generosity makes God’s purposes known. By God’s power, our generosity provides the announcement of the Good News of salvation and the deeds of mercy, the actions of love, which serve the needs of people everywhere.

Our generosity draws us closer to God, the Giver of all good gifts. Generous deeds shape our lives and our understandings. Through generosity we begin to know more deeply and more broadly the graciousness of God. Generosity does not change God’s behavior toward us, but it changes our behavior toward God.¹⁶

What do you hear?

How does it make you feel?

Toward what are you being drawn?

What do you sense you should do?

¹⁶ Meier, Michael, Step by Step, © 2001,ELCA, p. 1.

Friday, March 2
 Readings: Psalm 22:23-31
 Genesis 16:1-6
 Romans 4:1-12

9

Live genuinely

means putting your faith into action. This is the tangible demonstration of what is sincerely on our hearts and where our treasure is, not simply a verbal expression. The Macadonians set an example that Paul called to the attention of the Corinthians.

“I am testing the genuineness of your love against the earnestness of others.”
 2 Corinthians 8:8

Prayer: *O Lord, giver of every good gift, help us take to heart Jesus’ words when he commanded the leaders of the synagogue: “Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” (Matthew 22:21) Make us mindful that all that we are and all we have, we place at your disposal. May these gifts be gifts that scatter the good news like seed into the world. Make us those who plant the seeds of joy and mercy in all the places we go and bless our gifts that this might be so. We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen*¹⁷

Focal Verse: “For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.” Now to one who works, wages are not reckoned as a gift but as something due. But to one who without works trusts him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness”
Romans 4:3-5.

Reflection: God’s Work through Our Hands¹⁸

God’s love sets us free to roll up our sleeves and get to work.

Not because we need to earn our salvation, but because everything we do is a response to all that we have been given.

Just as our work on behalf of our neighbor is a reflection of our gratitude to God, our financial giving is also a “thank you” to the gift of Jesus in our lives.

Through the work of our hands across the globe and through the generosity of our hands in our weekly offerings, we share God’s boundless love with the world together.

*Marked with the cross of Christ forever,
 we are claimed,
 gathered and
 sent
 for the sake of the world.*

Mission statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

What do you hear?
 How does it make you feel?
 Toward what are you being drawn?
 What do you sense you should do?

¹⁷ Mosser, David, Stewardship Services, ©2007 Abingdon Press, p. 6.

¹⁸ Stories of Faith in Action 2011, ELCA p. 30.

Saturday, March 3
 Readings: Psalm 22:23-31
 Genesis 16:7-15
 Mark 8:27-30

10

Accept a challenge

means recognizing the dynamic nature of our faith. As our faith grows so will our blessings, and our responsibilities. Paul writes,

“... the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.”
 2 Corinthians 9:6

Prayer: Lord, help me to imitate your joyfulness in my own life. Sometimes it is difficult to discern the difference between those things you want me to enjoy as your good gifts and those things I should set aside as self-indulgent or excessive. I ask for the wisdom to see that difference ó to celebrate as you celebrated and to live simply in the spirit of the way you lived simply.¹⁹ In Jesus name. Amen

Focal Verse: òPosterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord, and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn, saying that he has done it.ö *Psalm 22:30-31*

Reflection: *The Law of Single-minded Service*

There’s no question that money has an alluring power, tempting us with all that it can purchase or accomplish. If we give into it, we learn to our dismay that it has the power to control us and make us its servant. Jesus taught His disciples, òNo one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.ö (*Luke 16:13 NIV*)

In Jesus’ teaching, the term òmoneyö has a very broad meaning. It includes actual money, but it also includes everything which we can become attached in this material world ó all the things that money can buy.

One of the most important principles of Christian stewardship is the Law of Single-minded Service. When we use the term *single-minded* it’s obvious what we mean: having a single focus, a single interest, a single purpose.

Single-minded service requires í self-denial, the setting aside of personal wants. Single-minded service also requires sacrifice. Single-minded service requires perseverance as well

Single-mindedness demands constant spiritual discipline. Living by this precept is not easy, but it is rewarding.²⁰

What do you hear?
 How does it make you feel?
 Toward what are you being drawn?
 What do you sense you should do?

¹⁹ NIV Stewardship Study Bible, Stewardship Council, 2009, p. 1329.

²⁰ Sutherland, Dave and Nowery, Kirk, *The 33 Laws of Stewardship*, NewSource Publishing, © 2003, p. 197-200.

Sunday, March 4: ***Second Sunday in Lent***

Readings: Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16
Psalm 22:23-31
Romans 4:13-25
Mark 8:31-38 or Mark 9:2-9

Prayer: *O God, our leader and guide, in the waters of baptism you bring us to new birth to live as your children. Strengthen our faith in your promises, that by your Spirit we may lift up your life to all the world through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.*²¹

Focal Verse: *“For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?”*
Mark 8:36

Reflection:

During Lent the church examines itself, measuring faithfulness against the life and teachings of Jesus. It is often easy enough for aspiring disciples to confess Jesus as Lord and Savior, yet the proof of discipleship is in the follow-up to the confession. For stewards, what we do with what we have after we make our confession of faith is a litmus test of our stewardship ó or how we manage the households God call us to manage.

í Jesus begins to define what those who truly follow him will face.

It is obvious on its face that stewards must first make a confession about who Jesus is. Yet stewardship does more than merely manage a confession. Stewardship assumes the responsibility of living the faith by managing the households of gifts and graces God has loaned us. Thus, what we do with what we have is a “second step” toward full discipleship.²²

What do you
hear?

How does it
make you
feel?

Toward what
are you
being
drawn?

What do you
sense you
should do?

²¹ Evangelical Lutheran Worship.

²² Mosser, David, Stewardship Services, ©2007 Abingdon Press, p. 108-9.

Monday, March 5
 Readings: Psalm 105:1-11, 37-45
 Genesis 21:1-7
 Hebrews 1:8-12

Stewardship Principle

1

Respond gratefully

to what God has first given us. All that we do is a response to God's grace. Everything we are, have, and use comes from God. Best of all, God gives the gift of Jesus Christ and the community of believers. It all begins with God. Our confession of faith in Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior is not of our doing. Grateful stewards put God first.

"... but they gave themselves first to the Lord."
 2 Corinthians 8:5

Prayer: *Merciful Creator, your hand is open wide to satisfy the needs of every living creature. Make us always thankful for your living providence; and grant that we, remembering the account that we must one day give, may be faithful stewards of your good gifts, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.*²³

Focal Verse: *ōO give thanks to the Lord, call on his name, make known his deeds among the peoples. Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wonderful works.ō*
Psalm 105:1-2

Reflection: Generosity is the natural consequence of abundance.

The most effective way to break the power of money is to give it away ó to give it away generously, to give it away in a manner that the world would describe as reckless.

The goal of our stewardship ministry is to help God's people grow in their relationship with Jesus through the use of the time, talents, and finances God has entrusted to them.

There are certain characteristics that the Bible lifts up when it talks about giving.

These following six characteristics could easily be seen as the values of a steward.

- What do you hear?
 - How does it make you feel?
 - Toward what are you being drawn?
 - What do you sense you should do?

Intentional: Being intentional in one's giving means to develop a plan for your giving and then follow through with that plan.

Regular: Regular giving í means to establish a pattern in your giving, and to follow that pattern.

Generous: Generous giving is perhaps the most basic stewardship value. God's incredible generosity is the basis for any call for generous giving on the part of God people. We can't out give God.

First: First-fruit giving í means giving to God first and living off the rest.

Proportional: The Bible always calls us to percentage giving.

Cheerful: Cheerful giving í comes from 2 Corinthians 9:7; *ōGod loves a cheerful giver.ō* The key to being a cheerful giver is to practice the other stewardship values.²⁴

²³ Evangelical Lutheran Worship

²⁴ Charles Lane, Ask, Thank, Tell, © 2006, Augsburg Fortress, p. 42-53.

Tuesday, March 6

Readings: Psalm 105:1-11, 37-45

Genesis 22:1-19

Hebrews 11:1-3, 13-19

2

Obey responsibly

to glorify God as a faithful proclamation of God's word. We acknowledge our faith and show our faith in the gospel for the glory of God and for the building up of the body of Christ. This takes courage. It involves our life-long obedience, including the ways we treat our families, others, and ourselves.

**"... you glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ."
2 Corinthians 9:13**

Prayer: *O God, you teach in the Holy Scripture that we are to care for those who have little and are poor. Remind us that as we give our offering that we are contributing to those who are the least, the lost, and the last. Daily may we remember the words of Jesus, who taught us, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." (Matthew 25:40) Help us remember just how much we truly have.²⁵ In Jesus name, Amen.*

Focal Verse: ðThe angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven, and said, ðBy myself I have sworn, says the Lord: Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore.ð **Genesis 22:15-17a**

Reflection: Stewardship is growing, developing, advancing, and building the gifts with which God has blessed us. God supplies resources sufficient to the mission.

- í live in the confidence that:
 - The love of God is renewing
 - The power of God is astonishing
 - The grace of God is amazing
 - The purpose of God is moving
 - The hope of God is overcomes all.

God invites us to be a good steward of the gift of generosity. A good steward returns all to the master. As you return all to God, you are freed from thinking you own what you have been given. God invites you to be a steward of the gift of God's mission.

As stewards of God's mission, it is never quite clear who is helping whom. God gives us first the mission, and then God gives us the congregation ó the outpost, the mission team ó with which to be in mission with the unchurched.

When you are a good steward of the congregation with which God has blessed you, you help that congregation toward wellness, to grow beyond a sense of powerlessness, a sense of compulsiveness for perfectionism, a sense of low self-esteem, a sense of depression or dependency, a sense of codependency.

