



Living Stewardship

About this Faith Practice

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

Let's Begin...

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

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



Discovery



Scripture



Discipleship



Christian Tradition



Context and Mission



Future and Vision

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

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

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

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

Use of Art, Music, and Scripture in Faith Practices

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

Ordering Posters

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

Art

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

From Imaging the Word Poster Sets:

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

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

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

From AllPosters.com:

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

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

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

Music

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

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

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

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

Scripture

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

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

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Exploration: Discovery

About this Age Group

Adults, defined as 35 years of age and older, are in many ways a rainbow people. Shaped in varying degrees by the experiences of early childhood and adolescence, adults tend to make sense out of their lives by taking cues from the worlds of work, family, and social relationships. These, in turn, contribute to whether and how they live into a meaningful sense of stewardship. Aging does not necessarily diminish their adaptive skills; it may even enhance them as life experience fosters wisdom. Adults can grow and change under the impetus of reflection, reliable information, and listening to and interacting with respected and informed role models in various learning settings. This recurring exposure may function as motivation to nudge adults toward a concern for and involvement in important issues such as care of the earth and humanitarian concerns. It may also encourage them in a growing sense of generosity regarding the use of their resources.

About this Exploration

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

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

Leader Preparation

More than a few church leaders approach the subject of stewardship as they would a downed electrical line or a venomous snake—with reluctance, caution, and pulse-pounding fear. This is not to imply that these leaders are spineless scaredy cats. There is a sense in which stewardship can be the “third rail” of the Christian faith: touch it in the midst of a group of believers and you can become a smoldering briquette in less time than it takes to quote John 11:35 (“Jesus wept.”).

Part of the emotional backlash seems to come from the fact that many people hear the word stewardship and tend to feel that the church is trying to meddle in their financial affairs. Or, to be more precise, they tend to suspect that the church is attempting to play the role of a pious pickpocket or spiritual extortionist, extracting money against their will.

If people knew the truth about stewardship, they might be more inclined to relax and let it just be about money. Of course, it is about so much more. Living stewardship practice is really about helping people understand that God does not really particularly care about siphoning 10 percent of our incomes into the coffers of the church. What God desires for us to realize is that everything that exists happens already to be God’s—even when we assume that it is ours or someone else’s—and that God wants it all. If we

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 Personal Ideas and Feelings about Stewardship (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Do not feel self-conscious about leaving this discussion open-ended or about the fact that you may arouse a variety of ideas and emotions. This step is designed to get the wheels turning as you and the participants begin to explore conscious and unconscious responses to stewardship, as well as issues and subjects connected to it.

Supplies:

- newsprint or whiteboard
- markers

Welcome the participants and take a few minutes to allow everyone to get acquainted, particularly if there are individuals in the group who have not been introduced to one another. Subsequent sharing will be aided as participants begin to know a bit about one another and feel comfortable enough to share their genuine thoughts and feelings. Suggest that individuals provide their names, a word concerning their primary interests, and a bit about their significant relationships. In the interest of time, encourage them to keep their comments to no more than one or two minutes.

Invite the participants to suggest what comes to mind when they hear the word “stewardship.” Record their ideas on newsprint or a whiteboard. Some suggestions might include the following: sharing, controversial, tithing, caring for the earth, boring, discomfort, planned, opportunity, sacrifice, regular, giving, money, blessing, passing a blessing on, and so forth.

Examine the list and invite participants to make any comments about what they see and any mental or emotional responses they might have to what is listed. To help spark discussion, ask the following or similar open-ended questions:

- What do you think comes to mind when most people hear the word stewardship?
- To what extent do thoughts and emotions regarding stewardship leave you feeling positive or negative? Why do you think that is the case?
- How would you personally define stewardship?
- To what extent would your definition match up or diverge from popular notions of stewardship, particularly in the church?
- In what sense do you see stewardship as a faith issue? Explain.

2 Images and Symbols of Stewardship

Leader preparation: Consider your own thoughts and feelings about stewardship. How have you tended to define it? How have you tended to express it? How comfortable have you been as others have talked about it and as you have entered into discussions regarding it? What images and symbols are evoked for you when you consider stewardship?

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really could buy off God with 10 percent, stewardship would be much simpler and far less demanding. But God calls us to rethink our lives—and our relationship to the Creator and all that God has created—so that we begin to operate not as acquisitive, self-focused, stingy owners, but as faithful, sharing, humble stewards.

That, then, is part of the journey on which you and the others are embarking. You are stepping out onto the road that leads to rethinking what stewardship means to you and what future role it will play in your lives as faithful disciples of Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Creator God, you so often call us to walk down roads that can seem — particularly at the beginning — far more booby-trapped with risk than reward. Give us the courage to take the first step and to follow it with the second so that, almost before we know it, we begin to see in sharper focus the path of life more abundant that you invite us to walk with you. Amen.

Session Development

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

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

Supplies:

- large piece of poster board
- markers in a variety of colors
- multicolored construction paper
- scissors
- glue sticks

Divide the group into smaller clusters of three or four persons each. Provide each group with the following materials: a large piece of poster board, markers in a variety of colors, multicolored construction paper, scissors, and glue sticks.

Offer the following instructions in your own words: Please spend a few minutes talking about the dominant feelings and thoughts that are evoked when you think of stewardship—what it is and what you believe it requires of you. After a few minutes of discussion, work together to decide on the dominant theme or a prominent response that emerged in your cluster sharing. Then decide how you might use the material you have been given to create some combination of shapes and images and single words to symbolize that theme.

When the clusters have finished their collaborative work, invite them to present the fruit of their labor to the entire group. Rather than ask the clusters to explain the meaning of their creative efforts, encourage the members of the larger group to suggest what they feel the cluster creations are evoking in them regarding stewardship. Then invite those who created the tableaus to respond to the group’s reactions.

Note any contrasts or similarities that emerge regarding the tableaus or images created and participant responses to them. Such points of convergence and divergence can offer fertile possibilities for discussion and exploration.

3 Stewardship Field Trip

Leader preparation: Prior to this activity it will help if you carefully explain to participants what they will be participating in and what you would like them to be alert to. So read the activity instructions and be ready to make some suggestions to the group members about what they need to watch for. In fact, if you are taking the group on an actual mini-field trip, it might be beneficial for you to do a personal tour first to see what the experience is like. This will also help you better understand what you may need to communicate to participants beforehand.

Supplies:

- transportation
- digital pictures and picture projection equipment

Take the group members on a brief field trip—type experience in the community near or surrounding your church or other location where you meet. This can be a walking tour—depending on the weather, the proximity of the area you will visit, and the feasibility of your participants engaging in physical activity—or a tour via cars and vans. Another option is to photograph areas ahead of time and project the images for the group.

Whatever approach you choose, the idea is to take participants on a physical or visual journey through a part of your community with an eye to being alert to expressions of stewardship that they observe or sense. For example, your group may pass or see an image of a well-kept garden or park. What does that say about the property owner’s or the community’s sense of stewardship? What does a bank or an area business say about stewardship matters? What is communicated

choose four or five activities, using at least one activity from each category.

by a rundown neighborhood or a pothole-littered city street? What stewardship approaches and practices are suggested by the churches in your surrounding community, including your own church? (You might also include some areas that reflect the opposite of good stewardship, but the emphasis should be on good care.)

When you have completed your actual or virtual field trip, invite the group members to participate in a time of debriefing in which they express how they experienced stewardship being subtly — and, in some cases, perhaps not so subtly — expressed. Ask the following or similar questions to stimulate discussion:

- How did you see stewardship being expressed in what you saw?
- What stewardship manifestations generated positive feelings? What manifestations left you with questions or negative reactions? Explain.
- How did this experience give you something to consider regarding stewardship with which you had not grappled before?

Discerning & Deciding Activities

4 Things That Belong to God (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: During this activity you will help the participants think about what belongs to God and how our outlook on that topic might influence our attitudes and actions. As you guide the discussion, bear in mind that it is quite easy to acknowledge that all things belong to God. Most of us, however, find it challenging to maintain (or live out of) that thought and allow it to guide how we approach the environment, our money, our possessions, and a host of other things.

Before you begin this activity, you might find it helpful to make your own list of a few dozen (or hundred or thousand?) things that are God's and ask yourself how significantly your understanding has formed your own attitudes and actions regarding stewardship.

Supplies:

- small rubber ball
- newsprint or whiteboard and markers

Invite a volunteer to serve as the scribe to record the responses that come from others in the group.

Encourage the group to form a fairly compact circle. Then provide the following instructions, using your own words: In a couple of minutes, I am going to pass or roll or gently toss the rubber ball to one of you in the circle. Before I do that, however, I am going to name three things that belong to God. The person receiving the ball will then name three things that belong to God before passing the ball on the next person of her/his choosing. As we name things that belong to God, our volunteer scribe will list our suggestions. The other stipulations are these: you cannot suggest something that has already been mentioned. You cannot pass the ball to the individuals standing immediately on either side of you. You can, however, pass the ball to someone who has already received it.

Begin by naming three things that belong to God and then give the ball to another individual in the group. After a few minutes, call a halt, and begin a brief discussion by asking the following questions:

- How difficult was it for you to come up with things that belong to God? Why was that the case?
- How long do you think we could have continued this exercise? Why do you believe that to be the case?
- What might this exercise have been like for a nonbeliever?
- Why did you choose the particular things you cited?

Hopefully the participants will not have difficulty naming things that belong to God, since the Bible tells us that all things, in heaven and on earth, belong to the Creator. Go beyond the initial discussion, however, by posing these additional questions:

- If all things belong to God, what bearing does this have on how we view stewardship?
- If all things belong to God, what role does that place us in — especially as Christians?
- How easy or difficult does it seem to be for us to remember that all things belong to God? Why might that be the case?
- How might our attitudes and actions change if we saw, and constantly remembered, that all things belong to God?

5 On the Verge of the Promised Land

Leader preparation: Read and study Deuteronomy 8:7–18 and formulate your answers to the suggested questions.

Supplies:

- Bibles

Divide the group into small clusters of four persons each. Be sure that each cluster has enough Bibles for every participant. Ask the clusters to read Deuteronomy 8:7–18. Then invite them to consider their responses to the following questions (you might have these printed on newsprint or a whiteboard, or copied for all participants):

- What does Moses seem to be saying about why the Israelites were on the verge of entering “a good land” (v. 7)?
- What were some characteristics of this land?
- What would the new land provide for the Israelites?
- What were some things mentioned that had happened as the Israelites traveled to their destination?
- What seemed to be the primary intent of Moses’ words as reflected in verses 17 and 18?
- What insights does this passage provide regarding stewardship?

After the clusters have spent a few minutes reading the passage and considering the questions, bring the larger group back together and encourage the participants to talk about the insights shared in the individual clusters. Although your task will not be to steer participants to simplistic, predetermined answers, the following may reflect some thoughts you will hear from the clusters: Moses’ message seemed to be that the Israelites’ journey from being slaves in Egypt to a people on the verge of entering a land of abundance was not something they had accomplished because of their own ingenuity and drive. What they had received and what they were about to enjoy came to them by the hand and blessing of God. It is very easy for human beings to come to believe that they are “self-made” and

that all that they have is a result of their own hard work and cleverness. Through Moses, God reminded the Israelites that even their gifts had their origin in God's blessing and bounty. Everything we enjoy has its origin in God. Part of stewardship is acknowledging this, giving God thanks for it, and treating whatever we enjoy — money, talents, skills, relationships, influence, and so forth — as the blessing and sacred trust that it is.

6 **Contrasting Images**

Leader preparation: Remember that your function is to facilitate the reflective and faith discernment impulses of the participants. Heated debate or excessive bashing of the surrounding culture is not the aim. Rather, think of your role as someone who is encouraging participants to think about what they may not stop to consider very frequently. One goal here is to encourage the participants to consider the interaction between our culture and faithful practice that encourages us to approach questions of stewardship. That is not to say that anyone who buys a new car or desires to own a high-definition television is focused on selfish, conspicuous consumption and is oblivious to faith and stewardship concerns. It is only to remind us that we often have to sort through the dominant messages of our culture to hear and grasp what God might be saying about issues such as stewardship.

Prior to the session, select an ad that depicts a popular product — such as a giant flat-screen TV, a new motor vehicle, the latest wireless mobile device, and so forth. Find ad in a glossy magazine or by searching Google for “Internet Advertising Examples.” <http://www.tinyurl.com/373p7yc> In addition to the product, be sure that at least one person is pictured in the ad.

Supplies:

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

Display the poster of the Rex Goreleigh painting “Planting.” Provide an opportunity for the participants to sit in silence and consider the picture for a minute or two. Then invite discussion by asking these or similar questions:

- What impressions do you gain of this woman from the way in which her hands and body are positioned relative to the plant?
- What sense do you get as to whether this is a new task for her or one she has engaged in before? Explain.
- Do you suppose that the woman is engaging in physical labor connected with a job for which she is paid, or do you think she is laboring with another motivation? Explain your reasoning.
- If the woman is laboring for pay, how do you suppose she thinks and feels about what she is doing?
- If her motivation is something other than drawing wages, what do you suppose that motivation is?
- Regarding this woman's approach to what she is doing, what do you sense she might have in common with you? At what points do you sense there might be differences?
- In what ways might this woman connect God and her faith with what she is engaged in?
- If you met this woman and developed a relationship with her, what do you suppose she might be able to help you more deeply consider concerning life and stewardship?

Display the magazine ad next to Goreleigh's painting. Invite the participants to suggest how the essence and "feel" of these two depictions seem to them to correspond and/or conflict. Ask: What does the ad seem to say to you about stewardship? Does it seem to say anything about how the person in the ad might view God and faith? If so, what does it suggest to you?

Sending & Serving Activities

7 Create Catchphrases (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Prior to the session, try your hand at coming up with your own catchphrases that encapsulate key ideas and insights about stewardship. This will prove beneficial as you anticipate some of the possible contributions from the participants and should any of them need assistance in coming up with a possibility to share.

Supplies:

- index cards
- pens or pencils
- newsprint or whiteboard and markers

Distribute index cards and writing implements. Offer the following instructions in your own words: Please take a couple of minutes to think about this question: "If I were to create a catchphrase to highlight stewardship, what would it be?" Then write your thoughts on the index card. You might write something as simple as "God gives to us; we give to God." Later on your card will end up in the hands of another person in the group. Do not be concerned, however, about coming up with something that would wow the ad mavens on Madison Avenue. Simply try to put your thoughts into a brief phrase or two.

When the participants have finished writing on their index cards, collect the cards, shuffle them, and redistribute them—one card for each participant. Invite the participants to read silently the cards they received. Invite volunteers to read aloud what is written on the card they have received and to indicate any insights or questions those words suggest for them.

As the volunteers share, be alert for sayings that capture insights ripe for further exploration and volunteer comments that merit follow-up. Consider writing them on newsprint or a whiteboard.

8 Role-Play the Gift-Giving Journey of the Magi

Leader Preparation: For this activity you will need to make contacts ahead of your group meeting to secure role-play volunteers and to assist them in their preparation for acting out the story of the Magi as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew. You may wish to make suggestions about Bible commentaries and websites that the volunteers can explore as they plan for their brief performance. They also might find it helpful for you to share with them the questions that will be used to stimulate group discussion following the presentation.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- costumes (optional)

Prior to the time when your group meets, invite four volunteers to participate in a role play based on Matthew 2:1–11. Three of the volunteers will portray the Magi from the passage; the fourth volunteer will portray King Herod.

Encourage the volunteers to spend time reading the passage and at least one or two Bible commentaries and/or Bible dictionaries that will provide them with background regarding this passage. One possible approach would be to do an Internet search for Wise Men, Magi, Jesus.

