

GENERAL PROGRAMS STEWARDSHIP

OFFICE OF DISCIPLES WOMEN



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Stewardship, not a Four-Letter Word

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this study is to embrace stewardship as part of the whole ministry of the church. Many of us in the church think of stewardship only once a year - when we engage in the process of securing pledges for the annual budget. Even then, we avoid the subject as much as possible. Ministers are hesitant to preach anything other than a very general “I won’t rock the boat so don’t get upset with me” stewardship sermon, and members of the congregation look at it as a chore rather than a privilege. This study gives a new way to look at, and hopefully respond to, stewardship.

SUGGESTIONS FOR LEADERS

PROGRAM:

- The words which each letter of the word “stewardship” stand for are the author’s own thoughts. You may use different words if you desire. Where more than one word is given for a letter, you may use only one or all of them.
- Do not read the material; become familiar with it and tell it in your own words as much as possible. Notes are acceptable and usually necessary. This is a hard subject. It will be easier for your group to have a conversation with them rather than a lecture.
- Engage the members in discussion. Present a little background and then give members the opportunity to get involved. Ask questions. Have them come up with their own stewardship alphabet. Or take some of the words, divide into small groups, assign each group a word, and have the groups discuss what the word means to them and how it relates to their own stewardship. Programs that touch us where we live are sometimes more painful, but they are always more interesting. We all like to talk about ourselves.
- However you present the program, make sure that your members

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understand that stewardship is not an option for Christians, we can all give something, and a generous heart is the most important ingredient of stewardship. Present the program in such a way that your members will **want** to become better stewards.

WORSHIP:

- The worship part of a meeting varies so greatly from group to group that I have only given a brief outline to get you started. Some groups use only a meditation and prayer, while others do hymns, offering, and communion. Adjust the service to fit your group.
- The call to worship is an opening sentence or two to change the mood to one of worship. It should always be brief, but spoken with clarity and conviction.
- For other hymn suggestions, see page 831 of the Chalice Hymnal topical index under Stewardship.
- The meditation, if used, can be something the leader writes or something from a book or other source. I used a personal experience, but there are many good resources available if you need something already in print. Just be sure that whatever you use illustrates the topic (stewardship).
- Receive the offering in whatever manner you choose. The offertory prayer should give thanks for the gifts.
- If communion is part of your worship, use whatever form you wish. Just be certain that all participants understand what is taking place.
- A benediction is a sending forth. It can be a prayer or brief words, such as, “Go in peace” (general), or “Go out with grateful hearts to share your gifts with others” (specific to program subject).
- The important thing in leading a worship service is to be in a spirit of worship yourself.

SERVICE PROJECTS:

- It is better to choose one project and do it well, rather than choose several and not do them well.
- AND.....NEVER make a member feel guilty if they feel they cannot participate in a project.. All of our gifts are different. This includes the gifts of time. and money.

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INTRODUCTION:

In the past several years the climate has changed in Virginia (and probably where you live also). We used to have cold winters, warm springs, hot summers, and cool autumns. Now each season has temperature fluctuations which cause it to be warm one day and cool the next. Sometimes the temperature will change as much as twenty degrees overnight.

That's the way it is with stewardship. We run hot during the annual budget campaign, capital campaigns, and other special fund raisers; but the rest of the time we are just plain cold toward stewardship. We don't want to think about it. We act like stewardship is one of those dirty four-letter words, but it is not. The word "stewardship" has eleven letters, and each of those letters can help us change our attitude toward stewardship. Before we go any further, we need to be reminded of one thing: Although stewardship is not *just* about money, giving our money *is* an important part of stewardship. Now let's look at those eleven letters.

S:

"S" is for Surrender and Self-giving. When we surrender to Christ, He asks for one-hundred percent of our lives. That's tough, but it is what being a Christian is about. It would be much easier if we could just give part of ourselves, but He wants everything. He gave his life for us and we in turn must give ourselves to our family, our neighbors, our church, and even our enemies. We do this by being present for others, and by sharing our resources of time, talent, knowledge, experience, and money.