You advance the congregation toward healing and wellness. As you do so, you act as a good steward of God's mission.²⁶

What do you hear?

How does it make you feel?

Toward what are you being drawn?

What do you sense you should do?

²⁵ Mosser, David, Stewardship Services, © 2007, Abingdon Press, p. 62.

²⁶ Callahan, Kenneth L., Giving and Stewardship in an Effective Church, HarperSanFrancisco, © 1992, p. 115-124.

Wednesday, March 7
Readings: Psalm 105:1-11, 37-45
Jeremiah 30:12-22
John 12:36-43

Stewardship Principle

3

Sacrifice proportionately

as Christ sacrificed for us. For our sake Jesus gave up everything to make us rich through the cross and the resurrection. We are called to sacrifice so others may share in God's word and blessings.

“... gave according to their means, and even beyond their means.”
2 Corinthians 8:3

Prayer: *Gracious Lord, you have blessed us with abundance. From your bounty you have given us all that we need and even more. Open our hearts to make available what you have given us so that all will have enough this day. In Jesus name. Amen.*

Focal Verse: For he remembered his holy promise, and Abraham, his servant. So he brought his people out with joy, his chosen ones with singing. He gave them the lands of the nations, and they took possession of the wealth of the peoples, that they might keep his statutes and observe his laws. Praise the Lord! **Psalm 105:42-45**

Reflection:

Christian stewardship begins with God's giving. A person cannot be a Christian giver until he or she first becomes a receiver, until he or she receives God's gift. As Christian stewards, we are God's trustees who are chosen to take care of all that is important to God.

The Christian steward is one who cultivates an intimate relationship with God. It is a relationship of prayer, Bible study, spiritual growth, constancy in worship, service to the community, and giving.

Yes, Christian stewardship begins with God's love, but it goes on to affirm God's ownership. It is that all we have is God's. A friend once designed an overhead slide for me to use in seminars. It shows a house with a rental truck on the back. How much of what we have is really ours?

Tithing is not about giving 10 percent; it is about who we are, whose we are, and what we are doing with all of it or all 100 percent. Christian stewardship begins with God's love, affirms God's ownership, and then celebrates God's partnership.

Stewardship understands that everyone is in a partnership with God, a partnership in which God provides the gifts for ministry. It is God's invitation to be in partnership, provide a clue of what life is about for each individual.²⁷

What do you hear?

How does it make you feel?

Toward what are you being drawn?

What do you sense you should do?

²⁷ Joiner, Donald W., *Creating a Climate for Giving*, © 2001, Discipleship Resources, p.30-33.

Thursday, March 8

Readings: Psalm 19
Exodus 19:1-9a
1 Peter 2:4-10

Prayer: *Heavenly Father you direct all that we do. Following your word, we ask, search and knock trusting in your sure and certain promise that whatever is done in your name, consistent with your will comes to fruition through your grace. In Jesus name. Amen*

Focal Verse: *“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” 1 Peter 2:9*

Stewardship Principle

4

Give willingly

as moved by the Holy Spirit. We have been prepared to give ourselves. We give our time, talents, and resources freely.

“For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave ...”
2 Corinthians 8:3

Reflection: When practiced consistently and intentionally, giving can become a spiritual discipline and, even more, a sacred art. When we practice giving regularly and understand that our motivation has some connection outside of ourselves, we have the opportunity to radically transform our lives, the life of another person, even the lives of entire communities.

Creating a lifestyle of generosity will allow you to do good in this world. Your giving will have a ripple effect; it will be passed on to other people, other families, other communities, other generations. Your giving will change the world.

When we create a *lifestyle* of giving, not just participating in a whirlwind of giving one weekend and then dropping the practice, our lives can become continuously filled with the blessings that come from this spiritual practice. Creating a lifestyle of generosity is more than just behavioral modifications; it is seeing the world differently every day. Taking small, consistent steps now is far better than waiting until the “right time.”²⁸

What do you hear?

How does it make you feel?

Toward what are you being drawn?

What do you sense you should do?

²⁸ Giving - The Sacred Art: Creating a Lifestyle of Generosity, Lauren Tyler Wright, 2008, SkyLight Paths, p. ix-x, xxii-xxiii.

Friday, March 9

Stewardship Principle

Readings: Psalm 19
Exodus 19:9b-15
Acts 7:30-40

5

Share abundantly

as we have received. The purpose of these gifts is for the good of the community of God. We give to build up the body of Christ. We use and share our gifts for the benefit of all.

“... and God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work.”
2 Corinthians 8:3

Prayer: *Lord God, you give to us in abundance desiring that we use your good gifts to benefit all people. Empower us to respond in faith in all that we do so that our actions bring glory to your holy name. Amen.*

Focal Verse: The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. **Psalm 19**

Reflection: Do we ask ourselves whether the way we use our money and the laws and rules we create to arrange our economy truly bend toward justice for the poor and needy of our world? Are we content to continue believing that current arrangements which so obviously benefit those of us who are most well off, will at some point ó somehow ó begin to work for the most needy as well?

Proverbs recognizes that those who seek wisdom’s way of justice will be concerned not only with the protection of the poor, but also with the well-being of other socially marginalized people.

If a king judges the poor with equity,
his throne will be established forever. (Proverbs 29:14)

The sages note that political leaders who ensure justice for the poor exercise legitimate dominion. A leader’s rule is legitimate only insofar as the leader establishes and maintains social justice. A king is responsible for providing justice to those who seek it. When political rulers promote and ensure genuine social justice, they align themselves with the divine will.

Besides the calls to show kindness to the poor and vulnerable people in our midst and the claim that a society’s political leaders have a responsibility to maintain social justice in their realms í proverbs speak of every person’s responsibility to act in a way that is fair, honest, and just when it comes to basic economic activity.²⁹

What do you hear?

How does it make you feel?

Toward what are you being drawn?

What do you sense you should do?

²⁹ Money and the Way of Wisdom: Insights from the Book of Proverbs, Timothy J. Sandoval, PhD, 2008, SkyLight Paths, p.91, 95, 96, 97, 99.

Saturday, March 10

Stewardship Principle

Readings: Psalm 19; Exodus 19:16-25; Mark 9:2-8

6

Give proportionately

is our way of giving in relation to our abundance. We are to give according to our means, not according to an income or a budget.

“If the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has – not according to what one does not have.”
2 Corinthians 8:12

Prayer: *Dear God, giver of all that we have and hold. You desire that all we do would bear witness to your selfless love. As you have blessed us, so we bless those around us. In proportion to what we have received, may we give. In Jesus name. Amen.*

Focal Verse: Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” **Mark 9:7**

Reflection:

There are many ways we can offer our thanks to God, and giving from our financial resources is an important, effective, and practical means of expressing our love of our Creator.

Proportionate giving is a method of Christian giving in which we deliberately set aside a specific percentage of our annual income to give to God through the ministry of the church. We are giving back to God a proportion of that which came from God – a portion of the blessings God has bestowed on us.³⁰

Three steps toward proportionate giving are 1) assess your current financial resources, 2) select a percentage amount and 3) apply the percentage amount to your current resources.

Current financial resources: for many this is primarily income received from working. Others sources include investment income, rental income and growth in capital resources (ie. stocks, bonds, land, other holdings). What are my current financial resources?

Percentage amount: a Biblical tithe is 10% of current income. That is a reasonable goal to grow toward. For other income sources consider 1% of current values. What is your current percentage? What do you desire this percentage to grow toward?

Apply the percentage to your current financial resources. Use the appropriate percentage for each resource type. Earned income, income from interest and rents, and value growth from capital assets (land, stocks, investments, etc.). What is the dollar amount for each type? How will you make this available as a thankful offering to God for all you have received?

What do you hear?
How does it make you feel?
Toward what are you being drawn?
What do you sense you should do?

³⁰ www.poplutheran.com/Stewardship

Sunday, March 11 ó **Third Sunday in Lent**

Readings: Exodus 20:1-17
Psalm 19
1 Corinthians 1:18-25
John 2:13-22

Prayer: *Merciful God, the fountain of living water, you quench our thirst and wash away our sin. Give us this water always. Bring us to drink from the well that flows with the beauty of your truth through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.*³¹

Focal Verse: Then God spoke all these words: I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; ***Exodus 20:1-2***

Reflection: ðWe Americans are people who spend money we don't have to buy things we don't need to impress people we don't like.ö

We have built our whole Western economy upon this and similar principles, and it is out of this culture of conspicuous consumption that Christian stewards must function. We must swim against the stream of every cultural impulse in our society if we are to function as Christian stewards today.

The Ten Commandments provide a clear and understandable way to define relationships between people and between people and God. Moreover, the first verse places the commandments within the narrative story of Israel and its liberation from oppression. The context speaks of liberation from Egypt, but it gestures toward liberation from the other things as well ó including our culture of conspicuous consumption.

What do you hear?

How does it make you feel?

Toward what are you being drawn?

What do you sense you should do?

To covet simply means to lust after that which belongs to another. Moses is explicit about possessions that tempt: ðyour neighbor's house í ; your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.ö If God reveals a higher purpose in life than our having more and getting more, then Christian stewards apprehend a revelation of authentic life. Clearly this is no easy task. A step toward bona fide Christian stewardship concedes that our battle to obtain more and more material possessions is little worth the struggle.³²

³¹ Evangelical Lutheran Worship

³² Mosser, David, *The Stewardship Companion*, Westminster John Knox Press, © 2007, p. 109-10.