Recommend that the volunteers gather for one meeting prior to the time when the entire group assembles. Suggest that they share some of the information and insights that they glean from their study and investigations in order to help them consider how they might best conduct the role play. They might even go through one brief rehearsal, though assure them that they should relax and have fun with the portrayal. No one is asking for a Tony Award–caliber performance.

During the session, introduce the volunteers and say a few words about what the rest of the participants will be seeing. Indicate that the depicted story is based on the account of the Magi as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew. You may even wish to ask someone to read aloud from the passage prior to (or after) the performance of the role play.

After the role play has been presented, encourage dialogue by using the following questions:

- What do you suppose motivated the Magi to travel so far to offer their gifts to Jesus?
- What were some of the obstacles and difficulties that faced the Magi?
- When the Magi encountered Herod and sensed his motivations, why do you suppose that they were determined to proceed and complete their undertaking?
- What might the Magi have to teach us about the gifts we offer to the Christ we profess to follow?
- What are some of the obstacles and difficulties that we must deal with as we approach our gift-giving journey to the Christ?
- How does our motivation and determination compare with that of the Magi?

Paraphrase a Hymn

Leader preparation: During this activity the participants will attempt to paraphrase the verses of a hymn. Make it clear that their attempts need not rhyme or conform to the meter of the original hymn. Rather, the point is to grasp the essential message of the hymn and put that into different words.

Supplies:

- hymnal with the hymn, or the words posted on newsprint or whiteboard
- an accompanist (optional)
- paper
- pens or pencils

Divide the group into clusters of three or four persons each. Provide each cluster with a copy of the lyrics to the hymn “God, Whose Giving Knows No Ending” (tune: Austrian Hymn). You can find the lyrics at <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong6a> and hear the tune at <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong6>.

If you have at least four clusters, assign one of the four verses to each cluster. If you have fewer than four clusters, select which verse or verses you will focus on and assign a different verse to each cluster. Ask each cluster to focus on its assigned verse by reading it through (at least twice) and then paraphrasing it.

When the clusters have finished the assignment, encourage them to share with the larger group their verse and their paraphrase of that verse. Then invite the larger group to make any comments or explore any questions regarding the following or other areas that seem fertile for exploration:

- What the hymn says about God and stewardship
- What the hymn says about us and our stewardship response
- What the hymn says about reasons for our stewardship response
- Additional insights that the paraphrases helped provide
- Questions that the original hymn words and the paraphrases might suggest

In closing you might wish to do one of the following: Sing all or part of the hymn; use all or part of the hymn as a responsive reading; or use one or more of the verse paraphrases as a prayer (as read by one of the individuals from one of the clusters).

Reflect

During the session remember to be a learner, not merely a leader. Issues may arise that will not be settled with quick, seemingly satisfactory responses. Some questions will seem to have no clear, simple answers. Stewardship is similar to many practices of the Christian faith that have been addressed by the biblical witness and thousands of faithful believers down through the centuries. It does not necessarily lend itself to three easy steps and a summation wrapped up with a neat, attractive bow. Be patient. Welcome the learning that can come with nettlesome questions, honest ambiguity, and persistence over time.

Living Stewardship



Exploration: Scripture

About this Age Group

Adults, defined as 35 years and older, are in many ways a rainbow people. Shaped in varying degrees by the experiences of early childhood and adolescence, adults tend to make sense out of their lives by taking cues from the worlds of work, family, and social relationships. These, in turn, contribute to whether and how they live into a meaningful sense of stewardship. Aging does not necessarily diminish their adaptive skills; it may even enhance them as life experience fosters wisdom. Adults can grow and change under the impetus of reflection, reliable information, and listening to and interacting with respected and informed role models in various learning settings. This recurring exposure may function as motivation to nudge adults toward a concern for and involvement in important issues such as care of the earth and humanitarian concerns. It may also encourage them in a growing sense of generosity regarding the use of their resources.

About this Exploration

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

Spirit, calls us to reject an understanding of dominion as power over creation. Scripture tells us that we are made in the image of God, the Creator and Source of Life, and so invites us to accept the gifts God provides for the enjoyment of all and to embrace “life that is really life” rather than storing up treasures and individual possessions.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Genesis 1:26–31
1 Timothy 6:6–10

Leader Preparation

One size fits all is rarely an adequate approach, whether we are talking about purchasing a pair of shoes, selecting a hat, or discovering what living stewardship means as we journey with Christ and other Christian pilgrims. But applying such an approach in the matter of God-things entails a much bigger risk than pinched toes or a fedora that droops over the eyes and rests on the bridge of the nose. For though the Word and the Spirit of God often speak and move in ways that can be interpreted as broad and general, they also have the power to be focused, particular, and specific. That’s why Noah’s experience did not indicate that God wanted all people to be shipbuilders any more than Jael driving a tent peg into the temple of an enemy general was a scriptural declaration of how to treat the next magazine salesperson who walks up to your door (Judges 4:12–22).

So remember to treat the participants, the scriptures, the resources, and the ideas you employ with dignity, respect, openness, warm generosity, and an appreciation for fine distinctions. Your role is not to attempt to produce a legion of identical, robotic stewardship automatons; it is to help each person seriously, prayerfully, carefully ask the question: What is God saying to be me about my stewardship faith practices

Exploring & Engaging Activities

 **1 Created in God’s Image (Easy Preparation)**

Leader preparation: Read the biblical text and consider your own views and feelings regarding questions related to the image of God, the dominion God has granted to human beings, and the goodness of God’s physical creation. Be careful not to impose your positions on the larger group. Be open to perspectives you have not considered before. In fact, you may want to reconsider openness to perspectives you may have rejected out of hand in the past. To some extent, the participants’ potential for growth will be influenced by your willingness to resist rigidity and embrace open, thoughtful consideration.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- Bible commentaries and/or Internet access (optional)

Divide the group into three clusters that have roughly an equal number of individuals. Supply Bibles for the persons in the clusters. Invite each group to read Genesis 1:26–31. Assign one question to each group for conversation:

- Group 1 – What are the implications of being made in God’s image?
- Group 2 – What is the nature of the dominion that God granted human beings to have over the earth?
- Group 3 – What are the implications of God’s pronouncement that what had been created was “very good” (v. 31)?

Provide access to Bible commentaries and/or the Internet so that the participants can consult reference material regarding the passage and the questions they are tackling. Such access, however, is optional.

Providing definitive answers to questions related to faith and biblical texts is not always possible or even preferable. To a great extent, meaning and faith take shape as we deal with nuance, ambiguities, and paradoxes. So, as you bring participants together to discuss what they talked about in their clusters, do not feel constrained to arrive at conclusions that masquerade as the final authoritative word. Instead, encourage healthy, open exchange that asks honest questions and sincerely seeks God’s multilayered truth.

As the clusters come back together, invite them to report on what they have discussed. Encourage the rest of the group to respond to these reports with questions and/or observations. The following are possible responses that you may hear coming from the clusters and additional thoughts that you may wish to introduce into the discussion.

Group 1: What are the implications of being made in God’s image? Being made in the image of God is not particularly related to gender or physical appearance. The nature of God and the nature of human beings are the key areas that intersect in determining whose image we reflect. The question is not about how much we look like God when we peer into a mirror; rather, more meaningfully, the question is about how our nature reflects the nature of the Creator.

in the context of the body of Christ and the world of which I am a part?

Prayer: O living, loving, and holy God, all things come from you. It is you who feeds us in our hunger, clothes us in our nakedness, shelters us in our vulnerability, and makes your dwelling with us in our loneliness. Provide your palpable presence and your trustworthy guidance once again as we seek to more truly know you so that we may be faithful stewards of all that you have placed in our hands. Amen.

Session Development

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

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

Group 2: What is the nature of the dominion that God granted human beings to have over the earth? Unfortunately, human beings often interpret dominion to mean domination. Societies and cultures tend to assume incorrectly that the human species has the right to use animal, mineral, water, vegetation—and even human—resources ruthlessly without regard to the effect on any portion or the whole of creation. The biblical concept of dominion is more closely akin to stewardship. We are to be stewards of the earth’s bounty, seeing the creation as a gift and a trust that is to be wisely and lovingly attended to.

Group 3: What are the implications of God’s pronouncement that what had been created was “very good” (v. 31)? Over the centuries positions developed that promoted a strict dichotomy between the physical and the spiritual. The spiritual, in this view, is good and sacred and to be treated with reverence and respect. The physical, on the other hand, is viewed as corruptible, evil, and of minimal importance. In the creation accounts, however, it is clear that no such dichotomy is implied. The physical is created by God and is not evil, in itself. So, just as the spiritual deserves reverence, respect, and care, so does the physical that is touched by the hand of God.



2 The Created Universe

Leader preparation: Keep in mind that you are attempting to look at creation (of the Earth and the universe) through the prism of stewardship. God is the great Creator. God’s creative activity reaches back to the past, continues in the present, and extends into the future. As we see the entire creation as God’s handiwork, we come to a place of wonder and awe that motivates us to treat all that God has made with reverence, tender attention, and loving care.

Supplies:

- poster: “Orion Nebula” <http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters6> by Stocktrek Images
- CD and CD player or music download and digital audio player (optional)

Display the poster “Orion Nebula” in a location where it can be easily viewed by all. If you wish, play background music—perhaps a CD or music download of a selection such as the opening theme from the movie “2001: A Space Odyssey.” You can hear it at <http://www.tinyurl.com/2j39jr>.

Prepare the participants with your own words to communicate the following: Let me suggest that you put both feet flat on the floor and remain as still and relaxed as possible. Spend the next several minutes taking in the visual components of the Orion Nebula poster. Do not force your thoughts in one direction or another. Allow them to flow freely as you quietly consider the poster image and the creative energy and focus that God poured into the creation of the planet Earth and the wider universe.

After allowing sufficient time to view the poster, invite reflection and sharing by asking these or similar questions:

- What thoughts and feelings occurred to you as you viewed the image?
- What did you sense, if anything, that related to God’s creative energy and activity, both in the past and in the present?
- What thoughts, feelings, and questions does this experience evoke in you regarding God’s creative purpose?
- What does this experience say to you about the role and place of humankind in the original and ongoing process of creation on Earth and in the universe?

- What thoughts and feelings does this image evoke that connect, correspond, and/or conflict with the Genesis accounts of creation?
- What feelings and thoughts are evoked concerning God’s ongoing care for creation and the role of human beings in that ongoing care?

3 Modeling Clay

Try following the instructions in this activity prior to the session. If nothing else, it will give you sympathy for the difficulty of the task. Creation is not easy or simple work, whether we are talking about the initial formation process undertaken by God or the “maintenance” that follows it.

Supplies:

- modeling clay

Invite the participants to divide into clusters of two or three individuals each. Give each cluster a hunk of modeling clay and offer the following instructions: Working with the partner or partners in your cluster, form a shape representing a living thing, or some other feature of the created Earth. For example, try to form an animal (such as a duck or a ferret), a plant (anyone want to try a hibiscus?), or a geographic feature (perhaps Mount Kilimanjaro). Have fun with this, but also do the best you can. Later, others will try to guess what you have created.

When the clusters have finished their efforts, invite them to display their handiwork for the total group. Encourage the individuals in the larger group to attempt to identify what each piece of cooperative work represents. For the first five or six guesses, the creative team should only respond to guesses with minimal responses, such as warm or warmer, or cold or colder. After that, the creative team can provide clues, such as indicating whether the creation is animal, vegetable, or a geographic feature, as well as additional hints, such as whether the creature has feathers, fur, or scales — if it’s a living creature. Do not spend an inordinate amount of time on this activity, but allow several clusters to display their handiwork and invite guesses from the total group.

Then open a discussion by asking these or similar questions:

- To what extent does this activity alter or deepen your appreciation for the complexity of the creative work of God?
- How easy or difficult did you find it to have a partner or partners in your creative efforts? Why was that the case?
- To what extent could it be said that God engages in partnerships in the ongoing work of creation and/or stewardship of the created world?

Strange as it may seem to us, God does invite us into a partnership in the ongoing work of creation and the maintenance and advancement of the created world. In one portion of the creation stories of Genesis, human beings are barely off the “assembly line” before they are given a part in stewardship (guardianship and custodial care) for what God has created (Genesis 1:26).

Discerning & Deciding Activities

 4 An Exaggerated Statement (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: During this activity the participants will create some exaggerated statements. In the spirit of the text, they will be asked to come up with statements that sound a bit over the top and maybe even a little silly to long time, church-going ears. Encourage the group members to join in the spirit of the moment and put any inhibitions about such things in neutral. One of the marvelous things about the sayings of Jesus and other portions of the biblical witness is that they can shake our sensibilities with sarcasm, hyperbole, and surprising earthiness — if we give ourselves permission to listen to them with fresh ears.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- newsprint or whiteboard and markers

Take a few minutes to read aloud Luke 18:18–29 or to review the salient details of the passage. Call the participants' attention to the following points related to the text: According to this passage, it is possible to keep the commandments and be judged "good," but still lack something in one's relationship with and commitment to God. In the conventionally understood sense, the wealthy ruler was morally faultless, but he lacked generosity. Put another way, he was deficient in the area of stewardship. Jesus said, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God" (v. 25).

Invite the participants to suggest other hyperbolic (exaggerated, nonliteral) statements that could convey the same sense of meaning as "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle" Write their suggestions on newsprint or a whiteboard. Some suggested statements might include the following: it's easier for a hippopotamus to swim through a soda straw; it's easier for a centipede to tie all its shoes in time to get to an urgent business meeting; it's easier for a Chihuahua to bench press an apartment building; and so on.

Spark discussion with these or similar questions:

- What do you think Jesus was trying to say by using the camel and needle illustration?
- What does this passage imply regarding a sense of stewardship and a spirit of generosity?

Biblical scholars have disagreed about precisely what Jesus was alluding to when he spoke of a camel going through the eye of a needle. Some insist that Jesus was referring to a gate in the city of Jerusalem called the Eye of the Needle, which camels could squeeze through only by bending low to the ground after having all of their cargo unloaded. Others maintain that the word camel should be translated as "cable" or "rope." Whatever the stance one takes about how this verse should be translated or interpreted, the fact remains that Jesus' words were an exaggerated, nonliteral statement designed to make a point: those who have great wealth can find it difficult to recognize that all they have has its origin in God and that God has a claim on how that bounty is to be responsibly used. Judging from the actions of many human beings, that recognition can be a difficult one for individuals among the middle class and other economic strata, as well.

5 Money Montages

Leader preparation: Gathering the materials for this activity will require some effort. You may want to ask friends to help by contributing outdated copies of magazines and newspapers (unless you or a family member has played the role of a pack rat by creating a series of Leaning Tower of Pisa print media miniatures throughout the garage or storage shed).

Supplies:

- newspapers and magazines
- poster board
- scissors
- glue sticks
- markers
- masking tape

Divide the group into clusters of four or five participants each. Provide each cluster with a quantity of newspapers and magazines, a large piece of poster board, scissors, marker, and a glue stick. Provide the following instructions: Work together within your clusters to look through your supply of magazines and newspapers to find pictures, headlines, and individual paragraphs that in some way deal with money and the effects of money. Cut out these pieces and form a montage by gluing the pieces to the poster board. Use the markers to add descriptive words or short phrases that capture the spirit of what you are depicting.

When the cluster members have completed their montages, invite them to share with the total group. For example, one cluster might present a montage made up of a picture of an elegant house with a foreclosure sign on the front lawn, a headline fronting a story about financial shenanigans on Wall Street, an ad for a financial investment company, and written words that include the dream, the nightmare, temptation, striving, heartbreak. Another cluster might display a poster that features a paragraph about the gift of a wealthy philanthropist to a worthy cause, a picture showcasing a fund-raising walkathon for a local charity, and words that include caring, generosity, and self-giving.

