



Congregational Stewardship Workbook 2000

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Synopsis

LIFE—life in its fullness (John 10:10)—life with significance and purpose—life as God's steward is what this section of the Congregational Stewardship Workbook is about! The very purpose of life, in relationship with Jesus Christ, is to be God's steward.

The Biblical Stewardship Principles are based on God's revealed will. They give direction for a life in response to God's acceptance and forgiving love in Jesus Christ. Life is lived to make a contribution to others in Christ's name—always in His name, not our own, not another's!

Congregational leaders will find a deep reservoir in the Biblical Stewardship Principles. Probing the Biblical basis of each statement will be an engaging experience. These principles serve as a guide for the selection of other stewardship education resources used in congregations and related educational agencies. The Biblical basis of the principles can be explored in large and small groups, in leadership retreats as well as in Sunday or midweek educational classes, support groups, leadership training sessions, etc.

The Biblical Stewardship Principles lend themselves to a series of discussions/presentations. The Holy Spirit is faithful in blessing the use of His Word (1 Cor. 1:9; Is. 55:10-11, etc.). The implications of each of the principles can have a profound effect on many of God's stewards. There will be a heightened awareness of the privilege of being God's steward in every arena of life—and a renewed sense of being a part of the larger "company of stewards," the body of Christ, as it exists both locally and in the church-at-large.

Now, as you get ready to explore this section of the workbook—imagine—JUST IMAGINE! what your congregation, homes, families, marriages and individuals—just imagine what God would/could do among, with, and through you and your colleagues in the congregation as together you learn, assimilate and practice the daily pattern of living out these principles!

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- 1) God's stewards are God's stewards.
- 2) God's stewards are managers, not owners.
- 3) God's stewards are saints and sinners.
- 4) God's stewards are uniquely singular, yet profoundly plural.
- 5) God's stewards are in the world, but not of the world.
- 6) God's stewards are loved and loving.
- 7) God's stewards are served and serving.
- 8) God's stewards live with an awareness of the present and the future, of time and eternity.

This is LIFE—the life of God's stewards. It's the life of people whose response to the Good News of Jesus Christ is to live as God's stewards managing all of life and life's resources for God's purposes!

A Quick Overview

Here is what you will find:

- An interesting, true story of a steward.
- A short summary and some insights related to each of the eight (8) principles.
- An exercise for reflection on the principles.
- A bibliography of other resources.
- A "stop—start—continue" series of challenges for your congregation.
- An appeal for designing a plan for accountability for stewardship leaders.

Go ahead! Look further! Don't stop here! You'll enjoy it!

A Story

Joe was an immigrant. Most considered him a low-class, immigrant foreigner. He had been through some terrible times. He did not like the place he now lived. He missed his family, especially his father, and even his brothers who had hurt him deeply.

In the course of time, Joe reflected on what his father had modeled for him in his childhood. He remembered the trust in God the family shared. His employers noticed a gradual difference in Joe's attitude, work habits, vocabulary, demeanor and relationship with others.

Something was going on inside Joe. His bitterness began to subside. His smile became more evident. As he reflected on the meaning of his life, what was happening, where he was, and his occupation; he became increasingly grateful to his father, especially for the principles, the integrity, that shaped his heart and soul.

Joe truly knew who and Whose he was. There were some basic principles provided the grounding, the roots for his life. He discovered them.

Like Joseph, in the following pages, you'll find "roots" for your life and for your fellow believers too.

You can read more about Joe in the Bible: Genesis 37-50.

Biblical Stewardship Principles:

God's stewards are God's stewards.

This means that God's stewards are stewards by virtue of creation and their re-creation in Holy Baptism; therefore, they belong to the Lord.

Stewardship, from the Biblical point of view, is a matter of identity. It's about knowing the One to whom we personally belong. It's about being known by and knowing the Triune God, the God of the Bible, the Lord and Giver of Life, the Creator and Re-Creator of all life—God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The Bible teaches God made us, body and soul, for the present and for eternity for Himself, and even when we wander away from God, deny

our being stewards, we still are! God has spoken in and through creation. Vitally important for our understanding of the meaning of life is God has spoken through the redeeming, re-creating, new-life-giving work of His Son; through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah, the Savior, we are restored to new relationships with Almighty God.