Monday, March 12

Readings: Psalm 84; 1 Kings 6:1-4, 21-22;
1 Corinthians 3:10-23

Prayer: Lord Jesus, as you have come to us, come for us, come to restore us; may our lives reflect, for others to see, these great gifts. In Jesus name. Amen

Focal Verse: According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it. **1 Corinthians 3:10**

Reflection: When you give with intention, you may find that giving is a transformational *form* of worship that expresses reverence for God, generates joyful gratitude, and leads you to a closer relationship with the Sacred.

Giving in all its forms, both financial and otherwise, can be an act of worship by virtue of its unique power to remind us that life itself, with all its ups and downs, all its struggles and heartaches and victories, is fundamentally a gift from God.

Worship reorders our values and our priorities by helping us fasten our vision on the eternal, on that which transcends our small egos. Likewise, giving in all its forms helps us to reorder our everyday perceptions that keep *ōmeō* and what is *ōmineō* at the center of the universe. By giving, we release our desire to hold desperately to what is in our hands and find that we are left with open palms and a mind no longer distracted by clinging to stuff. This posture of open hands and open mind, in turn, spurs further generous giving and helps us to see through the cultural clutter to the deep interconnectedness we all share.

Worshippers imitate God by reciprocating God's generosity and show God devotion by embodying the command to give.

When I regularly and deliberately give my money, I consciously reaffirm life as an abundant gift and turn my back on the cultural narratives that tell me accumulation is the only path to fulfillment. When you give money away, you discover that the source of joyful gratitude isn't the money itself, but the transformation of heart and perspective that the act of giving achieves.³³

Stewardship Principle

7

Commit intentionally

means making a statement about your intent and following through. As members in the body of Christ, we are asked to make a commitment of our time, talents, and resources as a faithful response to God and as a statement of support for God's work.

**"... arrange in advance for this bountiful gift that you have promised."
2 Corinthians 9:5**

What do you hear?

How does it make you feel?

Toward what are you being drawn?

What do you sense you should do?

³³ Giving - The Sacred Art: Creating a Lifestyle of Generosity, Lauren Tyler Wright, 2008, SkyLight Paths, p. 4-5, 11, 13, 15.

Tuesday, March 13

Stewardship Principle

Readings: Psalm 84; 2 Chronicles 29:1-11, 16-19;
Hebrews 9:23-28

8 **Contribute regularly**

means practicing our stewardship on a daily basis. By doing so this becomes a lifestyle. Paul instructs us:

“On the first day of every week, each of you is to put aside and save whatever extra you earn.”
1 Corinthians 16:2

Prayer: *God, you provide for all that I need and even more. This you do for me and all people though we do not deserve nor merit your graciousness. From my thankful heart give me the courage to return to you some of what I have received so that your goodness would be made known throughout the world. This I do in Jesus name. Amen*

Focal Verse: ðNow it is in my heart to make a covenant with the Lord, the God of Israel, so that his fierce anger may turn away from us. My sons, do not now be negligent, for the Lord has chosen you to stand in his presence to minister to him, and to be his ministers and make offerings to him.ö

2 Chronicles 29:10-11

Reflection:

The Doors of Generosity

I am sure that you come across opportunities to be generous almost every day, and if you fail to respond to those opportunities, who knows what rivers will not flow, what great ministries will never come to birth, what mighty things will not get done? God has opened the door of generosity to you; don't fail to open up the doors of generosity to others. ó Selwyn Hughes (1928-2006)³⁴

Daily we receive from God in great abundance. It comes to us as pure gift, apart from what do or what we might sense we deserve. This is God's heart ó to give everyday all that is needed and even more.

Since we receive and continue to receive, we are set in a position to reflect God, the giver of all good gifts, to the world around us. As we give to God it speaks for other to see that God is good, generous and provides beyond our hopes or expectations. Thanking God is appropriate and what we do. It is a regular part of daily life for a Christian.

- What do you hear?
- How does it make you feel?
- Toward what are you being drawn?
- What do you sense you should do?

³⁴ NIV Stewardship Study Bible, Stewardship Council, 2009, p. 756.

Wednesday, March 14

Readings: Psalm 84; Ezra 6:1-16; Mark 11:15-19

Prayer: *Lord Jesus let our lives reflect our love for you as we share with our neighbor all that you give us. Through what we do in your name allow your light to shine through us drawing all to know you. This we pray in Jesus name. Amen.*

Focal Verse: [Jesus] was teaching and saying, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations?' But you have made it a den of robbers."
Mark 11:17

Reflection: Stewardship is í to assume the responsibility of managing resources ó such as money, possessions, or land ó that belong to someone else for the benefit of a third party.

Stewardship Principle

9

Live genuinely

means putting your faith into action. This is the tangible demonstration of what is sincerely on our hearts and where our treasure is, not simply a verbal expression. The Macadonians set an example that Paul called to the attention of the Corinthians.

**"I am testing the genuineness of your love against the earnestness of others."
2 Corinthians 8:8**

The nagging belief that "I don't have enough" is a symptom of seeing the world as a place of scarcity. The natural response of a mind that sees scarcity is to grab for as much as it can get ó for itself. It does not see resources as opportunities to help others, and it certainly is not a generous giver.

A great Punjabi proverb says, "When a sparrow sips in a river, the water doesn't recede. Giving charity does not deplete wealth."

When I choose to see my money, my belonging, my time as not my own but given to me by God. I learn to let go of my worried thoughts and instead view the world through the lens of abundance. Because everything I have is a gift, I trust that I do already have an abundance, indeed an extra-abundance, and that I will always have enough. It is a way of seeing the world as a place of abundance, not scarcity.

Take a deep breath í exhale í and remind yourself of the abundant resources God has provided.³⁵

What do you hear?

How does it make you feel?

Toward what are you being drawn?

What do you sense you should do?

³⁵ Giving - The Sacred Art: Creating a Lifestyle of Generosity, Lauren Tyler Wright, 2008, SkyLight Paths, p. 21, 29, 30, 32.

Thursday, March 15

Stewardship Principle

Readings: Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22; Genesis 9:8-17;
Ephesians 1:3-6

10

Accept a challenge

means recognizing the dynamic nature of our faith. As our faith grows so will our blessings, and our responsibilities. Paul writes,

“... the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.”
2 Corinthians 9:6

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, we find it easier to place our focus on ourselves, what is happening in our lives now and find it more difficult to see the future you have promised with its goodness for all creation. Move us, by your Spirit, to act appropriately in all times and places; so that all will come to know and trust the gifts you give us. In Jesus name. Amen.*

Focal Verse: God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. **Genesis 9:12-13**

Reflection: We must begin with this basic vision: our goal is to find the life that God wants us to have, in confidence that this will be the best life we could possibly have.

What we are supposed to do for God is directly related to what God does for us. For example, the Bible teaches that generosity is a fruit of God’s Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). The way to become generous people, then, involves not quenching God’s Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19), but allowing the transforming work of Christ to have its full effect in shaping us to be the people God wants us to be (Romans 12:2; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 2:20; Philippians 1:6).

We are invited to put money in the offering plate on Sunday morning not because the church needs our money but because *we want and need to give it*. We have a spiritual need to worship God, and through our offerings we are able to express our love and devotion for God in a way that is simple and sincere. The motivation of the giver is what counts most, not the size of the gift or degree of benefit to the recipient (see Mark 12:42-44).

There is a strong connection between *love* and *giving*. Most of us know what it is like to love someone so much that we want to give them things. The motivation for such gifts is not primarily obligation but desire ó we give not because it is something we *should* do but because it is something we *want* to do.³⁶

What do you hear?
How does it make you feel?
Toward what are you being drawn?
What do you sense you should do?

³⁶ Powell, Mark Allan, Giving to God: The Bible’s Good News about Living a Generous Life, © 2006, Errdmans Publishing, p. 3, 4 12, and 15.

Friday, March 16

Stewardship Principle

Readings: Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22; Daniel 12:5-13;
Ephesians 1:7-14

Prayer: *Gracious Lord, with your protection and love I want for nothing. In you dear Lord I have the comfort to lie down in green pastures and rest beside the still waters of baptism. You alone Lord restore and refresh my soul daily. Together you and I face the trials of life. For this I am most grateful. Help me, Shepherd Lord, to keep life in perspective to enjoy, share and use all that you have provided. In Jesus' name. Amen*

Focal Verse: In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us. ***Ephesians 1:7-8a***

Reflection: The Book of Proverbs talks about how valuable the way of wisdom and virtue is. The sages teach us that the way of wisdom and virtue is more valuable than riches: It is enduring wealth.ö

Treasures gained by wickedness do not profit,
but righteousness delivers from death. (Proverbs 10:2)
Those who are greedy for unjust gain make trouble for their households,
but those who hate bribes will live. (Proverbs 15:27)
The getting of treasures by a lying tongue
is a fleeting vapor and a snare of death. (Proverbs 21:6)

These proverbs help us distinguish money and material gain from what is of genuine value; they also help us discern what virtues and character traits we can acquire that will bring true and enduring life and fulfillment.

[The] fundamental perspective the sages articulate [is] that the reward of the one who follows wisdom's way will not be mere material prosperity, but a broader experience of a good and contented life. The sages í are saying that wealth has a tendency to transform those who possess it into people who are largely defined by what they have, and how insatiably they consume. The sages ask us to use our intellectual capacities to question our motives and to heighten our awareness about how we, too, might be profligate [wildly extravagant] with our bounty.

The sages are trying to motivate us to acquire and practice the virtue of generosity and to vanquish any greediness from our spirits. [They] ask us to be wise stewards of what we have, to employ our resources in the service of others. [They] ask us to recognize that looking to the betterment of others, which perhaps might cost us economically, results not merely in a good feeling, but can also help remove the animosity of others and so also diminish the anxiety, and sometimes even fear, we have of our neighbors around town and around the world.³⁷

1

Respond gratefully

to what God has first given us. All that we do is a response to God's grace. Everything we are, have, and use comes from God. Best of all, God gives the gift of Jesus Christ and the community of believers. It all begins with God. Our confession of faith in Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior is not of our doing. Grateful stewards put God first.