As the group discusses what they have depicted on their posters and how their handiwork reflects cultural attitudes connected with money, it should become obvious that money can bring out whatever lies within us, from the best to the worst. It must be admitted, however, that more often it seems to bring out the materialistic, greedy, selfish aspects of human nature.

Ask the participants what they remember about scriptural references to money. Some biblical references they recall might include the love of money being the root of evil, the thirty pieces of silver that Judas received for betraying Jesus, and the widow's mite. Ask: What do these and other biblical texts seem to say about money? Given these references and contexts, what might it look like for an individual to be a good steward regarding money, both how one seeks money and what one does with the money one has?

6 Greed and Generosity

Leader preparation: As you prepare to lead this activity exploring greedy and generous impulses and internal resolve, recognize that few — if any — people are all greedy or totally generous. Human beings are a mixture. The most generous-hearted individual can have moments of callousness and grasping neediness. And candidates for the Ebenezer Scrooge Lifetime Stinginess Citation can be surprisingly humane and altruistic on occasions. Our aim is to journey closer to the heart of God and the practices of the loving, giving Christ as time goes on.

Supplies:

- newsprint or whiteboard and markers
- Bibles

Create two columns on newsprint or a whiteboard. Write the word “Greedy” at the top of one column and “Generous” at the head of the other column. Invite the participants to suggest words or short phrases (consisting of no more than three words) that they associate with the words at the top of the two columns. Record their suggestions under the proper heading as they call them out. Some words and phrases under “Greedy” might include: self-centered, fearful, clenched fist, narcissistic, grasping, money grubbing, ruthless, acquisitive, hoarding, destructive, and so forth. Suggestions related to “Generous” might include: giving, big-hearted, openhanded, kind, philanthropic, Christ-like, trusting, beneficial, and so on.

After the lists are compiled, ask a volunteer to read aloud Luke 12:13–21, as everyone else follows along in their Bibles. Pose a few questions to stimulate discussion. The following are possible questions, along with thoughts for consideration that you might weave into the give and take:

- What evidence is there of greed in this biblical account? It seems obvious that Jesus was decrying the greed of the rich man in the parable. But the fact that he told the parable at all seems to imply that Jesus sensed that greed was at the heart of the request of the individual who asked him to intervene regarding the family inheritance dispute.
- What do the effects of greed seem to be? Greed stifles and stunts life. Despite outward appearances, Jesus seemed to be saying, the rich man’s life had atrophied and was showing signs of decay and death, considerably before he collapsed and the call went out to the local undertaker.
- What might it mean to be “rich toward God” (v. 21)? In the upside down world of the kingdom of God, true riches and poverty are only marginally connected with possessions and one’s bank account. One is rich, in Jesus’ estimate, when the things of God are reflected in that person’s life — things such as love, generosity, caring, giving. These are just a few of the things that indicate that a person embraces and reflects the spiritual richness and generosity of God.
- What food for thought might this account have regarding stewardship?

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Money Troubles (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: If this activity does not make you and the other participants squirm just a little, then you probably aren’t living in Western culture and/or you’re not really paying close attention to what the text is saying. As much as we would like to exempt ourselves from the category of “the rich,” the reality is that — in terms of the world’s population — most of us are pretty flush. While it is easy to say, “I trust in God and not in mammon,” the truth is that living up to those words is a daily test on which, at our best, many of us barely squeak by. Thank goodness for grace. Thank goodness for spiritual practices that over the course of time enable us to grow and make incremental progress toward our lofty aspirations.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- “Words about Money and Wealth,” Attachment: Activity 7
- pens or pencils

Distribute copies of “Words about Money and Wealth” along with pens and Bibles. Ask the group members to spend a few minutes reading 1 Timothy 6:6–10, 17–19 and responding to the questions on the sheet.

When they finish writing their answers to the questions, invite them to share some of their responses as you guide the discussion. The following are some thoughts you may wish to keep in mind during the course of the dialogue:

What does the writer seem to say is required for a contented life? To what degree do you agree or disagree with this viewpoint? The writer’s viewpoint may be a difficult one to totally agree with for most of us who operate in a culture in which consumerism is one of the primary driving forces of the economy and is considered one of the indispensable building blocks of happiness. The writer seems to say that we should be content if we have enough food to fill our stomachs and enough clothing to cover our nakedness and protect us from the elements (and the writer doesn’t seem to specify designer label attire; apparently garments from Wal-Mart or Goodwill will do). The writer really does not seem much impressed with those who aspire to acquire. Godliness and contentment, the text seems to say, ultimately is easier to come by in an atmosphere of material and financial simplicity.

What does the writer seem to say about the desire to be rich and the love of money? What is your reaction to this position? One has to wonder what the writer would make of our current culture, which has made the dream of riches the ultimate dream and has essentially held out the promise that almost anyone can obtain financial super-sufficiency with hard work and a good investment advisor. A certain level of riches is seen, in our society, as necessary for any true degree of happiness. The writer seems to disagree with that position. Monetary acquisition, the writer argues, often produces more misery and tribulation than it does joy and bliss.

What indication is there concerning the writer’s view about whether the wealthy can be good and faithful disciples? How would you respond to the writer’s observations? Despite a rather wary view of money and the worrisome baggage it can bring with it, the writer does not seem to conclude that riches serve as an impassable roadblock on the path to God and Christian discipleship. In a sense, however, money has to be put in its place, and that place is very much lower on the pecking order than where human beings typically allow it to roost. Specifically the writer says that the rich must avoid haughtiness, make sure their trust is in God, and “be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share” (v. 18).

What does this passage offer that is helpful guidance regarding Christian stewardship? The writer points to the heart of stewardship by urging readers to be “generous, and ready to share.” While the context of this passage appears to point to one’s use of money, the writer’s admonition could easily be expanded to one’s total stewardship of life. Yes, financial generosity is one aspect of Christian stewardship, but so is a willingness to share one’s talents, time, and total being. The “formula,” if that word can be used here, seems to be that acquisitive stinginess leads to spiritual atrophy and death while generosity and a giving life bring spiritual robustness and “life that really is life” (v. 19).

 **8 The Art of Stewardship**

Leader preparation: Among other things, this activity calls for playing a selection of improvisational jazz. Although the instructions suggest using one of the recordings of Thelonious Monk, feel free to utilize the works of Louis Armstrong, John Coltrane, Miles Davis, or others.

Supplies:

- poster: “Jammin’ at the Savoy,” <http://www.tinyurl.com/38rpkw7>
- CD and CD player, or music download and digital audio player

Display the poster that presents the painting “Jammin’ at the Savoy” by Romare Beardon. As the participants visually drink in this image, play jazz music in the background. For the purpose of later discussion, it would be best if you could play some improvisational jazz, such as one of Thelonious Monk’s works, which include such recordings as “Epistrophy,” “Round Midnight,” “Blue Monk,” “Straight, No Chaser,” or “Well, You Needn’t.” <http://www.tinyurl.com/39sj821>

Following this time of visual and auditory input and reflection, invite discussion by asking these or similar questions:

- What were some of the impressions you experienced as you viewed this piece of visual art and listened to the music?
- What did you sense about the interactions of those who were creating the music (either in the picture or on the recording)?
- What parallels might be drawn between the members of an improvisational jazz group and our interactions with God regarding God’s creation and our stewardship responses?

As you enter into and proceed through the discussion, you may want to keep in mind the following thoughts: improvisational jazz is distinct from many other forms of music. Rather than merely playing the notes that a composer has committed to paper, the musical artists enter into a partnership in which diverse instruments become a part of an on-the-spot, real-time creative enterprise. “Success,” if it could be called that, does not come when every instrumentalist faithfully plays the prescribed notes the composer envisioned; it comes when the musicians interact within the group, and even with the audience, to bring about a musical experience that is somehow fresh, new, and unprecedented. In this sense jazz thrives on, really demands, cooperative diversity and creative spontaneity. In the Ken Burns’ documentary film *Jazz*, Wynton Marsalis observed, “The real power of jazz . . . is that a group of people can come together and create . . . improvised art and negotiate their agendas . . . and that negotiation is the art.”

Ask: If the negotiations that take place within a jazz ensemble result in art, what are the negotiations that occur between God and God’s human creatures as we seek to learn and live the art of faithful stewardship?

As the participants respond to this question, encourage them to keep in mind the negotiations (interactions) that occurred between God and humankind in the Genesis creation accounts and in other passages in the biblical narrative. It might be helpful for group members to ask themselves, in this context: What was/is God calling human beings to do? What responses are called for if we are to be faithful disciples, responsive stewards?

9 Following the Leader

Leader preparation: This option calls on you and the other participants to engage in an activity that is very similar to the children’s game “Simon Says.” Have fun with this activity, but be sure to use the follow-up questions to draw out the participants’ thinking on stewardship matters.

Supplies:

- Bible

Spend a few minutes engaging in an activity in which you ask the participants to follow and repeat your actions as you move your body. Depending on the mobility of your group members, this activity could be undertaken with participants standing or sitting. Feel free to choose which movements and actions you wish to use, but here are just a few actions you might consider:

- Wink your right eye
- Wiggle the fingers of your left hand
- Touch your nose with the pinky fingers of both hands
- Nod your head
- Turn to the left
- Turn to the right
- Turn 180 degrees
- Turn 360 degrees
- Bow
- Curtsey
- Flap your elbows (like a chicken)
- Bend over and try to touch your toes

Following this brief activity, read aloud 1 Corinthians 11:1, which says, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.” Then invite discussion by asking these or similar questions:

- How easy or difficult was it to follow the actions you were attempting to imitate?
- How easy or difficult do you find it to be an imitator of Jesus Christ?
- If we are called to imitate Jesus Christ, what implications does that have for us in the area of stewardship? What would that look like as we attempt to put that into daily, regular practice?

Reflect

What emerged as you and the other participants engaged in the activities, wrestled with the questions, and pondered the biblical texts? Where were the bursts of insight? What new questions popped up? Where did the group find points of agreement and points of contention? It may be helpful to remember that the Bible is not an answer book with the solutions to all of life’s problems, including stewardship challenges, indexed in the back of the book. Like life itself, we must walk — however falteringly and clumsily — with the biblical text over time before we begin to understand what it is saying to us and requiring of us. You’ve taken another step on the journey. Rest, refresh yourself, and prepare to take the next step.

Attachment: Activity 7

Words about Money and Wealth

Read 1 Timothy 6:6–10, 17–19 and respond to the following questions.

1. What does the writer seem to say is required for a contented life? To what degree do you agree or disagree with this viewpoint?
2. What does the writer seem to say about the desire to be rich and the love of money? What is your reaction to this position?
3. What indication is there concerning the writer's view about whether or not the wealthy can be good and faithful disciples? How would you respond to the writer's observations?
4. What does this passage offer that is helpful guidance regarding Christian stewardship?

Living Stewardship



Exploration: Discipleship

About this Age Group

Adults, defined as 35 years and older, are in many ways a rainbow people. Shaped in varying degrees by the experiences of early childhood and adolescence, adults tend to make sense out of their lives by taking cues from the worlds of work, family, and social relationships. These, in turn, contribute to whether and how they live into a meaningful sense of stewardship. Aging does not necessarily diminish their adaptive skills; it may even enhance them as life experience fosters wisdom. Adults can grow and change under the impetus of reflection, reliable information, and listening to and interacting with respected and informed role models in various learning settings. This recurring exposure may function as motivation to nudge adults toward a concern for and involvement in important issues such as care of the earth and humanitarian concerns. It may also encourage them in a growing sense of generosity regarding the use of their resources.

About this Exploration

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

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Isaiah 55:1–3
Mark 10:17–22

Leader Preparation

We become Christ's the moment we turn and accept God's gracious acceptance of us. But, of course, that is hardly the end of the matter—it is only the beginning. Faithful disciples—living, reliable stewards of God's rich bounty—are always works in progress. They cannot be produced at hyper speed. We cannot pop a doughy, self-focused mass of human narcissism into the microwave, set the timer, and pull a little Saint Francis of Assisi confection piping hot from the oven in a matter of minutes (or days, or months, or perhaps even years).

The normal gestation period leading to the birth of a human being is nine months. The formation of a faithful disciple makes that seem like the blink of an eye. In terms of time required, discipleship formation can seem equivalent to the fossilization process needed to produce coal or petroleum. Keep that in mind as you and the participants travel the journey of discipleship and the formation and refining of faithful stewardship practice.

No one expects you and the other group members to be perfect followers of Christ at the beginning of your time together—or at the end of it. Treat yourself with the same patient grace that God does. Press on to God's high calling, by all means. But also do not forget to celebrate the accretion of fresh insights, renewed commitments, and

Exploring & Engaging Activities

 **1 What We Have Mastered (Easy Preparation)**

Leader preparation: Prior to the session, it will be beneficial if you spend time considering some of the skills you have mastered, both in your professional and personal life. Think also about the people who have helped you to hone your abilities—identify and develop your gifts — over the years. The journey to mastery and discipleship is seldom, if ever, one that we can successfully make alone. As relationship is integral to our connection with God and our growth into people who reliably reflect Christ, so who we are and what we are enabled to do, over time, bears evidence of significant people whose lives are connected to ours.

Supplies: None

Ask each participant to pair with a partner. Then offer the following instructions in your own words: Think about something that you have mastered at some point in your life. Perhaps it is a job skill. Maybe it is something that connects to sports, a needlecraft activity, a hobby, a relationship skill, or some other area. Maybe you have mastered your temper or your tendency to reach for food in times of stress. Share with your partner some information about what you have mastered.

After the twosomes have had ample time to share with one another, bring the entire group back together and invite volunteers to say a few words about something they learned about the skills that their partners have mastered. For example, some may talk about their partners' skill in doing intricate embroidery or woodworking. Other individuals may refer to their partners' mastery of accounting skills or cooking.

Then ask the pairs to get back together and share about the following:

- Some of the challenges they faced in mastering the skill they have acquired.
- An individual who helped them in mastering the specified skills by serving as a mentor, a coach, a model, or an informal source of advice and support.

When the larger group has reassembled, encourage the participants to discuss what they heard in the twosomes. Although each group is unique, it is likely that some individuals will talk about how helpful certain persons were in helping them develop mastery in particular areas. Someone may talk about how much they owe to their swim coach in becoming a better swimmer, their career mentor in aiming for integrity and excellence, or a friend in becoming more sensitive and caring to others.

Bear in mind, as you lead this discussion, that none of us is self-made. Even the best and the brightest would have to admit, if they were honest and benefited from even a few droplets of humility, that the skills and abilities they have acquired have — in some measure — been given by a gift/ability-bestowing God and honed through relationships and interactions with others.

This has an important bearing on both discipleship and stewardship. It connects to discipleship because some of the ways followers of Jesus Christ learn to be

new beginnings that come over time and that help you grow into the image of the living Christ.

Prayer: God, perhaps we are not all that we should be. Most certainly we are not all that we could become. But we put ourselves in your hands. We are the clay; you are the potter. Make us patient. Help us to be malleable. May we be willing to submit ourselves for as long as it takes to become what you desire for us to be. Amen.

Session Development

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

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

faithful and good disciples are by watching, learning from, and living in relationship with others. It bears on stewardship because, just as we have received from God and from others within loving, supportive relationships, we are called to give to others within the context of loving, supportive relationships.

2 Before and After

Leader preparation: During one portion of this activity you are asked to help the group members consider how they are using the blessings of their relationship with Christ and the benefits of Christian discipleship as resources for others in the practice of Christian stewardship. Take care to be gentle and noncondemning. Rather than shaming the participants into examining and expanding their understanding of faithful stewardship, you are attempting to encourage group members to grow in Christ-likeness.