The Bible teaches that it is the gracious action of God-in-Christ who accepts, forgives and makes stewards out of people who are inclined to ignore and even rebel against God. It is a grace-filled response to say, "I am God's steward!" That is a privilege to be valued highly every day of life.

As we reflect on who and Whose we are, on what God has done for us, given to us, our identity is made more sure, more firm—like a loving child learning of being adopted by loving parents. Being identified as GOD'S steward is about our mission, our purpose for living.

As we consider the Biblical basis for this principle, please reflect on the context of each one of the Bible sections or passages listed. There

It means that our stewardship involves all of life and that we are discoverers, developers and deployers of all the gifts God has given to us. Our purpose is to let our life be an offering, is much to be gained by careful and prayerful reflection on what God reveals to us in the Bible. The implications of saying, "I am God's steward" are enormous.

It means we can give credit to God as the source of all gifts, talents, skills and time that we have. It means that our stewardship involves all of life and that we are discoverers, developers and deployers of all the gifts God has given to us. Our purpose is to let our life be an offering,

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a contribution to others in the name of Christ.

Take a close look at Gen. 1; Is. 43:1-3; Rom. 6:1-11; 2 Cor. 5:14-6:2; Eph. 2:8-10; and other references concerning God's creating and redeeming activity. Prayerfully take notes or make journal entries on your thoughts. Share them with others in a group or class and expand on the privilege of being called "God's steward." You are! We are! It is our challenge and privilege to live out that calling, that purpose in daily life. Wow! *God's stewards are God's stewards!*

God's stewards are managers, not owners.

This means God's stewards are entrusted with life and life's resources and given the privilege of responsibly and joyfully managing them for God.

A steward is a manager of another's belongings; a caregiver, custodian, trustee; a chosen servant; an important person in a privileged, responsible position. "It is required of stewards that they be found faithful" (1 Cor. 4:2). Since a steward is NOT the same as an owner, there is a unique sense of accountability that accompanies the title: steward. Stewards do not hold title to possessions, physical or intellectual, or even talents and skills. They are owned by the Owner. Even life itself is a gift, not fully one's own (1 Cor. 6:19), but rather it is a gift of God to be managed to fulfill God's purposes.

Owner:

Being manager rather than owner is a difficult concept for many modern people, especially those who live in capitalist countries where there is a strong emphasis on individual ownership, and where the words "I, me, mine" are so prevalent in the vocabulary.

Ownership of property is the dream of many people—people of all ages! Ownership often involves thinking about the issues of control, absolute rights, "doing as I please with what is mine," etc. How does this view of life, property, time, etc., compare with the Biblical narrative?

Review the first two chapters of Genesis (especially 1:1 and 2:15), 1 Chronicles 29, Psalm 89 (especially v. 11) and Ps. 24:1; Ps. 50:10-12; 2 Cor. 8:1-7; Luke 12:41-48; and 1 Tim. 6:17-19. What do these portions of the Bible have to say about the concept of ownership?

Reflect on the implications of the bumper sticker, "I never saw a U-Haul towed behind a hearse!" What does it say about the difference between being an owner and a manager?

Managers:

Do you know anyone who is a manager? What does a manager do? Where do managers get their training? How does one become a manager? What would you include in the list of attitudes that go to make up a "good manager"? To whom is she/he responsible? How does a manager treat the co-workers, properties, securities, products, ideas, trademarks, profits of the owner?

How do managers lose their positions? What are the consequences for the manager, for the owner? What happens to the reputation of those associated with the manager and the owner?

What are the implications of being a manager? What comforts are there

in being "manager" and not "owner?" What responsibilities are involved?

Opportunities:

In a congregation we have an opportunity to encourage and guide the God-pleasing management of all of life (spiritual, moral, intellectual, physical, social) and life's resources for God. The development of a process by which positive role models are held up for others to see and emulate can bring new encouragement to those learning to be managers for the Lord.

Implications:

We can guard against giving the impression that people are the ultimate owners of anything and everything. We can remind God's stewards that greater blessings call for greater responsibility in managing life for God. We can remind the stewards we associate with of Who the Owner really is, and help one another receive and use all the gifts of God with attitudes of gratitude. Could your congregation think of sponsoring a "manager of the year" award with nominations coming from members of all ages, backgrounds and length of membership? What benefits might result?