**"... but they gave themselves first to the Lord."
2 Corinthians 8:5**

What do you hear?

How does it make you feel?

Toward what are you being drawn?

What do you sense you should do?

³⁷ Money and the Way of Wisdom: Insights from the Book of Proverbs, Timothy J. Sandoval, PhD, 2008, SkyLight Paths, p. 53, 58, 59, 60, 72, 73, 75.

Saturday, March 17

Stewardship Principle

Readings: Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22
Numbers 20:22-29
John 3:1-13

Prayer: *Gracious Father, open my eyes to the light of Christ in this world. Help me to see his grace, his glory, and his love. Gracious Father, help me to share that light to build up your kingdom. Give me the strength and courage to live and proclaim your Word among us. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

Focal Verse: O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever.

Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wonderful works to humankind. And let them offer thanksgiving sacrifices, and tell of his deeds with songs of joy. *Psalm 107:1, 21-22*

2

Obey responsibly

to glorify God as a faithful proclamation of God's word. We acknowledge our faith and show our faith in the gospel for the glory of God and for the building up of the body of Christ. This takes courage. It involves our life-long obedience, including the ways we treat our families, others, and ourselves.

**"... you glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ."
2 Corinthians 9:13**

Reflection: How We Spend Money

When we are faithful stewards, we *spend* our money in God-pleasing ways. We please God when we use our money in ways that serve others (1 Pet 4:10-11) and that demonstrate appropriate self-care.

Accordingly, Christians may view the commendation of frugality and moderation not as a requirement but as an invitation to a joy-filled life. We all know that acquisition of possessions does not in itself bring joy. What is called for, then, is not an arbitrary distinction between "necessities" and "luxuries" but discernment regarding what is truly worthwhile and what is not. Ultimately, such decisions must be matters for personal conscience or family discussion. Christian stewards may not always be consistent or predictable in such deliberations, but the mere fact that they consider such matters prayerfully, seeking the guidance of God's Spirit, will set them apart from the general population.

If we begin consciously spending our money in ways that we believe are pleasing to God, we will not miss out on the pleasures of life. If anything, we will begin appreciating such pleasures all the more, knowing that God approves and applauds our enjoyment of this good world and much that it affords.

Discerning people lack no appreciation for the wonder and value of life but, to the contrary, appreciate what they have and do not regret the absence of what they choose to forego.³⁸

What do you hear?
How does it make you feel?
Toward what are you being drawn?
What do you sense you should do?

³⁸ Mark Allen Powell, Faithful Living: A Biblical Ethic of Financial Stewardship, Journal of Lutheran Ethics (JLE), Volume 7, Issue 1, © January 2007

Sunday March 18 ó **Fourth Sunday in Lent**

Readings: Numbers 21:4-9; Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22; Ephesians 2:1-10; John 3:14-21

Prayer: *Bend your ear to hear my prayer, Lord Christ. Give me the discipline to work with you, to discern your will, and to faithfully steward the resources you have provided this day and forever more. Amen.*

Focal Verse: O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever.

Some were sick through their sinful ways, and because of their iniquities endured affliction; they loathed any kind of food, and they drew near to the gates of death. ***Psalm 107:1, 17-18***

Reflection: Psalm 107 speaks to the issue of sickness unto death. We see the most explicit sign in the phrase “they drew near to the gates of death.” The first three verses serve as a preface to the entire psalm. In essence the psalm calls on people to offer thanksgiving to God for God’s redemption of the people in their time of trouble.

The whole of Psalm 107 recounts the diverse conditions from which the Lord saves the people. In verse 21, the psalmist offers believers an apt response. After the sinful ways, after the affliction, after drawing near the gates of death, after trouble and distress, and after near destruction, the redeemed people have one proper response: “Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wonderful works to humankind.” In this admonition inheres the steward’s wisdom ó “Let them offer thanksgiving sacrifices, and tell of his deeds with songs of joy.”

Obviously God needs nothing from humankind. God plainly reveals this in an odd and bare divine confession from Psalm 50:12: “If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and all that is in it is mine.” Yet what God desires from believers is a sense of grateful thanksgiving. We offer thanks and celebrate with songs and praise.

Psalm 107 suggested long ago much of what recent experiential science has tried to prove. People who are generous are happier, healthier, and better adjusted to life than people who are not. When we consider that God loans us all our resources, then stewards appreciate that faithful household management of God’s gifts leads to abundant life. God indeed blesses us for generosity, and it is our way of expressing our thanks.³⁹

What do you hear?

How does it make you feel?

Toward what are you being drawn?

What do you sense you should do?

³⁹ Mosser, David, *The Stewardship Companion*, Westminster John Knox Press, © 2007, p. 110-11.

Monday, March 19

Stewardship Principle

Readings: Psalm 107:1-16
Exodus 15:22-27
Hebrews 3:1-6

3

Sacrifice proportionately

as Christ sacrificed for us. For our sake Jesus gave up everything to make us rich through the cross and the resurrection. We are called to sacrifice so others may share in God's word and blessings.

"... gave according to their means, and even beyond their means."
2 Corinthians 8:3

Prayer: *Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, O my soul!
I will praise the Lord as long as I live;
I will sing praises to my God all my life long.
Do not put your trust in princes, in mortals, in whom there is no help.
When their breath departs, they return to the earth; on that very day their plans perish.
Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God. Amen. Psalm 146:1-5*

Focal Verse: Therefore, brothers and sisters, holy partners in a heavenly calling, consider that Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in all God's house. **Hebrews 3:1-2**

Reflection:

Stewardship is í to assume the responsibility of managing resources ó such as money, possessions, or land ó that belong to someone else for the benefit of a third party.

The nagging belief that ðI don't have enoughö is a symptom of seeing the world as a place of scarcity. The natural response of a mind that sees scarcity is to grab for as much as it can get ó for itself. It does not see resources as opportunities to help others, and it certainly is not a generous giver.

A great Punjabi proverb says, ðWhen a sparrow sips in a river, the water doesn't recede. Giving charity does not deplete wealth.ö

When I choose to see my money, my belonging, my time as not my own but given to me by God. I learn to let go of my worried thoughts and instead view the world through the lens of abundance. Because everything I have is a gift, I trust that I do already have an abundance, indeed an extra-abundance, and that I will always have enough. It is a way of seeing the world as a place of abundance, not scarcity.

Take a deep breath í exhale í and remind yourself of the abundant resources God has provided.⁴⁰

What do you hear?
How does it make you feel?
Toward what are you being drawn?
What do you sense you should do?

⁴⁰ Giving - The Sacred Art: Creating a Lifestyle of Generosity, Lauren Tyler Wright, 2008, SkyLight Paths, p. 21, 29, 30, 32.

Tuesday March 20

Readings: Psalm 107:1-16
 Numbers 20:1-13
 1 Corinthians 10:6-13

Prayer: *Gracious Father, thank you for all the blessings you give to us. Open our eyes to see, and our hearts to share the blessings you have sacrificed yourself to give us. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

Focal Verse: The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Take the staff, and assemble the congregation, you and your brother Aaron, and command the rock before their eyes to yield its water. Thus you shall bring water out of the rock for them; thus you shall provide drink for the congregation and their livestock. **Numbers 20:7-8**

Reflection: The way of wisdom, from generosity to right speech, has at its core a relational component, *social virtue*. Proverbs uses its vocabulary of money to describe the enduring worth of this social component of wisdom's way.

The sayings in Proverbs that highlight different facets of social justice teach us practical things about money and the way of wisdom, including how we ought to use our money and how we ought to act when it comes to the full range of our economic dealings.

The sages have much to say about how those who are not poor ought to treat those with fewer economic resources.

Those who oppress the poor insult their Maker,
 but those who are kind to the needy honor him. (Proverbs 14:31)
 Those who mock the poor insult their Maker;
 those who are glad at calamity will not go unpunished. (Proverbs 17:5)
 Those who are generous are blessed,
 for they share their bread with the poor. (Proverbs 22:9)
 Whoever gives to the poor will lack nothing,
 but one who turns a blind eye will get many a curse. (Proverbs 28:27)

These sayings seek to motivate us to get on the right moral side of the cosmos. Showing kindness to the poor and generously giving to the needy belong to the way of wisdom and so are rhetorically linked to the positive images of blessing and abundance in the verses. Ignoring or oppressing the poor belongs to the way of folly and wickedness and is thus associated with curses and a person's fruitless calls for aid.

What is at stake for the poor in all this are the basic necessities of physical existence. What is at stake for the audience, the ones who are actually in a position to give generously to the needy, is the meaningful and full life to which the way of wisdom leads.⁴¹

4

Give willingly

as moved by the Holy Spirit. We have been prepared to give ourselves. We give our time, talents, and resources freely.

“For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave ...”
2 Corinthians 8:3

What do you hear?

How does it make you feel?

Toward what are you being drawn?

What do you sense you should do?

⁴¹ Money and the Way of Wisdom: Insights from the Book of Proverbs, Timothy J. Sandoval, PhD, 2008, SkyLight Paths, p. 85, 86, 87.

Wednesday March 21

Readings: Psalm 107:1-16
 Isaiah 60:15-22
 John 8:12-20

Prayer: *Merciful Lord, open our eyes to see your grace.
 Open our mouths to share and proclaim your love.
 In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Focal Verse: Your people shall all be righteous; they shall possess the land forever. They are the shoot that I planted, the work of my hands, so that I might be glorified. **Isaiah 60:21**

Reflection: How We Regard Money

5

Share abundantly

as we have received. The purpose of these gifts is for the good of the community of God. We give to build up the body of Christ. We use and share our gifts for the benefit of all.