Supplies:

- 11" x 17" sheets of paper
- markers in a variety of colors

Give each participant an 11" x 17" sheet of paper and access to markers in a variety of colors. Offer the following instructions: Begin by drawing a vertical line that will divide the sheet of paper into two 8½" x 11" halves. On one half of the sheet, draw symbols of what your life was like before you embraced Jesus and became a follower of the Christ. On the second half of the sheet, draw symbols of your life now that you are a follower of Christ. Attempt to come up with at least three symbols, but no more than five. Some people may not be able to make a distinction of a “before” and “since” moment. Encourage them to illustrate how their understanding of Christ’s presence and action in their lives has changed over the years from childhood through the teen years to young adulthood to now.

When the group members finish their drawings, invite the participants to explain the symbols and what they represent. For example, an individual might represent life before embracing Christ by drawing a cactus (representing a desert), an empty glass, and/or a chaotic whirl of swirls and directional arrows. Life after beginning to follow Christ might be represented by blossoming flowers, a glass full to overflowing, and/or a series of peaks and valleys with an overall upward trajectory. Of course, the symbols and the story contrasts might not be quite that dramatic—in terms of a decidedly “negative” before and a totally “positive” after—for some persons in the group. For some, there is a sense in which the Christian walk and the challenge of discipleship can seem considerably more complicated than their former approach to life.

That’s why, as group members tell their discipleship stories, part of your role will be to be a good listener and to encourage the other participants to be attentive and appreciative listeners. There really are no right stories and wrong stories when it comes to narratives that are honestly and truthfully told—there are only human stories that reflect, in wondrous diversity, the range of ways in which we come to and walk with Christ in our journeys of faith.

In addition, look for opportunities to help the group members identify how the shift from “without Christ” to “with Christ” has altered their sense of gratitude for what they have received and their desire to look for opportunities to give of themselves, their time, their talents, and their resources in faithful stewardship. For example, how are persons who might symbolize their Christian life of discipleship as an overflowing glass using and directing that overflow? Do they simply bask in the feeling of being blessed, or are they looking for ways to bless others with the abundance they are experiencing?

3 Stories of Discipleship

Leader preparation: One key to this activity will be how well you select and offer guidance to the individuals who make up the panel described in the instructions. Be sure to begin assembling your panel well ahead of the session in order to give the panel participants the opportunity to think about the areas you would like them to be prepared to address and respond to.

Supplies:

- three or four panel participants

Arrange for a panel of guests to meet with your group and talk about the panel members' understanding of discipleship, particularly as it pertains to stewardship. In order to prevent things from getting unwieldy, select no more than three or four persons for the panel. In your selection process, identify persons who possess reliable reputations as faithful disciples and good stewards. These can be members of your congregation or other churches in your community. In addition, attempt to give attention to diversity. In other words, avoid a panel that consists of all middle-aged businessmen who belong to the Chamber of Commerce or all female lawyers who graduated *magnum cum laude*. Strive to include, within the limits you must deal with, individuals who represent a variety of ages, work situations, and life experiences. You might even wish to include individuals from congregations with a worshiping constituency that differs from your local church in terms of economic, social, or ethnic makeup.

Ask panel members to be ready to talk about the following:

- What is your understanding of the meaning of discipleship?
- How do you practice discipleship? In other words, share not only what you think about being a disciple of Jesus Christ, but also how that translates into who you are and how you live your life.
- What have you discovered about yourself and about Jesus Christ as you have traveled the path of a Christian disciple?
- How does being a disciple of Jesus Christ affect your understanding and practice as a steward of God's creation and how you approach the stewardship of your entire life?

Introduce the panel members. It is important for the group members to introduce themselves to the panelists as well. Then invite each panelist to offer a one- or two-minute statement about what being a Christian disciple means to her or him. As you move through the panel sharing, give the group members an opportunity to ask follow-up questions and to reflect on the sharing of the panel members. Also encourage group participants to note common themes in what panel members share and any statements or viewpoints that are distinct from or contrast with other panel members' perspectives.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 A Replication Project (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Where Christianity, discipleship, stewardship, and many other aspects of the faith go off-track is at the point where we forget that a good part of what we are called to do is a matter of replication. In other words, we are to say, do, and be what others said before us, what others did long before we were a twinkle in either parents' eye, and what others grew to become in both the near and misty past. Is there a significant sense in which creativity and distinc-

tiveness are valuable, inspirational aspects of the walk and expression of faith? To be sure. But, as with most creativity, what is imaginative and “new” is most often based on a theme as old as time and riffs on a note that has reverberated for generation upon generation.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- newsprint or whiteboard and markers

Divide the group into clusters of three or four persons each. Supply Bibles for each person in the clusters. Ask the clusters to read John 14:7–14 and respond to the following questions (which you may wish to write on newsprint or a whiteboard):

- Jesus’ disciples were called to follow him. Who was Jesus following?
- What did Jesus say that his words and his works revealed?
- What does this imply about what the words and the works of Jesus’ disciples are to reveal?
- What insights into discipleship and stewardship are indicated by this passage of Scripture and the words of Jesus?

After they have had an opportunity to talk about their responses within the clusters, bring all the participants back together and invite them to share some of the observations generated in their smaller groups. One idea you may hear during this discussion is that, to a great extent, Jesus demonstrated what it looked like to be a faithful disciple and a good steward in the ways in which he followed his heavenly Parent. Jesus’ words echoed those of God; Jesus’ work replicated the works of God. That is why Jesus stated that the disciples had seen God because they had seen him.

To a great extent discipleship and stewardship are replication practices. We are called to do what Jesus did (both in concrete action and in Spirit), just as Jesus spoke the words and did the work of the One who had sent him.

5 Rules or Relationship

Leadership preparation: This activity requires you to gather some material for use in the session. It would also be helpful for you to read the Scripture passage and ponder the questions you will be posing to participants during the session. Evaluate your own approach to discipleship and stewardship. Have you been more rule-oriented or more relationship-focused?

Supplies:

- table
- chair
- two trash cans (one taller than the other)
- blindfold
- one stack of 9” x 12” construction paper
- one stack of 8 ½” x 11” photocopy paper
- one 8 ½” x 14” legal pad
- Bibles

Ask for two volunteers. Instruct one volunteer to go to a place where she/he can neither see nor hear what is going on inside the room. Invite the remaining volunteer to be seated in a chair at a table at the front of the room. Blindfold the seated volunteer.

When the volunteer is blindfolded, bring out two relatively small trash containers. Make sure that one of the trash containers is taller than the other one. Place one trash container to the right of the volunteer (it does not matter which one), and place the other trash container to the left.

On the table in front of the volunteer, place the following: one stack of 9" x 12" construction paper, one stack of 8 1/2" x 11" photocopy paper, and one 8 1/2" x 14" legal pad. It is important that you have the stacks of paper items in a place where the volunteer will not see them. Do not inform the volunteer of what you have placed on the table.

At this point, inform the volunteer that you are going to begin giving instructions that you would like the volunteer to follow as closely as possible. Then begin giving the seated volunteer instructions similar to the following:

- Place a sheet of construction paper in the taller trash can.
- Place two sheets of legal pad paper in the taller can.
- Place one sheet of photocopy paper in the shorter can.
- Place a sheet of photocopy paper and two sheets of legal pad paper in the taller can.
- Place two sheets of legal pad paper in the shorter can and three sheets of photocopy paper in the taller can.
- Take a sheet of legal pad paper out of the taller can.
- Put the sheet of legal pad paper you just took out of the taller can into the shorter can.

Remove the blindfold from the volunteer and bring in the volunteer who was sent from the room. Seat the volunteer in the chair at the table, but do not blindfold. Inform this second volunteer that you are going to perform a series of actions. After each action you would like the volunteer to do what you just did. Then perform a series of actions similar to the ones detailed earlier for the blindfolded volunteer. After each individual action, pause and allow the volunteer to repeat your action.

Ask both volunteers the following questions:

- How difficult or easy did you find it to follow my instructions?
- Why do you feel that was the case?
- What could have made following my instructions easier, if anything?

In all likelihood, the volunteer who was blindfolded will indicate that it was more difficult to follow instructions than will the volunteer who watched and repeated your actions. The nonblindfolded volunteer simply had to watch and then do. The blindfolded volunteer had to listen to the instructions, correctly interpret them, feel around for the right paper, and then feel to determine the appropriate container for the paper.

Distribute Bibles. Invite a volunteer to read aloud from Mark 10:17–22 while the rest of the group members follow along. Then ask these or similar following questions:

- On what did the man who came to Jesus pride himself?
- Why do you think Jesus thought this man still lacked something?
- What did Jesus want this man to do? Why do you think that was the case?
- What insights, if any, might the exercise with our two volunteers contribute to our understanding of this passage?

The opening exercise in this activity should not be viewed as a simple, tidy key to thoroughly understanding the passage. Most analogies have weaknesses and

points at which they either apply not at all or apply imperfectly. In the ensuing discussion, however, it might be helpful to bear the following thoughts in mind: The man who came to Jesus seemed to be strong on rule compliance, but weak on relationships. He knew what not to do to people, but he did not have a firm grasp — it would seem — of how to respond to others in loving, compassionate, caring ways.

Jesus' approach to the gap in this man's faith walk was not to give him a set of further instructions to follow. Instead Jesus' key command was "Follow me." In other words, "Come walk with me; be in close relationship with me; follow along with me; do as I do; live with me and take on my character till it becomes a natural part of who you are." Even Jesus' advice for the man to sell what he had and give to the poor was true to what Jesus himself would have done.

Becoming a disciple — particularly a disciple who practices faithful stewardship — is not so much about committing 10 percent of one's income — or some other percentage—or giving so many hours of the week to the work of the church and in the service of others. It is less about adhering to such legalisms and more about making the actions, attitudes, and reactions of Jesus ours. It is mimicking Jesus, in the most profound sense of the term. It is, as someone has put it, becoming a "little Christ." The key to such discipleship is relationship building more than it is rule enumeration and adherence.



6 Living Lessons in Discipleship and Stewardship

Leader preparation: If you use the video clip of "Dueling Banjos" from the movie *Deliverance*, you will note not only some similarities but also some striking contrasts between what is depicted in the clip and what is suggested by the painting "The Banjo Lesson." The painting suggests a scene in which there is long-term relationship and trust between the man and the child. The video clip from the movie reveals two cultures (one urban, the other rural) warily coming into contact. The only point at which wariness and brittle defensiveness seem to dissolve for a few minutes is as the man and the boy engage in making music: the man at first initiating a few musical notes, the boy repeating those notes. Once the music — and the initiated action and the repetition — stops, the fragile connection is broken. One point to keep in mind, however, is that the significant insight here may not be that the connection abruptly disappeared, but that it was ever made in the first place. The breaking of the connection could be called poignantly tragic, but the fact that any connection at all was made could be just as rightly called miraculously hopeful — and an indication of what might have been possible had the man and the boy had more than one fleeting encounter. Note: There's strong adult language in the video clip, so you may want to review and assess before using it.

Supplies:

- Poster "The Banjo Lesson" <http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters4> by Henry Ossawa Tanner
- music download and digital audio player or computer with Internet access

You may want to begin this activity by watching a video of or listening to a recording of "Dueling Banjos." You can access a video clip for this at <http://www.tinyurl.com/69sxxj>. This video clip is taken from the movie *Deliverance*.

Once you have viewed the video or listened to the audio, display the poster of the painting "The Banjo Lesson" by Henry Ossawa Tanner. Suggest that the participants can observe the poster by remaining seated, walking around to view the

painting from different angles, and/or going forward to get a close-up view.

After a few minutes, encourage discussion by asking these or similar questions:

- What “story” might this painting tell?
- What do you think is happening in the scene in the painting?
- What might be the connection between the boy and the man?
- What might have happened before the scene in this painting? What might happen after the scene?
- What do you envision the boy doing when he grows to manhood?
- To what extent does this painting evoke memories and scenes from your own life? Explain.
- How would you contrast or compare the story of the painting with the video/audio clip?
- How might the video/audio clip and the painting speak to us about ways the lessons of discipleship and stewardship are transmitted?

To be sure, the possible conversational twists and turns and the insights that come from the participants are almost endless. By all means use the rich imaginations and personal stories of group members to dialogue about their responses to the painting and the music. Do not feel that you have to stifle that dynamic, creative give and take to direct the participants to a predetermined set of conclusions.

Nevertheless, here are some thoughts that you may wish to share, if it seems appropriate. Significant learning often comes through the medium of relationship. Children frequently learn to cook at the side of their parents or grandparents in the family kitchen. Or they may pick up the nuances of sowing and growing living plants as they work alongside others in a garden plot. Of course we can learn by reading or being told certain things in lectures, speeches, sermons, and the like. But there is something about seeing the lessons in action — and being lovingly, supportively encouraged to mimic those lessons — that takes the lesson from the theoretical to the implemented and practical. Watching others and repeating their actions and practices in a sense create a kind of physical and emotional “muscle memory” that can deeply imprint behavior on our minds and hearts.

Jesus did not simply provide the original 12 disciples with a written instruction manual on discipleship and stewardship or with a CD of step-by-step lectures. The early disciples learned to follow Jesus in the post-Resurrection and Ascension world by following, watching, and repetitively doing what they saw the in-the-flesh Jesus do during his earthly ministry. The discipleship and the stewardship that they came to practice were, in large measure, the results of human connection with Jesus that blossomed into in-depth relationship and eventually into a reproduction of authentic Christ-likeness. They haltingly and clumsily—and then with increasing sure-footedness—came to do as Jesus had done. They spoke as Jesus had spoken. They responded as Jesus had responded. They cared and loved as Jesus had cared and loved. To a great extent faithful discipleship and good stewardship is a matter of perfecting the art of spiritual imitation anchored by authenticity.

Sending & Serving Activities

 **7 Debate What Delights the Soul (Easy Preparation)**

Leader preparation: Prior to the session, think about the “shelf life” of happiness you have experienced as a direct result of a good meal, an outfit you purchased, or some other material acquisition. Compare that to the soul’s delight you have experienced as a result of so-called intangibles, such as relationships with friends and family, the blessings of a loving God, and sharing with others out of your bounty. That is not to denigrate the pleasure that good food or even a new car can bring; it is only to put those pleasures in perspective.

Supplies:

- Bibles

How you approach this activity will depend partially on how many individuals are in the group. If your group has twelve or fewer participants, you may wish to divide the group in half to form two debate teams. If your group has more individuals, you may prefer to create two teams made up of three to five individuals each, the remainder being observers.

Once you have established the two teams, read Isaiah 55:1–3 with the group. Then ask one team to argue the following proposition: The best, most satisfying things can be bought with money. Ask the other team to argue that the best, most satisfying things can be had without money.

As the debate teams prepare their statements, encourage them to in some manner address some of the primary contentions of the biblical passage, including:

- We are prone to spend our money on what is not bread.
- We are apt to spend money on what cannot satisfy.

Give the debate teams five to ten minutes to develop their arguments and counter arguments. Then hold the debate. Give each team time to present its arguments, and then time for each team to have counter arguments. When the debate time is over, engage the entire group in dialogue by posing the following questions:

- Which argument did you find more convincing? To what extent would you likely feel that way if you were not a follower of Jesus Christ?
- What positions did you find most convincing?
- What positions did you think were the shakiest?
- What further questions did this debate raise for you?

Then read again the passage from Isaiah and ask these or similar questions:

- To what kind of thirst and hunger is the prophet referring that can be satisfied without money?
- What “milk” and “wine” can be had “without money and without cost” (v. 1)?
- What are some things on which we spend our money that are not real food and that do not satisfy? Why do human beings have this tendency?
- What role does the covenant, which the prophet refers to in verse 3, play in addressing the hunger and thirst of the human soul?
- How does this passage provide insights into our attitudes and practices regarding discipleship and stewardship?