Examples:

Joseph was a steward, a manager. Genesis 37-50 tells an exciting story. Joseph was a steward of Pharoah, the ruler of Egypt, but he also has a steward, a manager, who worked for him (Gen. 43:19). Check out the implication and applications of that concept! How does that fit in with homes, families, church organizations today?

Shebna was the manager, the steward, of the household (Is. 22:15). Speculate on what that may have entailed. What qualities are needed to "manage a household" today?

Paul considered himself a "steward of the mysteries of God" (1 Cor. 4:1-2), in the sense of being a dispenser of God's good and gracious gifts, not storehouse guard, and certainly not owner. Managers manage to distribute the gifts and graces provided by the owner, and in Eph. 3:1-10 Paul indicates that he personally and the church through the ages (especially v 9-10) is called to be the managing dispensers of God's gracious purposes, to have all people be saved through faith in Jesus Christ!

Erastus, city treasurer in Ephesus, was a steward (Rom. 16:23). It's an amazing privilege: *God's stewards are managers, not owners!*

God's stewards are saints and sinners.

This means that God's stewards rejoice in and live out what the Lord has declared them to be through the cross. At the same time, His stewards recognize they are sinners who fight sin and its consequences each day.

It has been said, "Life is hard." True. Sometimes in life, especially being cognizant of life with God, we take one step forward and two back! Some days we seem to "grow up" and become more Christ-like, and the next day we slip back to that "old self" we don't want to be. Growing as a follower of Christ, reflecting Him, His will, His values, His purposes is not an easy or quickly accomplished goal! It is our calling.

We are saints and sinners, forgiven by God in Christ, loved, totally and fully accepted and acceptable to God, and at the same time we sin because

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we are sinners. Christian stewards live in that awareness, and need to be reminded and encouraged to remember the promises of God in the face of sin, weakness and failure.

The comments of Pastor Martin
Luther in the Small Catechism are
helpful in regard to this Biblical stewardship principle. It is in remembering the
promises of God, especially the
Sacrament of Holy Baptism, that stewards are enabled to live as God's stewards. Luther reminds us that Baptism with

water in the name of the Triune God, indicates "... that the old nature in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sin and evil desires, and that a new person should daily emerge to arise and live before God in righteousness and purity forever." Romans 6:1-11 is a good section of the Bible to recall, especially verse four.

STEWARD/MANAGER

Stewards sin, break God's will, fail, forget, rebel, make errors, mistakes in judgment, hurt God and His cause. That is reality. Stewards also repent, change, turn away from rebellion, self-centeredness, "me-ism," confess before God AND, in Jesus Christ and His cross, are assured of God's forgiveness for sin! A new beginning is made. This is a day-by-day, everyday, exercise.

Daily contrition, heartfelt sorrow for having failed and offended God, and others, is a spiritual discipline for all stewards. The practice of repentance, change of heart, mind, spirit and will is no easy matter. It takes courage, practice and intentionality. Many Christian stewards do this in regular morning and evening Bible reading and prayer times, in regular corporate worship, and also in special times of need or decision-making. Some people do this as part of a supportive small-group ministry.

Example:

St Paul writes about his own experience of being saint and sinner simultaneously in Rom. 7:21-25. He knows that he is a loved and forgiven man of God and wants to do good in living for God, but there is "another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin...." In the struggle he calls himself a "wretched man," and he does so as a beloved child of God, a forgiven sinner. In the middle of the struggle he knows Whose he is! He cries out, in triumph of the Gospel over the accusing Law, "thanks be to God who gives me the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

Congregation leaders can help provide an atmosphere and environment where this practice becomes the norm. It will be a blessing to individuals, homes, families, congregation and community. As this practice of repentance and faith—turning away from sin and turning toward God in newness of life—is nurtured the Holy Spirit will bring new blessings. Watch the people grow!

The following portions of the Bible will be of help in assimilating this Biblical stewardship principle: Eph. 4:17-32, especially v 22-24; Col. 3:5-17; 1 John 3:1-2; 1 Peter 2:4-12, especially v 9-10.