“... and God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work.”
 2 Corinthians 8:3

When we are faithful stewards, we *regard* our money in God-pleasing ways. The Bible often displays strong interest in the attitudes and motivations that undergird human behavior, and this is never more true than with regard to material things. Scripture says that "the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil" and maintains that one "cannot serve God and wealth" (Matt 6:24). Money, then, is to be something that we use, not something that we love or serve. We should not allow money to become a primary source of joy or meaning in our lives (that would be loving it) nor should we allow money to exercise a controlling influence over our decisions (that would be serving it).

Acknowledgment of God as the giver of all that we have also implies trust in God's continuing benevolence. The Bible cautions us not to be anxious (Matt 6:25-33). "Do not worry about tomorrow," Jesus says (Matt 6:34). "Do not worry about *anything*," the apostle Paul adds (Phil 4:6). When we trust in God to provide us with what we need, we can have less stressful and more satisfying lives. Indeed, it is trust in God that accounts for Paul's startling claim, "I have learned to be content with whatever I have" (Phil 4:11). Such contentment is grounded in the confidence that we not only *will* have enough to get by, but that we already *do* have enough. We have enough to be the people God wants us to be and to have the lives God wants us to have.⁴²

What do you hear?

How does it make you feel?

Toward what are you being drawn?

What do you sense you should do?

⁴² Mark Allen Powell, Faithful Living: A Biblical Ethic of Financial Stewardship, Journal of Lutheran Ethics (JLE), Volume 7, Issue 1, © January 2007

Thursday March 22

Readings: Psalm 51:1-12
Isaiah 30:15-18
Hebrews 4:1-13

Prayer: *Gracious Father, you give us your Word of grace in your Son Jesus Christ. Your continual Word comes to us through Scripture and the Holy Spirit to reveal your loving words to guide us in your ways. Help me to receive your word with gratitude and open heart. Amen*

Focal Verse: For thus said the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel: In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength. **Isaiah 30:15**

Reflection:

Jim Wallis, founder and editor of *Sojourners* magazine, says, “Budgets are moral documents.” They clearly reveal the priorities of a family, church, organization, city, state, or a nation [they show] us what we most care about.”

Being a good steward of money is knowing where our money has gone in the past, deciding where we want our money to go in the future, and living a life of intentionality to make those dreams a reality. In the larger picture, creating a lifestyle of generosity is about being aware of how you are living, recognizing what is at stake in your lifestyle choices, and ultimately thinking about the needs of others with your extra-abundance.

Being a good steward is not just about *what* you give, it’s about *how* you give. Having a vision will allow you to make the most of however much you’re able to give away.⁴³

Stewardship Principle

6

Give proportionately

is our way of giving in relation to our abundance. We are to give according to our “means,” not according to an income or a budget.

“If the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has – not according to what one does not have.”
2 Corinthians 8:12

What do you hear?

How does it make you feel?

Toward what are you being drawn?

What do you sense you should do?

⁴³ Giving - The Sacred Art: Creating a Lifestyle of Generosity, Lauren Tyler Wright, 2008, SkyLight Paths, p. 36, 38, 41.

Friday March 23

Readings: Psalm 51:1-12; Exodus 30:1-10;
Hebrews 4:14-5:4

Prayer: *Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications! If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered. I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning. Amen. (Psalm 130: 1-6)*

7

Commit intentionally

means making a statement about your intent and following through. As members in the body of Christ, we are asked to make a commitment of our time, talents, and resources as a faithful response to God and as a statement of support for God's work.

“... arrange in advance for this bountiful gift that you have promised.”
2 Corinthians 9:5

Focal Verse: Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.
Hebrews 4:16

Reflection: How We Manage Money

When we are faithful stewards, we *manage* our money in God-pleasing ways. The world of the Bible knew nothing of stock markets, tax brackets, or pension plans, but the Bible does have more to say about money management than we might imagine.

As a general principle, the Bible indicates that money is to be used, not hoarded. The best example of this may be the parable of the rich fool that Jesus tells in Luke 12:15-21.

There is another problem that we also want to avoid. The opposite of *hoarding* may be *squandering*, and the Bible does not denounce the former so as to recommend the latter. Indeed, just three chapters after the parable of the rich fool, we find a story about a foolish boy who squanders his inheritance on frivolous pursuits and then is caught unaware when a famine comes upon the land (Luke 15:12-16). So, saving money for some definite purpose is not the same as storing away more than we ever intend to use.

To get this right, to avoid both *hoarding* and *squandering*, we need to think through our intentions and prayerfully submit them to God, asking, "How much should I set aside for this or for that? When am I storing away too much and when am I saving too little?"

Concern for money management is, in my view, one of the most overlooked areas in contemporary stewardship education. For many of us, faithful stewardship must begin with a basic commitment to getting our finances under control. Faithful stewardship might mean altering our spending habits, developing a budget, or learning to invest and save our money wisely. It might mean seeking the counsel of trained financial advisors, and approaching all of our decisions about money management with prayerful consideration of what God would have us do.⁴⁴

What do you hear?

How does it make you feel?

Toward what are you being drawn?

What do you sense you should do?

⁴⁴ Mark Allen Powell, Faithful Living: A Biblical Ethic of Financial Stewardship, *Journal of Lutheran Ethics (JLE)*, Volume 7, Issue 1, © January 2007

Stewardship Principle

Saturday, March 24

Readings: Psalm 51:1-12; Habakkuk 3:2-13; John 12:1-11

Prayer: *Gracious Father, thank you for the gifts you give me. Help me to be gracious in sharing those gifts to your glory. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.*

Focal Verse: Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. **John 12:3**

Reflection:

Every religious tradition has at least a few practices that are obligatory activities that its followers are told, even commanded, to follow. For some religious groups, giving is one of these obligatory practices, and wisely so, because giving especially giving money can be a difficult thing to do. But giving has the power to help us exchange our greed, aversion, and indifference for a compassionate perspective and a renewed engagement with the world. In short, it has the power to change our very identity into one of generosity.

But change takes time, and progress toward that goal may not always be readily apparent. Sometimes it might seem like work, even a sacrifice, and often it is. But obligating yourself to give provides you with the motivation you may lack when the going gets tough, until you can see and experience for yourself the transformative joy of giving, first with your money and then with the rest of your life.⁴⁵

8

Contribute regularly

means practicing our stewardship on a daily basis. By doing so this becomes a lifestyle. Paul instructs us:

“On the first day of every week, each of you is to put aside and save whatever extra you earn.”
1 Corinthians 16:2

What do you hear?

How does it make you feel?

Toward what are you being drawn?

What do you sense you should do?

⁴⁵ Giving - The Sacred Art: Creating a Lifestyle of Generosity, Lauren Tyler Wright, 2008, SkyLight Paths, p. 58-59.

Sunday, March 25 ó **Fifth Sunday in Lent**

Readings: Jeremiah 31:31-34
Psalm 51:1-12 *or* Psalm 119:9-16
Hebrews 5:5-10
John 12:20-33

Prayer: *Generous, compassionate, empathetic God, you alone created, redeemed me to live in the Spirit. Give me continual strength and guidance to seek your loving Spirit in me. Help me to commune with you through acts of compassion, empathy, and generosity. In the name of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.*

Focal Verse: Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. **John 12:24**

Reflection:

The church celebrates Lent as a time of repentance. In Lent we assess our behaviors that stand in need of forgiveness. When Jesus says in today's Gospel text "those who love their life lose it," Jesus speaks to human life. Stewards recognize that we, perhaps out of survival and self-preservation, cling to possessions. The gospel addresses this impulse in many ways. When Luke displays the church at its spotless best, he writes, "All who believed were together and had all things in common" (Acts 2:44). This is Luke's rendering of a new creation ó the church.

We see the perfection of the church in its ability to share with one another. It is to this noble path that God calls his church. We who say we want to live in peace often shatter harmonious community over questions about possessions.

Lent is the season of Christian self-denial. For this reason, this text beckons believers to follow Jesus' lead. "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."

When stewards practice selfless giving on behalf of others, then they defy their own instinct for self-preservation. Our culture today lives under the myth of scarceness: it is only by hoarding and keeping possessions that we can assure ourselves of continuous survival. Yet Jesus teaches that within life in God there are ways of living that transcend simple survival. Jesus even reminds stewards, "Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor."

A Dayak proverb puts the human quandary this way: "Where the heart is willing it will find a thousand ways, but where it is unwilling it will find a thousand excuses."⁴⁶

What do you hear?

How does it make you feel?

Toward what are you being drawn?

What do you sense you should do?

⁴⁶ Mosser, David, *The Stewardship Companion*, Westminster John Knox Press, © 2007, p. 111-12.

Monday, March 26

Readings: Psalm 119:9-16
Isaiah 43:8-13
2 Corinthians 3:4-11

Prayer: *Loving Father, you have given me this day to serve you. Give me the endurance and wisdom to embrace the day to work, study and build on teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ in whose name I pray. Amen*

Focal Verse: I will meditate on your precepts, and fix my eyes on your ways. I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word. **Psalm 119:15-16**

Reflection: How We Acquire Money

When we are faithful stewards, we *acquire* our money in God-pleasing ways. The Bible often shows concern for such matters.

To start with, scripture offers no commendation for those who don't do any work at all. Everyone should "earn their own living," one text maintains, and "anyone unwilling to work should not eat" (2 Thessalonians 3:10-12). The point here is not to commend starvation for the unemployed or to put a scriptural kibosh on government-sponsored welfare programs. Work is good, the Bible maintains, and even people who don't need to work for a paycheck ought to take jobs that will allow them to contribute to society and prevent them from turning into "mere busybodies" (2 Thessalonians 3:11).