The following are some points and thoughts to weave into your discussions: Despite mountains of evidence to the contrary, human beings in our culture con-

tinue to hold to the belief that money offers happiness, satisfaction, and security. Of course, in a culture in which most of the population does not grow its own food, make its own clothes, build its own shelter, or provide its own fuel to moderate excessive heat or cold, a certain amount of money is arguably necessary to provide for basic necessities. A consumer culture, however, has stretched the meaning of basic necessities far beyond what that term once encompassed. Today the basics we feel we “need” would be viewed as luxuries by most of the world’s people. Lack of food, for example, can lead to starvation and the want of shelter and clothes can result in death due to exposure, but the lack of a big-screen, cable-ready TV or the latest fancy phone with multiple uses has not broken into even the top 100 in terms of leading casualty indicators.

Add to that the growing evidence that those with the most food, clothes, houses, and material goods are often no happier than those who scrape to get by. There is nothing that indicates that satisfied stomachs and conspicuous consumption reliably lead to contentment and joy. The prophet suggests that a God-connection is necessary to quench the thirst, feed the hunger, and delight the soul of human beings. This notion brings us around to discipleship and stewardship. If the acquisition of money is no guarantee of satisfaction and joy, the argument and incentive for accumulating more and more wealth loses its strength. With our basic physical needs met — and disabused of the notion that the more spendable cash we have, the greater our chances of experiencing fulfillment — we become freer to explore what it means to be gracious and generous givers. In the spirit of the God whose blessings overflow and the Christ who gave his all for our sake, we can begin to consider what discipleship and stewardship ask of us.

8 Time Usage

Leader preparation: Although this activity encourages participants to consider the time they spend focused on discipleship and stewardship, in actual practice those aspects of Christian faith and practice do not always manifest themselves in definitive blocks of time clearly marked off from other everyday activities. These aspects of faith practice can reveal themselves in the kind of car we drive, the laundry detergent we use, the hobbies and interests we pursue, the items we regularly recycle, and so forth. You may wish to point that out in the discussion that takes place during the session.

Supplies:

- 2 sheets of paper for each participant
- pens

Provide each participant with two sheets of paper and a pen. Instruct group members to draw a large circle on each sheet and number around the inner edge of both circles from 1 to 12, with the number 12 at the top of the circles, so that each circle looks like a clock face. Offer the following instructions: Place the letters “a.m.” above one of the circles and the letters “p.m.” above the other circle. Try to section each 12-hour period according to how you typically utilize your time. For example, if you sleep eight hours per night, indicate that by labeling the hours when you normally are asleep. Label periods for such things as meals, work, hobbies, TV watching, reading, and so forth. In addition, indicate the time that you typically spend focused on discipleship and stewardship. As you do so, ask yourself the following questions:

- What does this say about my priorities and what is important to me?
- What does the amount of time I spend focused on Christian discipleship and stewardship say about where they rank in terms of my personal priorities?
- How comfortable do I feel with the amount of time I spend focused on Christian discipleship and stewardship?

When the participants finish this portion of the activity, invite them to get together in clusters of two or three persons to discuss insights they gleaned from examining some of the ways they use their time. If they feel comfortable in doing so, encourage them to indicate the degree to which the exercise has nudged them to consider giving more time and focus to discipleship and stewardship.

At some point bring the entire group together and invite volunteers to talk about discipleship and stewardship as a part of their current lives and the role they would like discipleship and stewardship to play in their lives in the future.

The goal of this activity is not to induce shame or embarrassment in participants for how little they focus on discipleship and stewardship. Nor is it to extract promises group members are unlikely to keep once they leave the session. It is simply to give them the chance to think about how they utilize their time and how they might utilize it in the future. If growing in Christ is something we desire to do, we do well to consider how that desire manifests itself in reality. Of course, it is very likely that a number of participants are already quite focused on discipleship and stewardship concerns. Some may even be a bit surprised by how much time they devote to these areas. They may well serve as encouragement to other group members.

A Journey of Discovery

Leader preparation: At some point during this activity you may wish to sing the entire hymn or a portion of it. The primary focus, however, will be on the theological, discipleship, and stewardship understandings expressed by the song. In guiding that focus, you will be encouraging the participants to take a closer look at the words of the hymn. Spend time with the hymn yourself during your preparation for the session. Take quiet moments to read the words, meditate on them, and allow them to speak to your mind and heart.

Supplies:

- copies of the hymn “Take My Gifts and Let Me Love You”
- an accompanist (optional)
- paper and pens

Divide the group into clusters of three or four persons each. Provide each cluster with a copy of the lyrics to the hymn “Take My Gifts and Let Me Love You” (tune: Talavera Terrace). You can find the lyrics at <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong5>.

Offer each cluster the following instructions in your own words: Being a Christian disciple is a journey of discovery and discernment about who Jesus is and what it means to live as a steward of God’s creation. In that journey we begin to understand what it means to be stewards of our whole lives and all the gifts God gives us.

As you look at the words of the hymn, take note of those places in which the language speaks of:

- Life as a journey of discovery and discernment
- An understanding of who Jesus is
- An understanding of what it means to practice stewardship of one's whole life

Ask someone in your cluster to jot down the words you identify, which of these three areas they address, and any other insights or comments you wish to make concerning that portion of the song.

Some of the hymn words could be placed under more than one of the three categories. Nevertheless, after the clusters have completed their work, bring the total group back together and invite the cluster members to share some of the words of the hymn that they lifted out and some of the insights they shared with one another. The following is not a definitive list, but may reflect some of the sharing that cluster members may report:

Words indicating that life is a journey of discovery and discernment: Flavor of the Jesus life, tang of risk and new adventure. Take whatever I can offer — gifts that I have yet to find.

Words indicating an understanding of who Jesus is: God who first of all loved me, gave me light and food and shelter. Take the fruit that I have gathered from the tree your Spirit sowed.

An understanding of what it means to practice stewardship of one's whole life:

Take my gifts and let me love you. Now because your love has touched me, I have love to give away. Skills that I am slow to sharpen, talents of the hand and mind.

Reflect

It is quite possible for self-identified Christians to lose their bearings as they travel through life. Much of what true discipleship and stewardship means is blurred and misunderstood by the surrounding culture—including elements of what the media might identify as Christian culture. One necessary component of the committed, faithful Christian life is a periodic check of where we seem to be headed and what we are using to plot and track our journey. Like the little, warning voice on a GPS device, the sessions you are leading can help participants—and can help you—recognize when some “recalculating” needs to take place. Everyone takes wrong turns at some time or other; anyone can momentarily lose his or her way. Pray that you and your brother and sister pilgrims will use this time to discern and take appropriate turns as the Spirit prompts you.

Invite the participants to share about what they have discovered about Jesus Christ and their own stewardship response during their discipleship journey in recent days — not further back than the past one to two years.

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Living Stewardship



Exploration: Christian Tradition

About this Age Group

Adults, defined as 35 years and older, are in many ways a rainbow people. Shaped in varying degrees by the experiences of early childhood and adolescence, adults tend to make sense out of their lives by taking cues from the worlds of work, family, and social relationships. These, in turn, contribute to whether and how they live into a meaningful sense of stewardship. Aging does not necessarily diminish their adaptive skills; it may even enhance them as life experience fosters wisdom. Adults can grow and change under the impetus of reflection, reliable information, and listening to and interacting with respected and informed role models in various learning settings. This recurring exposure may function as motivation to nudge adults toward a concern for and involvement in important issues such as care of the earth and humanitarian concerns. It may also encourage them in a growing sense of generosity regarding the use of their resources.

About this Exploration

Our ancestors in faith have given us a rich inheritance of living stewardship. The spiritual practice of tithing is a gift that forms us as a community and provides for all even as it honors God. From tithing as joyful celebration in community among our Hebrew forebears and the “holding all things in common” of the earliest Christian churches, we see that people of faith before us were formed and challenged by God’s call — as we are today — to live generously and compassionately,

sometimes at great cost. From the beginning of the church, shaped for stewardship by worship, education, fellowship, and service, as intentional disciples of Jesus, we embrace life as a journey of discovery and discernment about who Jesus is, what it means to live as stewards of God’s creation, and as workers for justice, peace, wholeness, and inclusion. Exploring this legacy can inspire us to add faithfully to the tradition through our own acts of generous and compassionate stewardship.

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

Exploring & Engaging Activities

Leader Preparation

Some people tend to think of tradition as something that comes out of the murky, misty past. To be sure, there is some reason for that perspective. It’s not always clear why some practices originated or how they evolved. There are even instances in which particularly malevolent traditions have continued to breathe antagonism and breed anguish long after they should have been administered a lethal injection. Racial segregation and gender bias are two hoary, persistent pathological cultural dispositions that come to mind.

But if tradition sometimes provides a sanctioned life-support system for what should be allowed to expire, it can also help preserve what is essential, life-giving, and transformative. This latter category is the focus of this session. Two essential questions it asks are: What have the people of God practiced through the generations that connects them to the gracious, generous spirit of Christ? What are we called to practice so that same spirit might continue to live in the faithful stewardship practices of future generations?

 **1 Money to Live On (Easy Preparation)**

Leader preparation: Examine your perceptions about tithing and the giving patterns of your congregation as you prepare to lead this activity. You may even wish to examine your personal giving statements that record your financial gifts to the church over the past year or two. How comfortable are you with your level of giving? What do you expect of yourself in this regard? What do you expect of others in the church? What do you think God expects?

Supplies:

- paper and pens
- copy of church budget

Give each individual a sheet of paper and a pen. It might be helpful to distribute copies of the church budget that indicates the amount budgeted for income from giving for the year. That could provide a perspective for this activity. Offer the following instructions: Down the left margin of the paper, write the numbers 1 through 10. Look at the church budgeted income from giving. Consider what it might take from households and individuals to meet that budget. Then, by each number, place an amount that corresponds to what you think some individual or a family might be giving to support your congregation and/or other Christian ministries in a given year. For example, you may think that one individual gives \$4,000 a year. Write that by number one. You may guess that for the budget one household in the church gives \$500. Place that by number two. You may think that another household gives \$50 or less. Place that number by number three. Continue this process until you have speculated about the giving of ten unnamed individuals and/or households. This is not meant to be a judgment on anyone, and your ideas are not to be discussed with anyone else. Be sure and place yourself by one of the numbers.

Of course what you are asking participants to do is highly speculative. It may not correspond to reality at all. For the purposes of the activity, close correlation with the actual giving patterns of your church is unnecessary. The aim in this step is to help the participants think about their perceptions of giving patterns in the church and what those perceptions might say about financial stewardship.

Once the participants have recorded amounts for all ten spots on their sheet of paper, ask them to total the numbers and record that figure at the bottom of the sheet. Then divide the group into clusters of three or four persons each and provide the following instructions: Within your clusters, take a look at the figures that represent the total of each dollar amount on each of your cluster members’ sheets. Discuss the following questions:

- Could my household—or could I as an individual — cover costs with the total figure on my sheet? Why or why not? What does that mean about tithing?

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

Session Development

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

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

- If we were to think of a tithe (10 percent of one’s income) as the basic starting point for a Christian’s giving to the church and/or Christian causes, what do the dollar figures I have recorded say about how I think giving is approached within our congregation? Do people keep the tithe? Give more? Less?
- How would the individuals in our cluster feel about living on what they give to the church and/or Christian causes multiplied by ten?

At some point bring the entire group back together and invite the participants to compare notes on what they discussed in the clusters. You may well find that the total figures on each sheet fall short of what most people would think that an individual or household would need to cover basic annual costs.

Although giving to God has been a part of religious practice since biblical times, some church-goers may have never considered financial stewardship as an important part of their faith expression. While believing in Christ and adhering to certain moral and ethical standards may be seen as essential by some Christian adherents, there are those who view giving to the church as an entirely optional matter.

2 Traditional Church Stewardship Patterns

Leader preparation: If you implement this activity, give your pastor plenty of warning to grant adequate time for preparation. If your pastor is unavailable or is uncomfortable taking on this assignment, you might contact a denominational representative or a layperson in the congregation who has served in key financial leadership/stewardship roles.

Supplies:

- pastor (or other) as guest presenter

Invite your pastor to share with the participants some information and statements about your local church’s pattern of giving and its historical view of what is expected in terms of stewardship. Do not limit the examination of the church’s “giving pattern” to monetary gifts, although be sure that is included. Also, ask your pastor to talk about how the members of the congregation have tended to approach such things as giving of their time, sharing their talents and spiritual gifts, and working and advocating for justice and peace.

In addition to your congregation’s record on these issues, ask the pastor to talk about the patterns and approaches of your denomination. Encourage the pastor to address the following:

- To what extent is the church’s approach to giving and stewardship (both local and beyond) based on perceived biblical patterns and practices?
- How have the church’s approaches changed over the years, particularly over the past one or two generations?
- How are the church’s stewardship history and current practices affecting the church’s current ability to minister in the name and power of Christ to those within and outside the church?

Make it clear to the pastor that you are not expecting a lengthy lecture. In fact, stress that you are hoping to develop a dialogue between the pastor and the participants in the group. Your basic aim is to give group members some idea of your local congregation’s and your larger church’s approach to stewardship within the overall Christian tradition.

After the pastor has shared, invite the participants to respond with any questions or observations they might have. What surprised them? What would they like to hear more about?

3 A Tithing Feast

Leader preparation: This activity requires considerable time and preparation. Hopefully you know your group members well enough to be able to judge the degree to which they would be willing to plan and carry out such an event. If you have doubts about their willingness, stress that the decision to go forward or not is theirs.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- supplies depending on the plans made within the group

Begin by reviewing Deuteronomy 14:22–29 with the members of your group. As can be seen in this passage, tithing has been a part of Judeo-Christian practice since at least the time of ancient Israel. The tithe was a practice recognizing that all possessions are a gift of God (Deuteronomy 8:18). The bringing of the tithe was as much an occasion for gratitude and rejoicing as it was a legal requirement, and the tithe was considered an expression of love both to God and neighbor. In this instance, one aspect of the bringing of the tithe was that it served as an occasion for enjoyment and generous sharing with others. As indicated in the last two verses, the bringing of the tithe in the third year specified sharing with those whose needs exceeded their resources.

Suggest that your group attempt to carry out a modified enactment of this passage by planning a food “feast” that includes both the participants in your group and others who are not a part of the group. In particular, think of including a group of individuals who might not have the money or the opportunity to partake in such an event. The following are some possible approaches you might want to consider as you schedule and implement this event:

- Food catered at an assisted living facility.
- Hot dogs served to individuals in or near the congregation’s worship facility.
- A pizza party held for middle and high school students.
- Snacks taken to a daycare center that has a high percentage of children who come from lower-income households.

Take a freewill offering to cover the cost of food for the option you and your participants choose, or recruit volunteers to contribute the food. You might also want to ask for two or three volunteers to be a planning group for the event. Implementing the event will require coordination regarding arrangements for the purchase and delivery of food and details that may be required to schedule the event with any organization or facility that might be involved.

As a part of your planning, schedule a brief time when your group can get back together after the food feast. You may even wish to arrange such a time immediately after the event. During that post-event gathering, invite discussion by asking the following questions:

- What thoughts and feelings did you experience as the planning and implementation for this event progressed?
- To what extent did this experience give you a fresh insight or perspective on the nature and practice of tithing?

Discerning & Deciding Activities

**4 A Tree of Life (Easy Preparation)**

Leader preparation: As you read aloud the statements regarding the baobab tree, do not hurry through the reading. You may even wish to pause between statements to let the words and thoughts sink in a bit. You can use any Internet search engine to find dozens of photographs of baobab trees.