As stewardship leaders reading and reflecting on the above portions of God's Word, you will want to give individual and church groups encouragement with the truth that God's Holy Spirit gives help and hope in all circumstances. Stewards are saints and sinners who grow, change, blossom, mature and reproduce stewards!

Because individual Christians are never at the same maturity or discipleship-level at the same time, we continue to make use of God's Word, Law and Gospel, in all our Biblical education, discipleship, applications. We recognize that different approaches, processes, opportunities for growth as followers of Christ are needed in every congregation. However, the basic Biblical stewardship principles can be the roots for future personal growth, action and reproduction.

God's people have potential for great good or great evil. Therefore, the way in which the Biblical understanding of being God's stewards

Stewards are saints and sinners who grow, change, blossom, mature and reproduce stewards!

in all of life is presented as very important. All materials, communications, presentations, etc., need to be evaluated in the light of this fundamental understanding: *God's stewards are saints and sinners*.

God's stewards are uniquely singular, yet profoundly plural.

This means that God's stewards recognize that their lives of stewardship are not solo performances but are personal responses to God, lived out within the community of faith to benefit the whole world.

The fact of life is that first we are members of a family and then we become individuals. We possess individual identity because we develop gifts and skills within the context of the family, the relationship with others in the family. Growing up we are likely to be referred to as "The Smith family," or even as "the Smith child," "the Smith children." As we mature, we reveal and develop our individual strengths, skills, qualities, characteristics, and may be referred to as "Bobby Smith" or "Judy Smith." However, we always carry with us the identity of belonging to a larger family. We are singular to be sure, but we also have a plural dimension as God's steward.

In God's family, the church, stewards learn from and with one another. Talents, gifts, skills are discovered, developed and deployed in connection with others. St. Peter writes that we have been given these gifts by God not merely for ourselves, but "for the common good" (1 Peter 4:10). That "common good" includes the "household of faith" but also looks beyond the present company of Christ's followers into the world community in which we live and serve (Gal. 6:7-10).

There is a "body" concept to being God's steward. Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 are major teaching units for this Biblical stewardship principle. Paul puts it succinctly, "...in Christ, we who are many form one body,

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and each member belongs to all the others" (Rom. 12:5). The body is not a massive leg, or a big arm, or a tiny ear. The body is comprised of multiple parts, each with a vital function to fulfill for the common good. So it is among God's stewards.

2 Corinthians 8 and 9 are instructive chapters in the Bible. They tell a profound story of God's stewards in one place, responding to His grace, and serving those in another place. They did not forget the "plural" nature of the church and its ministry. They remembered why they served as they did, learned from models and mentors in their midst, and carried out the ministry in the name of Christ with gratitude for the privilege of knowing the Savior of all people, even those who lived far away and they would never meet until heaven's doors were opened.

Example:

The symphony orchestra. The orchestra is made up of many instruments. There may be a time for the violin or trumpet solo, but not all the time! Each member of the orchestra contributes to the music. Each one pays attention to the conductor. Each one serves at the proper time and then "symphony," "sounding together," "making music with one another" is made. The individual instrument counts, but the unity of the orchestra brings applause

to the conductor, and the work of the entire orchestra is acknowledged by all who are blessed by the music. So it is in the church, honoring God and also blessing the world.

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The implications of this Biblical principle, this "body/life" principle are profound. We take comfort in knowing that we are not alone! We cannot and must not do everything! Not everything depends on me, on one person, or even on "us" in this one place. The unique and specific gifts of the steward

Every one contributes to the music.

are given to be used to honor the Lord and to be a blessing to other people. There is a need to recognize those individual gifts, yet hold up the reality that we are all stewards together in the body of Christ. Each part is important, and each individual needs to nurture and use the gifts for his or her part in the body of Christ. The sum of all the parts is greater than the individuals that make it up. Together we can do for our Lord what we cannot do as a collection of individuals.

Another dimension of this reality is that we dare not over-emphasize one part of the work of God's people while under-valuing or neglecting another part. This calls for discernment and wisdom, and God's Holy Spirit is able to provide that to each part of his family (Acts 6:1-7). We ask ourselves periodically if we are a part of the total body, or apart from it. The connection to the rest of the body of Christ, locally, regionally and even worldwide is an important dimension of this Biblical stewardship principle: *God's stewards are uniquely singular, yet profoundly plural!*

God's stewards are in the world, but not of the world.