The Bible further indicates that money ought not be earned in ways that create hardships for those who can least afford them. God forbids the Israelites from taking advantage of those who "have fallen into difficulty," saying, "Do not take interest in advance or otherwise make a profit from them" (Leviticus 25:35-37; see also Exodus 22:25-27). Amos also rails against those who gain wealth at the expense of the poor (Amos 2:6-7; 5:11). In the New Testament, Jesus castigates religious leaders who have become rich by confiscating the homes of widows (Luke 20:47), and his brother James has some choice words for wealthy landowners who fail to pay their field hands a decent wage (James 5:1-6).

Stewards of God, however, do not just seek to avoid what is negative, resisting temptations to dishonesty, sloth, or greed. Beyond that, we are encouraged to view our employment positively as a vocation from God, as something that we do in order to make a worthy contribution to life in this world. But, generally speaking, we can all be faithful stewards of God by pursuing occupations that involve us in useful and worthwhile activities.⁴⁷

Stewardship Principle

9

Live genuinely

means putting your faith into action. This is the tangible demonstration of what is sincerely on our hearts and where our treasure is, not simply a verbal expression. The Macadonians set an example that Paul called to the attention of the Corinthians.

**"I am testing the genuineness of your love against the earnestness of others."
2 Corinthians 8:8**

What do you hear?

How does it make you feel?

Toward what are you being drawn?

What do you sense you should do?

⁴⁷ Mark Allen Powell, *Faithful Living: A Biblical Ethic of Financial Stewardship*, *Journal of Lutheran Ethics (JLE)*, Volume 7, Issue 1, © January 2007

Tuesday, March 27

Readings: Psalm 119:9-16
Isaiah 44:1-8
Acts 2:14-24

Prayer: God of the cross, help me to stand strong when my or others' words are discouraging. Give me strength to accept *the challenge to sow bountifully. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

Focal Verse: Do not fear, or be afraid; have I not told you from of old and declared it? You are my witnesses! Is there any god besides me? There is no other rock; I know not one. **Isaiah 44:8**

Stewardship Principle

10

Accept a challenge

means recognizing the dynamic nature of our faith. As our faith grows so will our blessings, and our responsibilities. Paul writes,

"... the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully."
2 Corinthians 9:6

Reflection: The Book of Proverbs offer[s] pointed observations about the real advantages wealth affords the rich and the real disadvantages the poor suffer in their poverty.

The wealth of the rich is their fortress;
the poverty of the poor is their ruin. (Proverbs 10:15)

Proverbs appears to point out, plain and simple, the real advantage that wealth provides the rich in comparison to the obvious hardships that poverty brings on the poor. This verse observes that money or riches provide protection, or a safety net, to those who possess them.

What do you hear?

How does it make you feel?

Toward what are you being drawn?

What do you sense you should do?

Although the sages recognize that oftentimes wealth does provide an advantage in the real world and that this is the way things *are*, the sages also assert that from the moral perspective of the path of wisdom, it is not the way things *ought* to be.

Although wealth in the real world often appears to be a social buffer, an advantage in times of trouble, ¹ this is merely an illusion. The just person, who trusts in God, is thus contrasted with the rich person who trusts in money. The clear implication is that the virtue of trust in God is superior to, more valuable than, the possession of riches.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Money and the Way of Wisdom: Insights from the Book of Proverbs, Timothy J. Sandoval, PhD, 2008, SkyLight Paths, p. 115, 117, 119, 120, 121.

Wednesday, March 28

Readings: Psalm 119:9-16
Haggai 2:1-9, 20-23
John 12:34-50

Prayer: *God of abundance, you have poured out a large measure of earthly blessings: our table is richly furnished, our cup overflows, and we live in safety and security. Teach us to set our hearts on you and not these material blessings. Keep us from becoming captivated by prosperity, and grant us in wisdom to use your blessings to your glory and to the service of humankind; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*⁴⁹

Focal Verse: I treasure your word in my heart, so that I may not sin against you. Blessed are you, O Lord; teach me your statutes. **Psalm 119:11-12**

Reflection:

Throughout the Bible, faithful giving does not bind God. Instead, the opposite is the case. Giving is meant to be a primary sign of a people who are living under God's gracious sovereignty.

Throughout the New Testament, one can find examples of the principle that the motivation of the giver are as important, if not more so, than the gift itself. Giving is motivated í by gratitude for what one has already received. The primary reason for giving is gratitude for the bounty which one has already received.⁵⁰

Stewardship Principle

1

Respond gratefully

to what God has first given us. All that we do is a response to God's grace. Everything we are, have, and use comes from God. Best of all, God gives the gift of Jesus Christ and the community of believers. It all begins with God. Our confession of faith in Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior is not of our doing. Grateful stewards put God first.

**"... but they gave themselves first to the Lord."
2 Corinthians 8:5**

What do you hear?

How does it make you feel?

Toward what are you being drawn?

What do you sense you should do?

⁴⁹ <http://www.mpls-synod.org/stewardship/prayers>

⁵⁰ Jamieson, Janet T. and Philip D., "Ministry and Money," Westminster John Knox Press, © 2009, p. 14-16.

Thursday, March 29

Readings: Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29
 Deuteronomy 16:1-8
 Philippians 2:1-11

Prayer: *O God, from the very beginning of time you commanded the earth to bring forth vegetation and every fruit of every kind. You provide the sower with seed and give bread to eat. Grant, we pray, that this land, enriched by your bounty and cultivated by human hands, may be fertile with abundant crops. Then your people, enriched by the gifts of your goodness, will praise you unceasingly now and for all ages unending. Grant this through Christ our Lord. Amen.*⁵¹

2

Obey responsibly

to glorify God as a faithful proclamation of God's word. We acknowledge our faith and show our faith in the gospel for the glory of God and for the building up of the body of Christ. This takes courage. It involves our life-long obedience, including the ways we treat our families, others, and ourselves.

“... you glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ.”
 2 Corinthians 9:13

Focal Verse: Observe the month of Abib by keeping the passover for the Lord your God, for in the month of Abib the Lord your God brought you out of Egypt by night.
Deuteronomy 16:1

Reflection: When we commit ourselves to obligatory giving we commit to more than the act of donating money or we commit ourselves to a mindset of generosity, to seeing the world in terms of, “How can I help?” not, “What can I get?” We literally change the way we react to the needs of others. Instead of responding with isolated moments of benevolence, we commit to operating out of a greater framework of active compassion that permeates every moment of our being. Our giving can shape not only our personal identity, but the identity of an entire community.

How much do I *have* to give? How much do we need to *keep*?

What do you hear?

How does it make you feel?

Toward what are you being drawn?

What do you sense you should do?

What if we used our 10 percent tithe as a benchmark and a starting point? What if we saw tithing within a greater framework of spirituality, as a means to an end or generosity being the end? Tithing is a technique we can use to shape our lives as generous beings who reflect God's bounteousness and live out our place within the sacred economics of this world. If we approach our obligatory giving not as some kind of divinely ordained quota but rather as a tool to help motivate us to give when our desire is waning, we might be changed into people who give intentionally and freely under many different circumstances from a life of generosity.⁵²

⁵¹ <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/ejp/climate/parishesprayerresources.pdf>

⁵² Giving - The Sacred Art: Creating a Lifestyle of Generosity, Lauren Tyler Wright, 2008, SkyLight Paths, p. 61, 63, 64.

Friday, March 30

Readings: Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29
 Jeremiah 33:1-9
 Philippians 2:12-18

Prayer: *Lord, we pray that your grace may always precede and follow us, that we may continually be given to good work; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.*⁵³

Focal Verse: Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure. *Philippians 2:12-13*

Reflection:

öWhen we acknowledge God’s ownership, every spending decision becomes a spiritual decision. No longer do we ask, “Lord, what do you want me to do with my money?”öThe question is restated, “Lord, what do you want me to do with Your money?”öWhen we have this attitude, spending, saving, and investing decisions are equally as spiritual as giving decisions.ö ó Howard Dayton⁵⁴

Paul said the love of money is but the beginning, or the root, of many kinds of evil. The lives of those who love money are characterized by greed, hoarding, and abasement. They have accumulated thousands, or even millions, and the loss of even a few dollars is traumatic. Many people love their money so much they will not part with it ó to give to God’s work or even to their own children. ó Larry Burkett⁵⁵

Proportionate giving is making a decision to give a certain percentage of one's income, joyfully and generously, to help to create God's dream for humanity. Following Christ means learning to understand money and how we give it as a spiritual issue. Money can be our voice, our way of declaring and manifesting God's dream for humanity. [Lynn Twist, the founder of the Hunger Project] invites us to become known for what we allocate not what we accumulate.⁵⁶

3

Sacrifice proportionately

as Christ sacrificed for us. For our sake Jesus gave up everything to make us rich through the cross and the resurrection. We are called to sacrifice so others may share in God’s word and blessings.

“... gave according to their means, and even beyond their means.”
 2 Corinthians 8:3

What do you hear?
 How does it make you feel?
 Toward what are you being drawn?
 What do you sense you should do?

⁵³ Book of Common Prayer, © 1977.

⁵⁴ NIV, Stewardship Study Bible, Stewardship Council, 2009, p. 348

⁵⁵ NIV, Stewardship Study Bible, Stewardship Council, 2009, p. 693.

⁵⁶ Sanguin, Bruce, sermon © 2010, Luther Seminary Stewardship Database.