Supplies:

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

Display the poster featuring the photograph titled "Baobab, Okavango Delta, Botswana" by Pete Oxford. As the participants consider the picture, read the following series of statements: Baobab trees are thought to be many thousands of years old. On the African mainland their leaves are often used as a leaf vegetable and are sometimes used to make soup. The fruit of the baobab has more vitamin C than oranges and exceeds the calcium content of cow's milk. The seeds of the tree can be used as a thickener for soup and as a seasoning. They can also be directly consumed or made into vegetable oil. Parts of the tree can be used for fuel and to make dye. Some parts of the tree are used for medicinal purposes. The African baobab tree is sometimes known as the tree of life. It is often a source of water in seasons of draught. Large baobab trees have been known to contain more than 30,000 gallons of water. People have been known to live in the hollow of a baobab tree.

Give the participants a few minutes to contemplate the picture in silence. Then ask the following question: In what sense does the baobab tree serve in ways that are similar to the Christian traditions of the church, particularly related to stewardship?

Answers, of course, will vary. Nevertheless, the following may reflect some of the responses of group members: Like the baobab tree, many of the Christian traditions of the church stretch back into times long past. The traditions of the church can be nourishing; they can feed the soul as portions of the tree feed the body; they can bring health and healing; they can provide living water for the thirsty; they can provide shelter for the soul.

Stewardship is one practice that provides resources that enable the traditions and other practices of the church to continue. Whether through financial support, gifts of time and talents, efforts on behalf of justice, or care for the earth, our stewardship involvement enables the body of Christ to continue to be a tangible, transformative presence in the culture in which we find ourselves.

5 People Who Made a Difference

Leader preparation: As you make the assignments for this activity, suggest that individuals use visuals in their reports to the larger group. Also suggest that they double-check information they get from the Internet. The Internet can be a wonderful resource, but it is only as reliable as the source one uses. There are both delightfully true and delightfully dubious "facts" that can be obtained on the great electronic information superhighway.

Supplies:

- two or three research-and-report volunteers

- “People Who Made a Difference,” Attachment: Activity 5

Prior to the group session, contact two or three volunteers and ask them to research two or three people who have attempted to meet human needs in the history of the church and/or the world in general. Give each volunteer a copy of the attachment “People Who Made a Difference.” Ask them to prepare a report to present to the group.

During the session, invite the volunteers to share their reports on the individuals they researched, focusing in particular on how the lives of these persons speak to the preceding questions. After the reports, invite the other participants to offer any questions or comments they might choose to inject. Participants might also wish to cite additional individuals who have attempted to meet the needs of others by living generously and compassionately.

6 First Century Stewardship

Leader preparation: As you lead this activity, be careful not to insinuate that those who do not practice generosity in their stewardship practices deserve capital punishment like Ananias and Sapphira. Stewardship stinginess does have spiritual consequences, however. It may not kill the body, but it does put at risk the Christian faithfulness, wholeness, and spiritual health of the individual—and the corporate church.

Supplies:

- Bibles

Divide the group into clusters of four or five persons each. Provide Bibles for each individual in the clusters. Invite the cluster members to read together Acts 4:32–5:11. Have them compare and contrast the descriptions from the passage with the church they are familiar with today. As they do this, suggest that they explore avenues opened by these or similar questions:

- How familiar or different does the church that Luke describes seem when placed beside the church you are most familiar with?
- What are the reasons for the similarities and the differences?
- What appeals to you about what Luke’s account says about the early church?
- What disturbs you about the account?
- How do you respond emotionally and intellectually to the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira and the narrative’s suggestion about the reasons for their demise?
- What do you think generosity and sacrifice meant to the church of the first century?
- How might early Christians have conceived of and described generosity and sacrifice?
- What do you think generosity and sacrifice mean to the church of the twenty-first century?
- What does the church of the first century have to say to us about sharing, generosity, and stewardship?
- What does the church of today have to say to the church of the first century regarding sharing, generosity, and stewardship?

During the discussion, you may wish to interject some of the following thoughts or keep them at the back of your mind for reference, if they seem helpful: In every age, the church reveals connections to and characteristics and practices that seem

in some sense to diverge from the ethos of the early church. The church is, after all, an organic body of believers. While a wide divergence might be cause for close examination and possible course corrections, some shift is understandable and, hopefully, in step with God's ongoing relationship with and revelation to those who follow Christ. While holding property in common might not be particularly feasible in the current culture—it does not seem to be a practice that had a very widespread, long shelf life even in the early church—the tight-fisted individualism that infuses modern attitudes, at times even in the church, does not seem particularly consistent with the teachings and example of Jesus. Christian stewardship, as it has come down to us through the centuries, has consistently held that what we own is not really ours, even when we maintain considerable control over it. Disciples of Jesus Christ are called to contribute to and participate in those things that work toward the common good, are consistent with values that reflect the nature of God, and seek to meet the needs of others. The church of the first century does seem to have something to say to us about generosity and the me-centered drift of much of the church and pretty much all of the surrounding culture. However, most of us would probably hope that the local church's stewardship committee would restrain itself and not start an "If It Was Good Enough for Ananias and Sapphira Yesterday, It's Good Enough for Slackers Today" prayer emphasis.

Sending & Serving Activities

7 Stewardship Legacy (Easy Preparation)

Leaders preparation: Before the session, take a few minutes to think about the ways in which you have benefited from the faithful stewardship of previous generations. We sometimes forget how much has come down to us that is the result of centuries of committed servanthood. We are not only the beneficiaries of those who are exemplary stewards in our own time; we are also the recipients of blessings that have been made possible by Christian believers from the first century onward. Our indebtedness goes back even further to the faithful Israelites who sought to live out of their understanding of all of life and creation as a marvelous, wondrous gift of God.

Supplies:

- paper and pens

Give each group member a sheet of paper and a pen. Provide the following instructions in your own words: On one side of the paper write down the stewardship legacy that has been bequeathed to you. This could be something out of the distant past, such as the servanthood example of Christ and the apostles, or something that is more recent, such as the generosity of one's parents. Identify three to five examples of what others have handed down to you regarding Christian stewardship.

After the group members have written their responses, encourage them to share with another participant what they have cited. For example, one individual may talk about a grandparent who was generous with time and listened with particular attentiveness. Someone else may refer to people in the earlier years of your congregation whose consistent tithing and financial generosity helped construct and maintain the church building and carry out ministry programming.

Next, invite the participants to use the other side of the sheet of paper to jot down what they would like their stewardship legacy to be. In other words, what con-

tributions—in terms of financial generosity, spiritual gifts, actions, and so on — would they like to be remembered for?

After the group members have recorded their answers, invite volunteers to share their responses with the larger group. As you listen, pay attention to:

- How many wished to pass on a legacy of financial generosity?
- Who expressed a desire to inspire others to work for justice and equality?
- Who desired to encourage others to reach out and include those on the outside or on the margins of society and/or the church?
- Who wanted to pass on an interest in and passion for peacemaking?

As you dialogue with participants, remind them that we are the beneficiaries of the faithful stewardship practices of those who have gone before us. In one sense, we have all reaped where we have not sown. If future generations are to enjoy a similar experience, we are the ones who must sow seeds and build legacies that will benefit people in the years to come.

8 Community Compassion and Justice Efforts

Leader preparation: As you will see, this activity may turn into a discussion of future compassion or justice responses involving your local church. You may wish to alert your pastor and/or the appropriate minister or leadership group about this particular learning segment. Discussion among your group members may turn up possibilities that could be valuable for those involved in considering and planning future service efforts.

Supplies:

- guest involved in a community compassion or justice effort

Invite a guest who has some knowledge of and/or association with a Christian compassion or justice effort in your community. This might include efforts such as a food pantry, a homeless shelter, a job retraining program, a youth recreational program, a legal defense effort for the poor, and so on. If your own congregation has been involved in such endeavors, you could of course invite an individual who has taken part in that outreach. It might be helpful, however, to give participants access to someone who can give them a perspective that is wider than what they may have been exposed to in your local church.

Ask your guest to prepare to address the following areas:

- Describe the history of the compassion or justice effort in which you have been involved. When and why did the effort start?
- In what ways, if any, has the effort changed over the years?
- How many different church or community groups are involved in the effort? What is the nature of their involvement?
- On what theological understanding was and is the effort based?
- What drew you to become involved in the effort?
- How do you see the effort and your involvement connecting to Christian stewardship?

After your guest's presentation, invite the group members to respond with questions or comments. Are there participants who are or have been involved in similar programs? How well does the effort mesh with the group members' understanding of faithful stewardship response?

This interchange may spark discussion of your congregation's history of involvement in compassion and justice efforts in the community, or it may stimulate participants' thinking about what your church's stewardship response to com-

munity needs might look like in the future. If the talk turns to future service possibilities, consider taking time to list or record suggestions and later share them with the appropriate minister or leadership/planning group in the congregation.

9 A Practice of Humility and Servanthood

Leader preparation: As you prepare to lead this activity, in which participants will be given the opportunity to participate in the washing of feet or the brushing of shoes, be sure that you indicate that taking part in this exercise is voluntary. One reason the act of foot washing is not practiced in many settings—including many Christian settings—is that it necessitates a level of human contact that many people find uncomfortable. If you choose to utilize this activity, you may wish to search for additional information about foot washing. Type into an Internet search engine the words “foot washing.” The following are some websites to get you started:

<http://www.gotquestions.org/foot-washing.html>

<http://www.mennolink.org/doc/cof/art.13.html>

<http://www.spiritconnections.com/footwashing.html>

Supplies:

- Bibles

Option 1: foot washing:

- supply of clean water
- large tub or other receptacle for water after use
- shallow basins or pans
- towels (one clean towel for each person participating)

Option 2: shoe brushing:

- several rolls of paper towels
- a trash can to discard paper towels

Read aloud John 13:1–15. Share the following in your own words: This passage is the Gospel writer’s account of a practice of humility and servanthood that Jesus performed following the Last Supper on the night before he was crucified. The root of the Christian practice of foot washing appears to be in the hospitality customs of ancient civilizations. At a time when travelers walked from place to place and sandals were the predominant footwear, hosts would often welcome guests by providing water with which the guests’ feet could be washed. Guests’ feet were often washed by the servants of the hosts. Hosts generally did not wash the feet of their guests. So-called “equals” did not wash one another’s feet. In 1 Samuel 25:41, Abigail offered to wash the feet of David’s men as an act of humility. There is some evidence that foot washing was practiced in the early church but that it gradually became less common. Though not widely practiced by the laity in most Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant fellowships, foot washing is still observed by several Christian groups (including by the clergy of Catholic and Orthodox groups at certain times of the church year). Foot washing is an act symbolizing Christian humility and servanthood, reflecting Christ’s act at the Last Supper and the his approach to ministry and human relationships.

Explain that the group will participate in a brief activity in imitation of Christ’s act of foot washing. Depending on your group and the comfort level of its members, consider one of the following approaches:

Option 1: Foot Washing

Provide a source from which participants can obtain clean water. Provide these instructions:

- Place some water in a shallow basin. There is no need to fill the basin; enough water to cover the bottom of the basin will be sufficient.

- Go to a participant who has removed his/her shoes and socks.
- Kneel and place one of the participants' feet in the basin of water.
- Cup a handful of water and gently rub it over the participant's foot.
- Dry the foot with the towel.
- Repeat the application of water and the drying with the participant's other foot.
- Rise and embrace the participant and exchange the words, "The peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you."
- Empty the water in a receptacle provided for water that has been used during the activity.
- Place the towel in an area designated for used towels.
- Return the basin to a spot where it can be used by other participants.
- Return to your seat (remove your shoes and socks if your feet have not already been washed).

Option 2: Shoe Brushing

Provide several rolls of paper towels. Instruct group members to:

- Tear off a paper towel section.
- Go to a participant who has remained seated.
- Kneel and gently, unhurriedly use the paper towel section to wipe loose dirt or debris from first one shoe of the participant and then the second shoe.
- Rise and embrace the participant and exchange the words, "The peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you."
- Discard the used paper towel section in a trash can.
- Return to your seat.

You may wish to lead the group in singing, without musical accompaniment, familiar hymns or choruses while the foot washing or shoe brushing is taking place. Be sure, as well, to make it clear that participation in this activity is entirely voluntarily. An individual can simply observe. Nonetheless, try to see to it that each person who wishes to participate has the opportunity to both serve another participant and to be served by another group member.

Once everyone has participated who desires to, invite discussion by asking these or similar questions:

- What thoughts and feelings did you experience during this activity?
- To what extent did you sense or experience the connection between this practice and humble servanthood?
- What might this practice help suggest to us about living as Christ-like servants and Christian stewards?

Reflect

The blessings of Christian tradition have come down to us. Though we sometimes take those blessings for granted, we also sometimes fail to grasp that we have a responsibility to pass the best of that tradition on to future generations. The stewardship practices of tomorrow will be built, to a great extent, on our stewardship practices today.

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Attachment: Activity 5

People Who Made a Difference

Throughout the history of the church and/or the world in general, faithful people have attempted to meet human needs. These men and women sought to live generously and compassionately. These individuals are from periods that stretch from the earliest days of the church to fairly recent times. The following is a partial list of people who have made a difference. You may know of many others.

- Francis of Assisi
- W. E. B. DuBois
- Dorothy Day
- Mother Teresa
- Clara Barton
- Albert Schweitzer
- Susan B. Anthony
- Rachel Carson
- Frederick Douglass
- Horace Mann
- Martin Luther King Jr.
- Jane Addams
- Mohandas K. Gandhi
- Harriet Tubman
- Per Anger
- Elizabeth Cady Stanton
- Booker T. Washington
- Eleanor Roosevelt
- Nelson Mandela
- Benito Pablo Juarez
- Emily Greene Balch
- Cesar Chavez
- Rigoberta Menchu Tum
- The Dalai Lama

As you pursue your research, consider the following questions:

- What did these individuals attempt to do?
- How “successful” were they?
- What seemed to motivate them?
- What were their ties to the church, if any?
- What role, if any, did their spiritual faith play in their efforts?
- What do their lives say about stewardship of one’s self and resources?
- In what ways do these persons offer examples of living stewardship?

Living Stewardship



Exploration: Context and Mission

About this Age Group

Adults, defined as 35 years and older, are in many ways a rainbow people. Shaped in varying degrees by the experiences of early childhood and adolescence, adults tend to make sense out of their lives by taking cues from the worlds of work, family, and social relationships. These, in turn, contribute to whether and how they live into a meaningful sense of stewardship. Aging does not necessarily diminish their adaptive skills; it may even enhance them as life experience fosters wisdom. Adults can grow and change under the impetus of reflection, reliable information, and listening to and interacting with respected and informed role models in various learning settings. This recurring exposure may function as motivation to nudge adults toward a concern for and involvement in important issues such as care of the earth and humanitarian concerns. It may also encourage them in a growing sense of generosity regarding the use of their resources.

About this Exploration

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

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Isaiah 1:10–17

Mark 14:3–9

Leader Preparation

For far too many of us, life is seen as a relentless, ruthless competition. In this view, existence resembles a variation of the TV-reality show *Survivor* in which one—and only one—“winner” gets the grand prize and all the other “losers” receive consolations prizes consisting of a vial of sand and a small quantity of palm-tree bark. Within the framework of this winner-take-all game, almost any tactic is deemed permissible and every contestant looks out for number one.

Life patterned after Christ, however, offers a drastic alternative to that perspective. In Christ we are called to live in the context of a mutually supportive community where compassion, generosity, and sharing replace callousness, greed, and covetousness. Christ’s faithful steward is someone who has begun to recognize that life that is true life does not emerge as I acquire an overflowing quantity for me; it manifests itself as I begin to understand the importance of and become concerned with the well-being of us.