This means that God's stewards recognize that the Lord sets them apart from the world and by the transforming power of the Gospel sends them into the world to live out the Gospel.

Christians are different; not odd or strange, just different, unique. There is within God's steward a growing awareness of developing "the mind of Christ" (Phil. 2:5-11). It is something we desire. It is a response to His grace, His great love for us. Jesus was different. He did not live for Himself, but for the Heavenly Father who sent Him (John 17). He desires that His followers, God's stewards, live the same way. The Apostle Paul writes to us, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will" (Rom. 12:2).

It is the "renewing of the mind" that transforms the life of God's steward. There is a diminishing of self-centeredness and a growing desire to live to bless others. There is a certainty, a security, that comes from knowing Whose we are in Christ. We are declared His forever! That reality enables us to trust Him, to live for Him and not for self each day. Now that is different! The "world" does not live that way. Check the newspaper, TV, or the Internet!

Stewards live for the Owner. Life is managed for the Owner, the Redeemer of life. We live it IN this world, ever mindful of the fact that Jesus did too. He lived, died and rose again in this world so that we could live in His world forever! That is the steward's motivation to make use of the gifts God gives us to bless, nurture and take care of God's world. We are IN it, but not OF it!

John 17:15-18 is very clear. Jesus says, "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not OF the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world."

This world is the place we currently live in as God's stewards. We are called, commissioned and sent (John 20:21-23; 16:33). Here we fulfill our stewardship, our mission: to be God's stewards. However, we are not part and parcel OF this world. Our security does not depend on accumulating the "things" of this world, having a great record, or achieving high status. Position, prestige, power are not our goals as God's stewards.

Our purpose is not to live for ourselves, but for Him who died for us and rose again (2 Cor. 5: 14-15) and, like Abraham, we do that living IN this world, to glorify God and to benefit our neighbors (Gen. 12:1-3). Our purpose in life is to live to make a contribution to the lives of others in the name of Christ, and we seek to have a growing number of people join us in this purpose (Titus 2:11-14). The philosopher, Williams James, said that what matters is not the duration of life, but the donation! We are contributors, not merely consumers.

To be sure, we make use of the gifts, the intelligence, the technology, the resources God provides IN this world so we can carry out His will as stewards in daily life, individually and corporately. We do not shy away

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from learning all we can about everything: human beings, science, medicine, space, history, communication, etc. We use those gifts to honor God, to serve and draw others closer to Him by the way we live, speak and act. It is a part of how "having the mind of Christ" is revealed. Our witness as God's steward is seen in the decisions we make in our daily life, in home, family, school, in our profession, on the job, in the community, in public and in private.

This principle has implications for the need to balance the time we spend in service in the organization called our church, and the time we spend serving others in the name of Christ in the community, among the ones in need.

Being God's steward is not limited to "church-related" activities. We remember that "God so loved the world...." That includes all the people in it, those who are not yet a part of God's church, but need to be! Being God's steward goes beyond the church or school property line.

God's stewards dare not resort to underhanded, unethical means to achieve their goals, or the goals of the church organization in this world. Our witness is diminished and integrity compromised when, or if, we resort to "pressure

tactics," laws, regulations, or demands that might "work" in order to get the job done in the church just because it is done that way "in the world."

Beware of legalisms, disguised as "useful" or "workable programs" that creep into the thinking of God's people. Demands and manipulation may get immediate or short-term results, but they leave a long residue of resentment and hostility. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the continuing motivation and power for renewed heart and lives (Phil. 2:5-11; Rom. 12:1-2; 2 Cor. 5:14-6:2) God's stewards are in the world but not of the world.

God's stewards are loved and loving.

This means that God's stewards recognize that their stewardship flows out of God's act of love for them in Christ. This empowers them, in turn, to love others in acts of Christ-like love.