Saturday, March 31

Readings: Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29
 Jeremiah 33:10-16
 Mark 10:32-34, 46-52

Prayer: O Lord, absolve your people from their offenses that from the bonds of our sins, which by reason of our weakness we have brought upon us, we may be delivered by your bountiful goodness; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.⁵⁷

4

Give willingly

as moved by the Holy Spirit. We have been prepared to give ourselves. We give our time, talents, and resources freely.

“For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave ...”
 2 Corinthians 8:3

Focal Verse: “Give thanks to the Lord of hosts, for the Lord is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!” For I will restore the fortunes of the land as at first, says the Lord. *Jeremiah 33:11b*

Reflection: God forms us to be more like God. We have the opportunity to be shaped into the best possible versions of ourselves. In those moments when giving is the last thing you want to do, let your motivation come from God in the form of obedience to a sacred obligation.

There is beauty in obligatory practices because the mandatory act grows out of a person’s religious identity. As a Christian, being generous is part of who I am as a follower of God. In many ways it’s not even a choice I make. Even when I don’t want to practice generosity, I do it anyway because it’s part of being me; it’s part of my story.

As with any spiritual discipline, we may start practicing giving out of obligation, but once we begin to see how our perspective is changed and broadened, the obligation turns into genuine desire. After a while, we become transformed and no longer have to make such deliberate and intentional choices about whether or not to act; we act without thought because it flows from this new-found identity. My ultimate goal is to be formed into a person of generosity, not just a person who practices individual acts of generosity out of obligation. But in order for that to happen, I must regularly participate in acts out of obligation to train my desires. These acts shape reality over time and transform my identity. Generosity then becomes something that’s “just what I do” as a child of God, not “something I consider doing” when an opportunity presents itself. The act of giving, ultimately, shapes me into who God created me to be.

Creating a lifestyle of generosity is a process, not an overnight achievement. The motivation and attitude behind a gift is as important, if not more important than how much we give. Growing in generosity is not just about adding zeros to our end-of-the-year totals; it’s about how the gift passes from our hands to another’s.

Above all, a life of generosity is the result of obligatory giving. You can be transformed into a generous giver, not just a person who gives generously.⁵⁸

What do you hear?

How does it make you feel?

Toward what are you being drawn?

What do you sense you should do?

⁵⁷ Lutheran Worship, ©1982.

⁵⁸ Giving - The Sacred Art: Creating a Lifestyle of Generosity, Lauren Tyler Wright, 2008, SkyLight Paths, p. 69, 70-71, 73, 74.

Sunday, April 1 ó **Palm/Passion Sunday**

Readings:

Palms
Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29
Mark 11:1-11 *or*
John 12:12-16

Passion
Isaiah 50:4-9a
Psalm 31:9-16
Philippians 2:5-11
Mark 14:1ô 15:47 *or*
Mark 15:1-39 [40-47]

Prayer: *O God of mercy and might, in the mystery of the passion of your Son you offer your infinite life to the world. Gather us around the cross of Christ, and preserve us until the resurrection, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen*⁵⁹

Focal Verse: O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever. ***Psalm 118:29***

Reflection:

Mark narrates this sparse story of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Jesus asks two of his disciples to go and find a colt for him. Not only this, but he gives explicit directions about how they are to get the colt. Mark tells the story in a noticeably restrained fashion. We anticipate vast throngs of people lining the streets. Yet besides the many who spread coats on the road, Mark's only other mention of a crowd comes when he writes that "those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting." Perhaps the throngs we anticipate never materialized.

Jesus simply asks his disciples to go and get [this colt]. The "how" of attainment is perhaps not as important as the "why." Jesus tells his disciples to undertake this task because, possibly, Jesus knows that someday the disciples' act, offered at this critical moment in Jesus' life, will figure in to their faith story. We human beings create ownership in the things in which we play a part.

People say they have nothing to offer God. Any discerning steward knows this is untrue. The definition of "steward" comes from a Greek word that means "to manage the whole household." Some common church households include teaching, ushering, listening, visiting, praying, giving, cleaning and cooking. We manage such households ó and many more. Sometimes our flimsy excuses for why we don't offer anything to God sound silly if we only stop to actually listen to them. Some folks repeat their excuses so long that they truly believe them. Yet Jesus teaches all believers that we can authentically serve God using both our treasures and our lives.⁶⁰

What do you hear?

How does it make you feel?

Toward what are you being drawn?

What do you sense you should do?

⁵⁹ Evangelical Lutheran Worship, Augsburg Fortress.

⁶⁰ Mosser, David, *The Stewardship Companion*, Westminster John Knox Press, © 2007, p. 113-114.

Monday, April 2

Readings: Isaiah 42:1-9
 Psalm 36:5-11
 Hebrews 9:11-15
 John 12:1-11

Prayer: *O God, your Son chose the path that led to pain before joy and to the cross before glory. Plant his cross in our hearts, so that in its power and love we may come at last to joy and glory, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.⁶¹ Amen.*

5

Share abundantly

as we have received. The purpose of these gifts is for the good of the community of God. We give to build up the body of Christ. We use and share our gifts for the benefit of all.

“... and God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work.”
 2 Corinthians 8:3

Focal Verse: But when Christ came as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation), he entered once for all into the Holy Place, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. **Hebrews 9:11-12**

Reflection: A modus Vivendi (a lifestyle, a manner of living) of giving is not the practice of most people. Sure, most people typically practice some form of philanthropy every once in a while ó dropping some coins in a charity collection box in a store, volunteering a few hours at their children’s schools, or giving used clothes to a thrift store. But í those isolated acts of giving are very different from creating an entire lifestyle of generosity where we are intentional about what we do with all our energy, time, wealth and belongings.

Living out generosity as a lifestyle isn’t easy, not only because it’s out of the mainstream, but because the voracious appetite of the cultural marketplace is ready to swallow us up at any moment. The more we consume, the greater our desire to consume becomes, not unlike craving more and more of a drug.

In our society, a majority of people are focused on pursuing the almighty dollar and get swallowed up. If we refuse to cooperate with culture and swim against the stream, life doesn’t have to be an exhausting rat race of consumption and debt. When we give ó our time, talent, treasure ó we practice the action most opposite consuming. Giving and receiving is the converse of buying and selling. Buying and selling is all about the consumer and feeding the economic engine. Giving and receiving is all about the ðotherð and sustaining humanity. Giving draws us into relationships and community and we interact with others and depend on them. The more we practice the art of giving, monetary and otherwise, the more generous we become.

A modus Vivendi (a lifestyle, a manner of living) of generosity has the added benefit of inherently encouraging financial responsibility. If we make giving a priority over spending on ourselves, we will naturally find our outgoing cash flow tempered.⁶²

What do you hear?

How does it make you feel?

Toward what are you being drawn?

What do you sense you should do?

⁶¹ Evangelical Lutheran Worship, Augsburg Fortress.
⁶² Giving - The Sacred Art: Creating a Lifestyle of Generosity, Lauren Tyler Wright, 2008, SkyLight Paths, p. 88-89.

Tuesday, April 3

Readings: Isaiah 49:1-7
 Psalm 71:1-14
 1 Corinthians 1:18-31
 John 12:20-36

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, you have called us to follow you. Grant that our love may not grow cold in your service, and that we may not fail or deny you in the time of trial, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen*⁶³

Focal Verse: Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God. **1 Corinthians 1:26a, 27-29**

Reflection: The Bible always calls us to percentage giving. The language is always, “Give in proportion to the blessings you have received.” Those who have much wealth are expected to give proportionately. Those who have little wealth are also expected to give proportionately. The tithe, or ten percent, is obviously the best example of the Bible’s teaching of proportional giving.

Another touching example of proportional giving is found in Mark 12:41-44, [the widows mite.]

In terms of actual dollars, the widow’s penny is nothing compared to the large sums being put in the offering by the rich. However, in terms of percentage giving, the offering of the poor widow dramatically exceeded the larger sums of the rich.

Percentage giving is a two-edged sword. For those who don’t have large financial resources, percentage giving is a word of great comfort. Such people know that in God’s eyes their “small” gift is not small at all, but incredibly generous. For those who have greater financial resources, percentage giving calls them to account if their gift is larger in dollars but still quite small in percentage.

It is important for stewardship leaders to stress percentage giving. Doing so is a guard against ever saying unintentionally that someone who can give today’s equivalent of a penny is an insignificant giver.⁶⁴

6

Give proportionately

is our way of giving in relation to our abundance. We are to give according to our means, not according to an income or a budget.

“If the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has – not according to what one does not have.”
 2 Corinthians 8:12

What do you hear?

How does it make you feel?

Toward what are you being drawn?

What do you sense you should do?

⁶³ Evangelical Lutheran Worship, Augsburg Fortress.

⁶⁴ Charles Lane, Ask, Thank, Tell, © 2006, Augsburg Fortress, p. 51-52.

Wednesday, April 4

Readings: Isaiah 50:4-9a
Psalm 70

Hebrews 12:1-3
John 13:21-32

7

Commit intentionally

means making a statement about your intent and following through. As members in the body of Christ, we are asked to make a commitment of our time, talents, and resources as a faithful response to God and as a statement of support for God's work.

**"... arrange in advance for this bountiful gift that you have promised."
2 Corinthians 9:5**

Prayer: *Almighty God, your Son our Savior suffered at human hands and endured the shame of the cross. Grant that we may walk in the way of his cross and find it the way of life and peace, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.*⁶⁵

Focal Verse: Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. **Hebrews 12:1-2**

Reflection: In reflecting on contentment in your life, consider the following questions:

- What does contentment mean in your life?
- Where do you find your deepest feelings of contentment?
- What or who inspires you to feel content?
- What people or stories from Scripture embody contentment for you?
- If someone asked you "How does one become content?" what would you say?