Prayer: Lord, help us to see those around us not as souls merely to be “won,” as though we were participating in some kind of cosmic evangelistic contest. Instead may we see our brothers and sisters as fellow so-journers to be wooed to the loving Christ who calls us to a shared life of community, reciprocal concern, generosity, and gratefulness. Amen.

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Offerings and Seeking Justice (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read through the passage and consult one or two Bible commentaries in order to provide yourself with additional insights and discussion possibilities.

Supplies:

- Bibles

Distribute Bibles to the participants and invite a volunteer to read aloud Isaiah 1:10–17. Then encourage discussion by posing these or similar questions:

- What does God seem to be unhappy about concerning the people and their leaders?
- How does God view the sacrifices and offerings that are being offered?
- What insight does this passage give us into how we might approach our practice of stewardship, including the bringing of tithes and offerings?
- What justice issues should the church address as it considers its discipleship and stewardship practices?

As you lead the ensuing discussion, you may wish to utilize some of the following material or keep it in mind for reference: The words of the prophet were not really directed to the “rulers of Sodom” and “the people of Gomorrah” (v. 10). The prophet was addressing the people of Judah and accusing them of being guilty of some of the same offenses that resulted in God’s destruction of the infamous people of Sodom and Gomorrah. Chief among the sins of the citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah was their lack of hospitality, justice, and concern for others. They were notorious for focusing primarily on their own needs and pleasures.

This passage does not really express God’s displeasure at offerings and sacrifices per se. It does, however, indicate that God cannot be bought; God’s favor cannot be secured with “stewardship” that simply consists of financial or material generosity. Such generosity is a component of faithful stewardship, but such things as compassion, concern for the other, and seeking justice are also key components. We do not live as isolated people who are called simply to make our peace with God on an individual basis. We are also called to care for those for whom God cares.



2 All in the Same Boat

Leader preparation: Because this activity references the Great Flood account in Genesis, read Genesis 6–9 to refamiliarize yourself with the particulars of the narrative.

Supplies:

- poster “With hoot and squawk and squeak and bark...” by Barbara Reid <http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>
- newsprint or whiteboard and markers
- Bibles (optional)
- animal sounds (optional)

Display the poster “With hoot and squawk and squeak and bark ...” by Barbara Reid. The poster presents the artist’s depiction of animals and birds leaving the

Session Development

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

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

Ark in a great rush of fur, fleece, feathers, and hide, after the events of the Great Flood as recorded in Genesis 6–9. As you invite participants to contemplate the image, you may wish to play some prerecorded animal sounds in the background. To find sounds you can download, type into an Internet search engine the words “wild animal sounds.” One resource you may wish to check out for downloads is the San Diego Zoo website at <http://www.tinyurl.com/2du512h>. Another site is <http://www.tinyurl.com/2g73ks>.

As the group members scrutinize the picture, offer these or similar questions for reflection (you may wish to write these questions on newsprint or a whiteboard):

- What do you think it might have sounded like on the ark?
- What smells would have been present?
- What might it have looked like on the inside of a craft crammed with animals and a few people?

In your group, you may have persons who take the Great Flood narrative literally and those who think it unlikely that all those birds and animals could have crammed into one vessel for 40 nanoseconds, much less for approximately a year (according to some who have tried to calculate, based on the Genesis account, how long Noah and his menagerie might have been on the ark). Wherever participants come down on this issue, encourage them to imagine what it would feel, smell, and sound like to be in a confined space with a great collection of wildlife for approximately a year.

After the group members have had time to consider the poster and respond to the questions, use your own words to communicate the following: According to the Genesis account, there were only eight human beings on the ark with all the animals. Let’s consider what it would have been like on the ark had every animal been accompanied by a human being. Then encourage the participants to respond to these or similar questions:

- What challenges would Noah have faced that he did not face in simply dealing with animals?
- How would the presence of additional human beings have affected needed food, water, and disposal issues?
- To what extent might Noah’s challenges have paralleled a planet with a growing population and finite natural resources?
- What does this hypothetical situation such as Noah’s, and the very real circumstances of the people of planet Earth, say about the need for sound, faithful stewardship practices?

The path of the group’s discussion will differ based on a number of factors, including how playful and imaginative your participants are. During the course of the conversation you may wish to point out that though Earth is not as cramped as an ark packed full of animals and people, there is a sense in which the citizens of this planet are — to make a very bad pun — in the same boat. Our resources are finite; the demands on these resources, at points, are at or near the critical point. We must realize that we do not live in isolation; our actions have real repercussions for all those who share the planet with us.

3 A Man and a Tree

Leadership preparation: As you read the suggestions for this activity, you may decide to use a different Internet article or another resource that raises pertinent questions about living stewardship, graciousness, and generosity. Feel free to make those determinations as you consider what will work best for your group members.

Supplies:

- copies of the Internet article “240-Year-Old Elm Tree ‘Herbie’ to Get the Chop” <http://www.tinyurl.com/2a4ht5n>

Prior to the session, review the Internet story “240-Year-Old Elm Tree ‘Herbie’ to Get the Chop.” Print enough copies to distribute to the group members, or familiarize yourself with the story so that you can summarize it for the participants. If the article cannot be found at the suggested Web address, try typing the words Herbie, elm tree, Frank Knight, and Yarmouth, Maine, into any Internet search engine.

Review the story with group members. The highlights of the news report are: A 101-year-old man has cared for a 240-year-old elm tree over the last half-century. Because of the care of Frank Knight, the tree survived 14 bouts of Dutch elm disease and became acclaimed as the tallest and oldest elm in New England. The tree became not just one man’s passion, but also a favored landmark in the community of Yarmouth, Maine.

Then stimulate discussion with these or similar questions (utilize any of the following discussion comments that seem helpful):

- What evidence of grace and generosity is there in the actions of Frank Knight? In the article, Knight speaks with obvious affection for the tree that he cared for during five decades. The news item says that he checked on the tree weekly and sometimes daily. His interest in the tree outlasted his position as the tree warden for Yarmouth.
- To what extent did Knight’s actions seem motivated by the following: self-interest, the benefits to the surrounding community, a concern for creation? To be sure, there probably is some element of self-interest in even the most altruistic-seeming actions. Nevertheless, the man in this story seemed to be predominantly motivated by a love of the natural world and a keen understanding for how the things of nature can add to the ethos and self-image of a community.
- What effects did Knight’s actions seem to have on the people of the community? To an extent, Knight’s concern and care for the elm tree seemed contagious. Others in the town began to feel a sense of protectiveness about the tree and its preservation. This tells us something about how faithful stewardship, graciousness, and generosity in one person or group can beget similar responses in those around them.
- To what extent would you characterize Knight as a “living steward”?

Discerning & Deciding Activities

4 Extravagant Generosity (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read the activity and anticipate some of the comments and questions that participants might bring up. You may want to brainstorm and quickly jot down some of these possibilities. This simple, quick exercise can help you prepare your own thoughts and suggest areas of investigation as you prepare to provide leadership during the session.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- newsprint or whiteboard and markers

Divide the group into two clusters with roughly the same number of persons in each cluster. Distribute Bibles to everyone. Invite both clusters to read Mark 14:3–9. Then ask one cluster to come up with reasons to support the woman who poured the perfume on Jesus' head, and ask the other cluster to list reasons to support those who criticized the woman.

Then bring the group back together and ask both clusters to share their reflections and ideas. As the participants talk about their defenses or criticisms, write their statements on newsprint or a whiteboard.

Some statements in support of the woman might include:

- She seemed to highly esteem Jesus.
- She was generous with a costly gift.
- Jesus, himself, defended what the woman did.
- There was no indication that what she did was for selfish purposes.
- The people who criticized the woman should have been more concerned about their own actions and gifts than about the actions of the woman.

Some statements critical of the woman might include:

- She broke cultural customs by entering a room where she did not seem to be invited.
- The perfume was wasted.
- The cost of the perfume could have been used to benefit those in need.
- It would have been better to fill the stomachs of the hungry rather than make Jesus' head more sweet-smelling, even if he was the son of God.

When the statements have been recorded, encourage the participants to slip out of their assigned roles and share any questions or comments generated by this passage and the statements from both clusters. In the dialogue that follows, you may wish to acknowledge that this is another case in which Jesus responds in a way that may, on the surface, appear a bit puzzling. To some ears, Jesus might seem a bit insensitive to the plight of the poor. In some ways the woman's action does not seem all that different from the kind of action that Jesus might have been expected to condemn had it been performed by the daughter of a member of the Sanhedrin to honor the High Priest.

We can only speculate, but perhaps this is where Jesus' keen understanding of human nature and motivations comes into play. Jesus obviously did not see the woman's act as a heartless snubbing of the poor. He saw it as a grace-filled, generous act that was likely in keeping with the spirit that predominantly moved and motivated this woman. To some extent it may be that Jesus clearly understood

that the woman's critics would be little inclined to anoint his head with costly oil or aid the poor. The woman may well have found a way to do both. That is, after all, often what we discover about stewardship: the selfish and self-focused are often generally narcissistic; the generous tend not to restrict their generosity.

5 Graffiti Wall of Celebration and Gratitude

Leader preparation: As you prepare to tape butcher paper to the walls of your room, you may want to test the paper you are using to be sure that markers will not bleed through and mar the walls.

Supplies:

- butcher paper
- masking tape
- markers of various colors

Prior to the session, use masking tape to affix long strips of butcher paper to the walls of the room. Provide a number of markers of various colors.

As you begin the activity, indicate that you are going to read a passage written by John Donne, a poet and preacher who lived during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Explain that the language will sound dated and that, like all writers and speakers of his day, Donne tended to use masculine references in alluding to humankind rather than utilizing gender-neutral terms. Then read aloud from the following passage (you may also wish to type out this brief passage, print copies, and provide them for group members):

“No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend's or of thine own were: any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bells tolls; it tolls for thee.”

From *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, Meditation No. 17 by John Donne (published in 1624 (in the public domain))

Following the reading, offer the participants the following instructions: Donne's words remind us that all human beings are connected in ways that we often lose sight of. As we are in some sense diminished by the death and deprivation of others, we are also lifted and enriched by the gifts and triumphs of others. Use the markers to write and draw on the butcher paper words and images to celebrate and express gratitude for the wondrous, God-instilled potential, giftedness, creativity, and capacity to respond to the good that is resident in women, men, and children the world over.

After they have made their contributions to the graffiti wall of celebration and gratitude, invite volunteers to comment on their work. For example, someone may have drawn a dove or peace symbol in celebration of anonymous, everyday peacemakers, as well as noted peace activists such as Gandhi, Jane Adams, Nelson Mandela, Rigoberta Menchú Tum, Elie Wiesel, Martin Luther King Jr., Shirin Ebadi, and others. Others may have written words such as forgiveness, sharing, generosity, reconciliation, self-sacrifice, or music to express the capacity of human beings to reflect the nature and creativity of God.

As you and the other group members listen to the sharing and as you dialogue with one another, remind the participants that the connections we share with one another and the gifts of God that we celebrate in one another are part of our call to be good stewards within the human family and the family of God. Attention to our links with others and generosity of spirit are key parts of our response of gratitude to the God who made us all and created all that we enjoy.

⑥ Express Gratitude

Leader preparation: Stewardship is, in one very large sense, an expression of gratitude. It arises from the recognition that what we have and enjoy has been made possible — in many cases — by factors, resources, people, and a loving God that reach beyond our personal meager capacities. While stewardship certainly seeks to offer thanksgiving to God, it also recognizes that thanksgiving is due for and even to those who have acted as God’s hands and feet. As you lead this step, think of the people who have been “Christ to you” in your life. Get in touch with the gratitude that you feel for people who have, along with God the Creator, given you a sense of what it means to be truly blessed.

Supplies: None

Lead the participants in an expression of gratitude to someone in your community or general geographic area who has served the needs of people and/or who has worked to identify and nurture the God-gifted abilities of others. This may take a little research. It may require your group members to examine local newspapers or regional magazines to identify worthy groups or individuals. It may necessitate conversations with local churches, community leaders, and people who work in helping agencies.

Of course, some in your group may be aware of men, women, or even children who deserve a large helping of gratitude. Someone may volunteer at a local hospital as an on-staff chaplain to comfort the grieving and give counsel to families and individuals facing catastrophic circumstances and health crises. Someone else may have connections to an artist in the community who works to create workshops or long-term projects that help children from homes with financial challenges discover and develop their ability to express themselves artistically.

Look for individuals who express a spirit of common humanity, compassion, extravagant grace, and generosity. You may want to focus on someone who has received little, if any, public recognition.

Consider doing more than sending thank-you notes to the people you identify. For example, express gratitude in the context of one of your congregation’s worship services or at a special dinner that you plan. Raise funds for the work this person is involved in—if the effort is partially or fully funded by charitable donations. You may want to use this as an opportunity to do more than offer a one-time expression of gratitude. Perhaps your group may form an ongoing link with the person or persons you are recognizing. Those who wish to may decide to become involved in the work represented by the honoree or honorees by volunteering time and utilizing personal skills.

Whatever form your expression of gratitude takes, make this an opportunity to learn about and possibly become involved in the efforts of people who see their work, whether voluntary or vocational, as a mission that seeks to touch and make common cause with the people in your community.

Sending & Serving Activities

 **7 Practicing Our Way to Improvement
(Easy Preparation)**

Leader preparation: There is a reason that confession has been a foundational practice of the church through the centuries. Only by confessing our sins, our weaknesses, our discomfort, our fears, and our insufficiencies are we ready to accept God's grace and enabling Spirit. Confession breaks down our own defenses and those of the people to whom we confess. It helps make us ready to put our lives more fully in God's hands so that we can grow beyond where we are. As you lead this activity, do not feel that you have to pretend that your life is an accurate fulfillment of the song. Sometimes we sing songs as testimonies; sometimes as aspirations. And sometimes it is only in humility, confession, and openness before God that we even begin to be able to tell the difference.

Supplies:

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

Prior to the session, arrange for one of your participants with a good reading voice (a reincarnation of Laurence Olivier would be nice, but not necessary) to read the chorus and the five verses of "Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love" (tune: Chereponi). You can hear the tune and see the lyrics at

<http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong4>.

Ask the other group members to follow along.

Then invite discussion by asking these or similar questions:

- What challenges do you encounter as you serve or consider serving the poor, the rich, the near, the far away, people of the same race and ethnic background, and those of differing races and ethnic backgrounds?
- In what sense is the image of Jesus washing the feet of his friends connected to living as faithful stewards in a community of diverse people—some of whom are acquaintances and some of whom are strangers?
- If you were to sum up in one sentence, how does this song speak to how we are called to practice stewardship?

As you lead the discussion that grows out of these questions, note that few, if any, individuals are equally comfortable with all people or with serving in all situations. Although we might suppose that certain middle-class persons would be uncomfortable ministering to or with people with in poverty, in some cases those persons might feel more discomfort — and even more resentment — connected with the well-to-do.

Bear this in mind: love, servanthood, and faithful stewardship do not demand that we find all that we are called to do any more emotionally complex or challenging than switching cable stations with a remote control. If the love and Spirit of God entered our lives and completely rewired us in the same time it takes to install a new dishwasher, then it might be more reasonable to expect that we would find Christ-likeness a lot less daunting, emotionally taxing, and even frightening than most of us do.

Following Christ is a journey, a pilgrimage — even when we are following by recognizing and developing areas in which we are gifted. If you've read stories about pilgrimages, you know that they almost never proceed without a hitch. There always seem to be complications, roadblocks, detours, dragons, hijackers,

inclement weather, and periods of despondent disorientation along the way.