"We love because He first loved us." That is how St. John puts it (1 John 4:19). It is true. The greatest evidence of the love of God is in the giving of His Son, Jesus. His life of obedience (of keeping the Law in the stead of all of God's law-breakers, sinners); His sacrifice of himself; His atoning death on the Cross for all people; His rising to life again on Easter. Well, there is no greater evidence of divine love than this! (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8-11; Gal. 4:4-5; 2 Cor. 5:14-15; 1 John 3:16-18)

The passages listed above, and many others, tell the story of God's great love for human beings, all kinds, in all places. Reflecting on that truth enables people to find new hope, new significance, new meaning for life

each day. The love of Christ is the springboard of Christian living and loving (2 Cor. 5:15).

Faith in God's love for sinners is shown in action, in deeds of love toward other people (Gal. 5:6b). There are two great commandments that God speaks to all human beings in the Bible: love God, love your neighbor (Matt. 26:36-39). However, it all begins with God's stewards being loved by God first! (1 John 4:19) Love is reciprocated. It is not coerced, manipulated or forced. It grows out of a personal relationship with Christ. His church is called into being to extend and nurture that love.

Jesus put it so clearly, "A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:34-35).

A wise old sage said, "Love wears coveralls!" Loving people is hard work. Ask Jesus! Love wears work clothes. It is not easy to love some of the people around us, even in our own household at times, but the fact is stewards are called by God to love because we are loved. Giving the cup of cold water, providing food for the hungry, forgiving the one who has hurt you, caring for the environment, helping the homeless, working for just laws, visiting the prisoner, befriending the poor, strengthening the family—all are part of the expanding circle of loving others in the name of the Christ who first loved us! (Matt. 25:14ff; Eph. 4:32; Micah 6:8)

Question:

If you were to give the "Steward of Love" Award annually to one or two members of your congregation who reflected the love of Christ to others, who would they be?

How might you decide? Could you do that in your congregation? *God's stewards are loved and loving.*

God's stewards are served and serving.

This means that God's stewards recognize that their stewardship involves a Gospel-powered style of life, which is demonstrated in servant-hood within all the arenas of life.

Question:

Who comes to mind when you read/hear the word "servant"? Can you make a list of the ones who have impacted your life, your congregation? There have been some great ones in the history of the world, and of the church!

Has there ever been a servant greater than Jesus of Nazareth, God in human form, the Savior of all? I don't think so. Knowing what needed to be done to put all human beings "right with God," Jesus spoke these words to His hesitant followers: "We are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death, and deliver him to the Gentiles; and they will mock him, and spit upon him, and scourge him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again" (Mark 10:33-34).

That is being a servant! He lived His life serving others, washing feet like an ordinary household slave (John 13: 3-5; 15-17), and reminding all stewards that the path to greatness is not in triumphant rule, but in living

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this truth: "whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave..." (Matt. 20:26-28).

God's stewards are not bound by the organization of the church in serving. Stewards live a life of serving because we have been served by the Chief Servant, the Chief Steward. Service done in the community and world for the benefit of all God's creatures and creation is a part of our total stewardship of life. The use of talents, gifts and skills for the well-being of others is a way we stewards live out our lives.

Stewards challenge and encourage one another to fulfill the acts of compassion, kindness and charity that bring honor to God. We learn how to serve the more we get to know the will of The Servant, Jesus. Paul instructs us, "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus, who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—death on a cross! (Phil. 2:5-8)

That is being a servant! It is also why God's stewards have servant attitudes. Spend time with Jesus and He will serve you—and you will serve others in your household, community, neighborhood, business, government in like fashion. *God's stewards are served and serving*.

God's stewards live with an awareness of the present and the future, of time and eternity.

This means that God's stewards live intentionally in the light of the Lord's eternal purpose while being firmly committed to His rule in the here and now.

When you know you're going to heaven, you can do a lot of good on earth. The Christian faith begins with God. God did what was and is needed for our eternal destiny. The comments and Biblical references in the previous sections have made that abundantly clear. Because of God's action in Christ, the steward's eternal destiny is certain. Therefore God's stewards are set free to live fully for God in this present world (Gal. 5:1, 13; 1 Peter 2:16).

God's stewards are not escapists, thinking only of leaving the troubles of this world and escaping to heaven. We do not have a religion of escapism. Christianity is the most "physical" of all world religions. In the Incarnation of God in the person of Jesus Christ we learn to understand the preciousness of life, of this world, and our privileged calling as God's stewards.