T:

"T" is for Trust. When the prophet Elijah asked the widow of Jaraphath for a morsel of bread, she told him she had only a handful of meal and a little oil. When Elijah told her that God had said the meal and oil would not run out until the drought ended, she trusted that God would do as

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he said. (1 Kings 17:8-16) When times are difficult and money is tight, we are afraid to trust that God will take care of us. We want to hold onto what little money we have. We have to take care of Number One first, and then, if there is any left, we may help others and give a little to the church. Jesus tells us to give it all up and follow him. We follow him because we trust.

E:

“E” is for Eternal and Enduring. We sometimes say the church is always asking for money. Yes, the needs (and demands) are eternal - they never go away. If we respond to those needs in a positive way, the church will endure, and endure it must. The poor are always with us (Matthew 26:11), and so are the hungry, the homeless, the lonely, the heart-broken, the victims of war, and others who need a helping hand or a kind word. Our attitude about stewardship says a lot about our attitude toward those Christ loves.

W:

“W” is for Wholeness. To become one with Christ is to become whole. In today’s fast-paced, electronic, consumer-driven society, we long for wholeness. We search for that which will bind together the fragmented parts of ourselves. There is no “G” in Stewardship, but until we become generous in our attitudes toward ourselves and others, and generous in sharing the blessing we have been given, we will not find that wholeness. Our world is broken and much of its healing will be up to the Church. We need more love, more tolerance, and more generosity to heal our own brokenness and that of the rest of creation.

A:

“A” is for Action. We reach a point where we have to stop talking, thinking, planning, and promoting the mission of the church and JUST DO IT. This is true of stewardship, both personal and in the church. We need to stop talking about how we “should” give more to the church and actually

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open our wallets and checkbooks and actually GIVE some money. Enough said.

R:

“R” is for Responsive and Regular. Stewardship is our response to the life, teaching, ministry, and command of Jesus. We don’t choose whether or not to practice stewardship; we choose whether or not to obey Christ. To make this response a healthy and productive habit, we need to practice stewardship on a regular basis. In giving our offerings to the church, this may be weekly, monthly, or whatever works for you as long as it is consistent and regular.

D:

“D” is for Discipline, Dedication, Devotion, and Daring. Stewardship is a discipline that must be cultivated with dedication and devotion. And it is sometimes daring. There is a song written about the Disciples of Christ titled “Dare To Be Disciples.” (Words and music by Darrell Faires, Sr., copyright 1985 by Shalom Publications, 7225 Berkridge, Hazelwood, MO 63042) The refrain reads: “Let us care, let us share, let us dare to be disciples, followers of the way. Let us learn, let us yearn, let us burn to be disciples, Disciples of Christ today.” Caring, sharing, daring, learning, yearning, and burning to be disciples of Christ (followers of Jesus) and Disciples of Christ (members of the Church) requires a life of total stewardship.

S:

This second “S” is for Salvation. When we give of ourselves to help others, through the church or otherwise, we are contributing to their physical and emotional salvation, which may lead to their spiritual salvation. Stewardship is also a response to our own salvation. Christ gave his life for us; how can we not give something of ourselves back to him by giving to others.

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H:

“H” is for Honesty and Humility. When we approach God with honesty and humility concerning our possessions, we will realize that everything we have is a gift from God. If we are truly thankful for all God has done for us, we will respond with generous hearts.

I:

“I” is for Inclusiveness. Stewardship is not just about money. It includes everything we have and everything we are. Not some things, not most things, but EVERYTHING. While we should be very generous with our time, money, and gifts in our churches, stewardship includes all areas of our lives. It speaks to what we read, what we watch on TV, what kind of music we listen to, how we shop, what we eat, and even what we think. This may seem like an impossible task, but there is one letter left.

P:

“P” is for Promise. Luke 6:38 says, “Give , and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.” (NRSV) What a powerful promise! Not only will we receive a good measure, but it will be pressed down and shaken together to make room for more, and then it will be so plentiful that it will run over.

SORTING IT ALL OUT:

Now that we’ve learned some of the elements of good stewardship, how do we sort it all out? How do we make stewardship work in our own life? How do we decide how to divvy up our money? When do we say “No”?

A good rule of thumb for money is the 3-S plan -

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- save some,
- share some,
- spend some.

We need to **save some** of our income because rainy days will come and we need to have the resources to handle them when they come.