The word "contentment" is mentioned seven times in Scripture, and six times it has to do with money. Paul wrote, "Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:11-13)

As Paul's example shows, we can still be content regardless of how much "stuff" we actually have. But how do we connect our contentment to any of life's circumstances? Paul had a faith-based perspective. Look at 2 Corinthians 12:10: "Since I know it is all for Christ's good, I am quite content with my weaknesses and with insults, hardships, persecutions and calamities." Paul's perspective recognizes the ultimate reason for living "for Christ's good." It's an uncomplicated way to live when everything comes back to living for Christ.

When we depend on favorable circumstances for our contentment, our perspective constantly changes and we become unhappy when things don't go our way. When we depend on Jesus for our contentment, we are secure because his perspective is always consistent. (Hebrews 13:8).⁶⁶

What do you hear?
How does it make you feel?
Toward what are you being drawn?
What do you sense you should do?

⁶⁵ Evangelical Lutheran Worship, Augsburg Fortress.

⁶⁶ Brumby, Lynn, "Living a Life of Contentment", Stewardship Now, October 2010, ELCA.org

Thursday, April 5 ó **Holy Thursday / Maundy Thursday**

Stewardship Principle

8

Contribute regularly

means practicing our stewardship on a daily basis. By doing so this becomes a lifestyle. Paul instructs us:

“On the first day of every week, each of you is to put aside and save whatever extra you earn.”
1 Corinthians 16:2

Readings: Exodus 12:1-4 [5-10] 11-14
Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19
1 Corinthians 11:23-26
John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Prayer: *Holy God, source of all love, on the night of his betrayal, Jesus gave us a new commandment, to love one another as he loves us. Write this commandment in our hearts, and give us the will to serve others as he was the servant of all, your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen*⁶⁷

Focal Verse: öFor I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, öThis is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.ö In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, öThis cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.ö For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.ö
1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Reflection: There are Old Testament texts that speak of God giving material blessings. This blessing is never for the sake of the blessed alone. Blessing implies sharing with the poor and points beyond itself as a witness to the one true God. But if the full purpose is ignored, material blessing or wealth may become perilous. For then, it consistently leads to the twin sins of greed and idolatry.

What do you hear?

How does it make you feel?

Toward what are you being drawn?

What do you sense you should do?

The connection between wealth and idolatry is equally clear in the New Testament. Twice in the Pauline corpus, greed is equated with idolatry. [Ephesians 5:5, Colossians 3:5]

The final connection is made by Christ in the Sermon on the Mount: í öYou cannot serve God and wealthö (Matthew 6:24). The key issue regarding what the Bible teaches about money is here. The issue is the choice between which god we shall serve.

Although wealth can be a blessing for Christians, there is certainly no guarantee of it (being a blessing). Furthermore, what does seem to be much more clearly taught is wealth’s potential for misuse.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Evangelical Lutheran Worship

⁶⁸ Jamieson, Janet T. and Philip D., öMinistry and Money,ö Westminster John Knox Press, © 2009, p.16-17.

Friday, April 6 ó **Good Friday**

Readings: Isaiah 52:13-53:12
Psalm 22
Hebrews 10:16-25
John 18:1-19:42

Prayer: *Almighty God, look with loving mercy on your family, for whom our Lord Jesus Christ was willing to be betrayed, to be given over to the hands of sinners, and to suffer death on the cross; who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen*⁶⁹

Focal Verse: “Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. ⁵But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed.” *Isaiah 53:4*

Reflection:

It “the world” big picture, money is power. In Pilate’s day, with the Roman military backing him up, military might made one powerful. Either by way of naked force or money, power is persuasive. Still, with power also comes responsibility. Rome boasted that everyone living within the boundaries of its authority was due justice. In our lesson today the falsity of that claim is too evident even to point out.

Christian stewardship reflects the truth that how we do something may be as important as what we do. The Christian faith is not utilitarian, in other words. We do not merely look at the bottom line; we look at how we arrived at the bottom line. This means for a steward that “the means to an end result” are as important as the end itself. Perhaps God could have thundered humankind into salvation, but God used Jesus’ self-sacrifice for divine purposes. Accordingly, the Christian faith makes little sense to our managed, linear, logical, rational ways of doing business with the world. Maybe this is why the world rejects Jesus. God’s means to the end just don’t make human sense.

In our world of efficiency and utility, the gospel reminds stewards that how we offer ourselves and our talents to God and others is often as crucial as our offering the gifts and talents in the first place. The way we give food and drink to strangers at our door says a lot about how we exercise power and authority with those who have little.⁷⁰

Stewardship Principle

9

Live genuinely

means putting your faith into action. This is the tangible demonstration of what is sincerely on our hearts and where our treasure is, not simply a verbal expression. The Macdonians set an example that Paul called to the attention of the Corinthians.

“I am testing the genuineness of your love against the earnestness of others.”
2 Corinthians 8:8

What do you hear?

How does it make you feel?

Toward what are you being drawn?

What do you sense you should do?

⁶⁹ Evangelical Lutheran Worship, Augsburg Fortress.

⁷⁰ Mosser, David, *The Stewardship Companion*, Westminster John Knox Press, © 2007, p. 33.

Saturday April 7 ó **Holy Saturday**

Stewardship Principle

Readings: Job 14:1-14
Psalm 31:1-4, 15-16
1 Peter 4:1-8
Matthew 27:57-66

Prayer: *Eternal giver of life and light, this holy night shines with the radiance of the risen Christ. Renew your church with the Spirit given us in baptism, that we may worship you in sincerity and truth and may shine as a light in the world, through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen*⁷¹

Focal Verse: ðThe end of all things is near; therefore be serious and discipline yourselves for the sake of your prayers. Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins.ö **1 Peter 4:7-8**

Reflection: It is true that financial worries have a profound power to drain the joy right out of our lives. And yet, money is just a thing; by itself, it is neither good nor evil. The aphorism, ðMoney is the root of all evil,ö í is actually a common misquote of a verse from the Bible that reads, ðThe *love* of money is a root of all kinds of evilö (1 Timothy 6:10). The difference is important to note, for though our experience of money may be life-robbing, it doesn't have to be. In fact, money can be redeemed ó by which I mean money can be used as a tool to celebrate life and increase joy rather than being a source of contention or stress. The key is to have a proper, skillful relationship with money ó neither fearing it nor craving it, but respecting it and the power it can have in our lives and in the lives of others. You may not be surprised that one effective way of achieving and maintaining a healthy relationship with money is by giving, for in the transaction, we reorder our priorities and expectations and learn to treat money with a lightness of spirit, and we discover the inherent worth ó not the financial value ó of things in our lives.

The same is true of possessions. There is nothing wrong, in and of itself, with a desire for and ownership of material items; it's when you put your trust in these things and grip them so tightly, as if letting go would destroy you, that problems arise.

A great responsibility comes along with being rich. ðTo whom much is given, much is expectedö (Luke 12:48). God expects a lot from us in this position, but it's also an honor to be in a position where we can use skills we enjoy to make money and then use that money to make other people live better lives.⁷²

10

**Accept
a challenge**

means recognizing the dynamic nature of our faith. As our faith grows so will our blessings, and our responsibilities. Paul writes,

**“... the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.”
2 Corinthians 9:6**

What do you hear?

How does it make you feel?

Toward what are you being drawn?

What do you sense you should do?

⁷¹ Evangelical Lutheran Worship, Augsburg Fortress.

⁷² Giving - The Sacred Art: Creating a Lifestyle of Generosity, Lauren Tyler Wright, 2008, SkyLight Paths, p. 77-78, 93.

Sunday, April 8 ó **Resurrection of Our Lord – Easter Day**

Readings: Acts 10:34-43 or Isaiah 25:6-9
 Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24
 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 or Acts 10:34-43
 John 20:1-18 or Mark 16:1-8

Prayer: *O God, you gave your only Son to suffer death on the cross for our redemption, and by his glorious resurrection you delivered us from the power of death. Make us die every day to sin, that we may live with him forever in the joy of the resurrection, through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen*⁷³

Focal Verse: öThe Lord is my strength and my might; he has become my salvation.ö
Psalm 118:14

Reflection: **The Threat of Money and Possessions**

It is important to [see] why the New Testament is so concerned about money and possessions. The answer can be stated in four words: Jesus wants your heart. Jesus wants nothing more than to be in relationship with you and to have your heart turned toward him. Jesus and others in the New Testament see money and possessions as threats because they can turn one's heart away from Jesus.

No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth. ***Matthew 6:24***

Jesus said, öYou cannot serve God and wealth.ö í in the United States we try to do precisely that which Jesus says we cannot do. We try to serve both God and wealth.

Our culture talks to us constantly about financial security. We spend a lot of energy worry about our financial security.

As we plan for our future, the message that is hammered home to us is, öMake sure you have enough. Make sure you have saved enough, and that you have invested it wisely. That way, you will be able to trust that your future is secure.ö

We need to recognize that Jesus says there is a problem here. The problem is the impossibility of serving two masters. [Jesus says] if you try to serve money and me, you will either love the money and hate me, or hate the money and love me. Try as you will, you just can't serve both.

The threat that money and possessions pose to one's relationship with Jesus í is that wealth has a way of luring us to trust in it í into thinking that without it we are nothing. Jesus want you to have your treasure stored up with him. Jesus wants you to be his disciple. Jesus wants you to know the eternal importance of serving God, and not wealth.⁷⁴

What do you hear?
How does it make you feel?
Toward what are you being drawn?
What do you sense you should do?

⁷³ Evangelical Lutheran Worship, AugsburgFortress.

⁷⁴ Charles Lane, Ask, Thank, Tell, © 2006, Augsburg Fortress, p. 34-40