Stewards belonging to God live and serve in this world, yet are mindful of eternity. Stewards know we are blessed to be a blessing (Gen. 12:1-3). Stewards are not merely consumers, accumulators of things. The stewards true "treasure" is in doing the will of God with all we are and have (Matt. 6:19-21). The purpose of the life of God's steward is to make a contribution to others in the name of Christ. We do that in the here and now, while we live, and as we have opportunity in service to other people, to the society around us, and the world in which we live (Gal. 6:7-10).

Stewards can also continue to do some of that even after we have been

called to eternal glory with God, our Savior. Stewards plan ahead and make a Will to make further use of the resources God provides, so that His grace,

In the Incarnation of God in the person of Jesus Christ we learn to understand the preciousness of life, of this world, and our privileged calling as God's stewards. His love in Christ, can touch the lives of future generations. Stewards rejoice in knowing by good planning for both the

present and the future, they can continue being a blessing to others for decades to come (1 Tim. 6:17-19; Phil. 3:12-14, 20; 2 Peter 3:11-12; Rev. 14:13).

Stewards are empowered to discover, develop and deploy the gifts and resources God has provided in time, in the here and now, to continue being a blessing in the lives of others for eternity. Christian stewardship is the free and joyous activity of the child of God and God's family, the church, in managing all of life and life's resources for God's purposes.

God's stewards live with an awareness of the present and the future, of time and eternity.

An Exercise for Reflection

As you read, study and reflect on the Biblical Stewardship Principles:

- 1) Beware of previous prejudices about the concept of "steward-ship" being only money. Set prejudice aside and remember you've set it aside!
- 2) Jot down your thoughts about the meaning of each principle. Write down as many as you can.
- 3) Let your imagination flow freely as you think about being God's steward in unique ways.
- 4) Ask a friend of like mind in the congregation to consider your ideas ... and help you add to them.
- 5) Reflect on the positives and the possibilities of your ideas for implementing the principles.

Ask: What appeals to me about this idea? What outcomes could be realized?



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- 6) What obstacles, questions, challenges might be raised? How, or in what ways, could some of those challenges or obstacles be overcome?
- 7) With the help of others, write out a brief strategy and plan for making widespread use of the biblical principles for guiding the lives of Christian stewards in your congregation. God will bless you!

Stop—Start—Continue ideas:

STOP—ask: What are we really trying to do as stewardship leaders, influencers in this congregation?

Ask: What plans do we have for the next three years? How will year three build on years one and two?

STOP:

accepting the criticism of those who say "the church is always asking for money..." and START showing what good things God is doing through the lives (including the offerings) of His people who are living out many of the Biblical stewardship principles.

START:

having a regular time of prayer for all God's stewards at every Church Council, committee or congregational organization meeting/gathering. Provide some suggestions, supplying regular resources available for "growing" God's stewards, providing offering envelopes for all Sunday school children at age three. Have regular paragraphs about "being God's steward" in the weekly church bulletin, newsletter and other forms of congregational communication.

using projected stewardship messages on the screen in the sanctuary as a regular part of the announcements, notices, before worship begins. Ask the youth to help.

CONTINUE:

speaking with all congregational leaders and organizations about the growing stewards God is raising up in the congregation... include the shut-ins, children, youth, solo parents, couples, widows, widowers, etc., in the positive examples that are highlighted.

listing in newsletters the names of people, and their activities, who illustrate the carrying out of the Biblical stewardship principles in a positive way.

Accountability items:

Accountability is the twin sister of responsibility, and is the conveyor of multiple blessings! Give it a try. You'll be blessed! After all, you are God's stewards!

- Ask for help in being accountable for growth, spiritual maturity, as God's steward.
- Consider asking all the members on the Stewardship Committee, or the Church Council, or a select group of four to eight other members to "covenant together" for one year of more intentional growing as God's stewards.
- Meet for two to three hours every two months to share, to listen, to tell what God has been doing in your life.
- In a sensitive manner present (and listen to) the obstacles, challenges, failings encountered, and affirm the growth, blessings, new awarenesses, changes and habits that are being developed.
- Pray for and with one another, share sections of the Bible that have become more meaningful over the months of learning to live the Biblical principles of being God's stewards in all of life.