We **share** our money by giving our offering regularly, supporting missions - whether buying items for a Church World Service health kit, giving a donation to Week of Compassion, or some special program that your congregation undertakes - and by caring for each other by using money to send cards, make a meal, or whatever is needed. We share outside of the church by supporting charities that are meaningful to us. Do not feel obligated to support everything, for no one can, and do not give to unfamiliar charities or those who send you a cheap gift and expect you to “pay” for it with a donation.

We **spend** our money by taking care of our needs - food, clothing, shelter, insurance, transportation, etc. After we take care of our needs, we can spend money for our own pleasure - buying a good book, lunch out with a friend, a new sweater, or whatever.

Never live beyond your means. If your income is not enough, look at how you spend it. If you find you are eating out every time you shop or run errands, go immediately after breakfast and be home for lunch. If you can't afford a cruise for your vacation, spend some time exploring the quaint little towns in your state. If you are buying too many books, get a library card. There are ways all of us can reduce our spending if we pay attention to how we are spending our money.

The 3-S plan works for your time also. Save time for simply being. Some people are so caught up with doing that they have no time left for being. Take time to enjoy nature. Take time to grow spiritually. Take time to be

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thankful. Sharing time can be doing jobs in the church, caring for your family, taking time to call someone who can't get out, having a real conversation with your spouse, etc. Spending time includes the job, personal responsibilities, and self-maintenance.

Giving our talents, skills, and other special gifts can take many forms. You may sing in the choir (talent), teach Sunday School (skill), pick up trash in the church parking lot (gift of still being able to bend over), encourage a young person (gift of words), give someone a ride to the doctor or some other appointment (gift/skill of driving), etc.

IN SUMMARY:

- We must give.
- We should give generously and regularly.
- We give in many ways.
- We always get more than we give. Always.

WORSHIP SUGGESTIONS

CALL TO WORSHIP:

O God, we come before you with hearts overflowing with thanksgiving for the many gifts you have given us. At the same time, our hearts ache for those who do not have enough. Help us to use our resources to be your hands, feet, and voice in a hurting world. In the name of Jesus, the Christ, Amen.

HYMN: "We Give Thee but Thine Own" - No. 382 in Chalice Hymnal

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SCRIPTURE:

1 Peter 4:10-11 - “Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen. (NRSV)

MEDITATION:

I was once challenged by something I read to take a certain block of time and look at everything as a gift from God. The day I decided to do this I was on my way to a CWF retreat at a retreat center a little over an hour's drive away. It was a dreary, rainy Fall day and I had left work in a grumpy mood. As I shifted my thoughts (and attitude) and began to do the exercise, I immediately realized that the rain was a gift as we cannot live without water. As I proceeded on my journey, I named many things that were gifts - my car, the ability to drive, the paved roads, the houses along the way, the trees, the flowers that were still around, a bicycle in a yard, hanging baskets on a porch, a pond, a tractor, etc., etc. etc. Each of these things had been made out of materials that God had given by people whom God had gifted with the knowledge and skills to make them. I named many more during that short trip, but this gives you the idea. Everything we have is indeed a gift of God.

CALL TO OFFERING:

Let us give our offerings with hearts full of gratitude and generosity.

OFFERING AND OFFERTORY PRAYER:

COMMUNION:

CLOSING HYMN OR BENEDICTION:

SUGGESTED SERVICE PROJECTS

- There are many service projects related to stewardship. Some involve giving money, some require buying something, some require giving time, and some require using the talents and skills of individual members.
- It is important that when you choose a service project for your group, to choose something other than the regular, ongoing programs of your congregation. Your members should, of course, support those programs and projects, but your project needs to be something separate from a total church program.
- Rather than list specific projects, below is a list of places to look at needs. After determining where the needs are, you can then decide on a project based on the resources of your members.
 - Nursing homes and assisted living facilities
 - Local schools - families of students who may need groceries, etc.-mentoring, tutoring, help with field trips, etc.
 - Local incarceration facilities - facilities for youths, local jails, or whatever is in your area - toiletries (check with facility for guidelines, such as no glass bottles) worship services, birthday parties, etc.
 - Your local welfare office
 - Your local police department
 - Service organizations in your community
 - Church councils or other religious organizations
 - Your minister - many people who need help look to churches first

Projects can be one-time or ongoing, small or major. It depends on your group. Just be sure that you select a project to which most members of the group are willing to commit.