The journey with Christ begins and proceeds by putting one clumsy, uncertain foot in front of the other. Bumbling and stumbling are the rule, rather than the exception, before we learn to walk the Christian path with any real grace and dignity. Until that time, we start where we are and keep at it. We “practice” stewardship and servanthood and faith in somewhat the same way that we practice hitting a golf ball or typing or making a speech or walking on stilts—we practice to begin to get the hang of it. Until we begin to get the hang of it—and sometimes, on occasion, even after we’ve become more adept—we should not be surprised or overly dismayed to find that we often seem to do it in ways that may disappoint us and those around us.

Perhaps that is one reason that we need, as this song says, for Jesus to fill us with his love. If it were not for the love and grace of God filling our hearts, we might very well give up on servanthood, stewardship, and Christ-likeness before we ever got any good at it.

8 A Servanthood Road Trip

Leader preparation: Though it’s probably unfair to call an act of servanthood self-centered, there are instances in which our actions can have motives that are not immediately apparent to us. Jesus made that point about the Pharisees. They did many of the “right” things for motives that were both unexamined and non-praiseworthy. When we serve those closest to us, including those in our own community, there is always the possibility of being just a bit self-serving. We may need, at times, to ask ourselves: Do I feel an impulse to clean up the house in the adjoining block because I want to help a financially challenged neighbor, or because I am more concerned about an eyesore that potentially depresses property values in the area?

Involving ourselves in service to those beyond our immediate community does not eliminate the need for honestly, humbly examining our motivations—smugness and pride, for example, can worm their way into almost any endeavor—but it does potentially move us beyond another comfort zone and help give us a deeper understanding of what it means to encounter and care for the stranger who is infrequently in our midst.

Supplies:

- planning committee
- supplies determined by the committee

Plan and carry out a service project focused on a community or neighborhood other than your own. It could entail a one-day project, or an effort that would require an overnight stay. This could be in a community adjoining yours or it could be in another state or province. Discuss with the participants the reasons for making this servanthood road trip. Some of the points you might wish to touch on could include the following: We tend to think of neighbors as people close at hand. When Jesus talked of loving and serving our neighbors, he had a more expansive view of that term. Jesus seemed to include those outside our group or community as neighbors. Jesus seemed to define a neighbor as someone who needs help that we can supply (see the story of the Good Samaritan, Luke 10:25–37). Although it is certainly commendable and desirable to use our talents, time, and energies to serve those in close proximity to us, there is also something to be said for practicing compassionate stewardship and servanthood among those beyond our local vicinity.

Begin to make plans related to the project the participants select and the details that will need to be addressed to carry it out. You may want to work with a two- or three-person committee that can attend to these details. Check with your denomination to see what projects they may support or recommend.

Regarding the selection of a project, here is a partial list of possibilities:

- Painting a house
- Shingling a roof
- Doing lawn work
- Adding a room to an existing house
- Picking up litter along a road or highway
- Assisting at a homeless shelter
- Working with a food distribution or feeding program
- Cleaning several houses in a neighborhood
- Assisting at a medical clinic
- Clearing trash and debris from a park or other public area

A partial list of details that will need to be addressed includes:

- Matching the project with the skills and physical capacities of the participants
- Calculating and communicating the cost of the undertaking
- Making arrangements with government, neighborhood, or service agencies in the area where the project will be carried out
- Lining up necessary transportation
- Making housing arrangements, if the project requires an overnight stay
- Determining what supplies and tools will be needed for the project
- Scheduling a debriefing session after the project is completed

It is important for participants to talk about the project after it is done. In fact, you may want to do that before you leave the site. During that time, encourage responses from group members by asking these or similar questions:

- How did you feel when you were told that we would be traveling to another area rather than serving those in our own community?
- How did your feelings change, if they changed, as the project progressed?
- What insights have you gained about out-of-town neighbors through this experience?
- In what ways has this experience helped challenge, inform, or change your understanding of faithful stewardship practice?

9 Identifying Possible Ways of Offering Support

Leadership preparation: Your role in this activity is to assist participants in thinking about and possibly moving forward on some form of participation in supporting the mission and/or outreach efforts of your congregation. Take care not to be pushy or heavy handed. If it is true that God loves a cheerful giver, it is also likely true that God would prefer that our acts of service come from willing hearts rather than from situations in which we feel shamed or coerced. Make it clear that you are helping to highlight possibilities and offering assistance in thinking through and planning connected with those possibilities. As always, the willing responses will have to come from the participants.

Supplies:

- guests from congregational mission and/or outreach ministry
- newsprint or whiteboard and markers

Arrange for representatives of those involved in your congregation's mission support and/or outreach efforts to meet with your group. Ask those individuals to explain what your local church is supporting and involved in related to missions and outreach. In particular ask your guests to address the following areas:

- What are the areas that need additional involvement from individuals in the congregation?
- What specific ways could the group members become involved to address missions and outreach needs?

Following the presentation, divide the participants into clusters of five or six persons each. Encourage the clusters to discuss how participants might become more involved in areas highlighted by your guests. This could entail both individual and group involvement.

After the clusters have had a chance to exchange ideas, bring the group back together and ask for reports. As cluster members share, write their ideas on newsprint or a whiteboard.

Lead the participants in making plans, as individuals or as a group, to follow up on and implement one or more of these or other ideas. Do not make individuals feel that they are being forced or shamed into doing this. Make this an invitation. Make it clear that you are asking whether the group members would like to pursue such a plan and, if so, that you are offering to help them take a concrete step in conceiving of and implementing a stewardship practice strategy.

Reflect

Extravagant grace, generosity, and gratitude are not characteristics that most of us come by naturally. If truth be told, our inclinations tend to run more toward condemnation, stinginess, and complaining. These less than loving attitudes we are apt to demonstrate with family, friend, and stranger alike.

But life in Christ begins to teach us that we have reason to be grace-filled, generous, and grateful. It eventually brings us to the realization that, rather than having us share them with the very few, God intends for us to target these virtues for widespread distribution to people near and far.

Number and specify the places where you can liberally sprinkle grace. Sift through the abundant reasons you have for increasing your capacity to be generous. Make a list of things for which you have good cause to be deeply and profoundly grateful.

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Living Stewardship



Exploration: Future and Vision

About this Age Group

Adults, defined as 35 years and older, are in many ways a rainbow people. Shaped in varying degrees by the experiences of early childhood and adolescence, adults tend to make sense out of their lives by taking cues from the worlds of work, family, and social relationships. These, in turn, contribute to whether and how they live into a meaningful sense of stewardship. Aging does not necessarily diminish their adaptive skills; it may even enhance them as life experience fosters wisdom. Adults can grow and change under the impetus of reflection, reliable information, and listening to and interacting with respected and informed role models in various learning settings. This recurring exposure may function as motivation to nudge adults toward a concern for and involvement in important issues such as care of the earth and humanitarian concerns. It may also encourage them in a growing sense of generosity regarding the use of their resources.

About this Exploration

As we move into the future, a clear vision of where we are headed emerges out of our understanding of stewardship. This growing understanding will be enhanced as we consider far-ranging questions, such as: What kind of persons do we want to be? To what purpose do devote our lives? What are our core values and beliefs? That vision will also benefit by wrestling with more immediate questions, such as: What choices and decisions are we making every day in our use of the money, time,

talents and abilities, the environment, and other resources that have been entrusted to our care? Living Stewardship comes down to individuals and the communities of which they are a part. It also involves acting in new ways; growing out of our reflections on how we are living our lives and the journey we are on; discerning the messages that we've received throughout our lives from culture, family, and God; experiencing ourselves in community; and deciding our next explorations.

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

Leader Preparation

Realization of a preferred future tends to come only after scores, hundreds, or even thousands of incremental, intermediate actions. An all-star short-stop begins as a fumble-fingered little leaguer. In between there are gazillions of ground balls—some snagged, others botched—on the long road to fluidity and proficiency. A gourmet cook emerges from the unpromising husk of a kitchen novice who could barely boil water without a detailed recipe. In a sense the skilled chef begins to take definitive shape only after a certain number of culinary triumphs as well as smoldering, deflated soufflés.

First, we must capture a vision of what Christ calls us to become. Then, we must apply the patient—even dogged—faithfulness that is required to engage in the practices that take us from ne'er-do-well disciples to someone who approximates a Christ-like practitioner of living stewardship. The journey is seldom short or easy. But the result is, more often than not, a life remarkably remade into something that more closely resembles an image of the living, serving Christ.

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 Some Stewardship Assumptions (Easy Preparations)

Leader preparation: The assumptions highlighted in this activity certainly are not the only ones that exist in the realm of stewardship response. As you read the Bible passage, and as you ponder your approach to leading the activity, you may think of other assumptions it would be helpful to highlight. Feel free to add, delete, and rework as needed. The material written here is only one part of a possible approach to the session. Your creativity, your knowledge of your group members, and your own personal experiences are all valuable, integral components of the learning experience that you and other participants can share.

Prepare the index cards as described. Contact four individuals from the group. Ask each to plan a one- or two-minute commentary based on a statement you will provide. These commentaries will be verbally presented to the total group. The individual presentations should go no longer than two minutes. One minute, or a little more, would be the ideal. Let the presenters know that 100 words of copy generally work out to around one minute of oral presentation.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- four index cards with one of four statements
- four commentators

Distribute the following statements, a different one to each of the four presenters:

1. People want to see the results—the “payoff”—of their giving.
2. If we give too generously, others will feel that there is no need for them to make a contribution.
3. Giving is an entirely personal decision since what we are offering belongs to us.
4. No one gives unless they are pressured or made to feel guilty.

Introduce the presenters and indicate that they will be sharing brief commentaries that deal with some assumptions about giving. Then give the presenters the floor. After each presentation, give group members the chance to respond to what they have heard before hearing the next presenter.

After all four presentations have been delivered, divide the group into four clusters that contain roughly the same number of participants. Distribute one of the four statements used by the commentators to each cluster. Provide Bibles for everyone. Offer these instructions: Within your clusters, read 1 Chronicles 29:1–19. As you read, attempt to find portions of the passage that support and/or rebut the statement you have been given and the presentation of the individual who delivered the commentary based on that statement. Based on the statement and the biblical passage, grapple with the following questions:

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

Session Development

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

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

- In what ways do the statement and the passage agree and/or disagree?
- What questions, feelings, and personal thoughts does the dialogue between the statement and the passage engender for you?
- In the dialogue between the statement and the passage, what do you see that has a bearing on your future growth in faithful stewardship practice?

Depending on the number of people in the group, you may wish to create more than four clusters. Ideally, each cluster should include four to six participants. Be sure that all four statements are addressed in the course of cluster discussions.

After a period of discussion within the clusters, bring the total group back together. Invite the clusters to share some of the discussion from their small group. Avoid suggesting that the biblical passage definitively answers the stewardship questions raised by the four statements. Though many Christians affirm a belief in God’s omniscience and the Bible’s divine inspiration, it seems unlikely that the passage was included in the scriptural canon as part of God’s grand design or as a proof text response to a handful of statements in an examination of stewardship. Nevertheless, the passage raises some potentially fruitful areas for consideration and exploration. With that in mind, the following are some points you may wish to inject into the discussion, at some point, as you attempt to create a dialogue between the four statements and the biblical passage:

1. *People want to see the results — the “payoff” — of their giving.* This is a recurring mantra among contemporary nonprofits and groups that deal with charitable giving, whether secular or church-related. And statistics seem to support the characterization. To a greater degree than was manifested in earlier decades, those who make financial contributions seem interested in seeing rather quick, tangible results when they give. In the 1 Chronicles passage, however, we see David moving resources so that they could be used for a massive project—the building of the temple in Jerusalem—that he would not live to see completed. In fact, David likely realized he would not even be alive to attend the “groundbreaking.” What does this kind of commitment of resources say about our own attitudes about faithful stewardship practice as it affects the long-range future?

2. *If we give too generously, others will feel that there is no need for them to make a contribution.* In certain circumstances, it’s hard to convincingly refute this statement. At times people tend to keep their wallets in their pockets and purses when they see that someone else seems to be “footing the bill” or “carrying the freight.” There are other cases, however, in which a generous gift can prime the gift-giving pump. David’s river of generosity seemed to open the floodgates to a mounting wave of generosity that swelled up from among the leaders of Israel.

3. *Giving is an entirely personal decision since what we are offering belongs to us.* That does seem to be a prevalent view in our culture. We are a people who seem to believe that our disposable income was generated entirely by us and that we should therefore dispose of it in ways that feather our own nest and appeal to our personal preferences. Note, on the other hand, David’s perspective: “Who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand. We are aliens and strangers in your sight, as were all our forefathers. Our days on earth are like a shadow, without hope. O Lord our God, as for all this abundance that we have provided for building you a temple for your Holy Name, it comes from your hand, and all of it belongs to you” (1 Chronicles 29:14–16 NIV). In a society and economy based on personal ownership, David’s statement can rattle our assumptions.

4. *No one gives unless they are pressured or made to feel guilty.* In reality, that is where many of us start out—even those of us who have practiced regular giving for some time. But the text seems to suggest that the grudging gift is not the only option to choose from. It's possible to get to the point where we give with a sense of joy (vv. 17–18). Sometimes it is a matter of evolving growth, similar to the way our love develops for a child. We may start out responding to cries and wet diapers in the middle of the night largely to avoid feelings of guilt or eventual charges of neglect should we not respond to the caterwauling. But a practice begun out of some measure of obligation—however small that feeling of obligation might be—can move toward a point of response that is increasingly free, joyous, and love-saturated.

2 Tomorrowland

Leader preparation: This activity focuses on helping you and the participants think about the process, the challenges, and the opportunities connected with looking ahead to how the future might take shape, particularly as it relates to faithful stewardship practice. Think back over your own experiences with anticipating and envisioning the future. What frustrations have you experienced as you attempted to be forward-looking? What has proven rewarding and beneficial? What have you learned—and how have you grown—as you have sought to shape and prepare for a preferred future?

Supplies:

- computer with Internet access and projector
- screen

Show a brief video clip focusing on the Tomorrowland attraction featured at the Disneyland theme park in the mid-1950s. One clip, which is about nine minutes in duration, can be found on the Internet at <http://www.tinyurl.com/ngjgre>.

Another option would be to view the opening or closing sequence — or a partial episode—of the cartoon series *The Jetsons*, which is about a futuristic family living at around the mid-point of the twenty-first century. Clips of episodes can be found at <http://www.tinyurl.com/2cagxwz>. Other sources for clips can be found by typing into a search engine the words *Jetsons* video clips. (This begins with a contemporary commercial so you may want to have it set up to begin with the actual show.)

The Jetsons TV show (which ran in the 1960s and was reprised for a time in the mid-1980s) depicted a world in which the father of the Jetson household, George, commuted to work in an aerocar that resembled a flying saucer and worked a total of nine hours a week. His job consisted of pushing a single computer button once each day. Despite the supposed futuristic focus of the show, family role stereotypes tended to be entrenched in the 1950s. For example, Jane Jetson—the wife of the household—was a homemaker obsessed with fashion and the latest labor-saving domestic gadgets.

Use a video that seems to best fit the time you have available and the needs and sensibilities of your group members. Whatever segment you select, attempt to locate one that offers a sense of what some scientists or others envisioned the world looking like as they attempted to peer into “tomorrow” — even if the vision of the future is presented with tongue in cheek.

After watching the video clip, invite the participants to recall and talk about other predictions that they remember from their childhood and teen years. For example, some individuals may remember predictions that by the beginning of

the twenty-first century human beings would be driving atomic-powered cars, colonizing Mars, taking vacations on the moon, living in geodesic domes, and having their housework and food preparation performed by robots.

Stimulate discussion by asking these or similar questions:

- What did the future look like, according to the clip we just watched?
- In what areas did the future that actually materialized seem to reflect what was envisioned?
- In what areas did the future fail to unfold as envisioned?
- What factors affected unfolding developments to influence how the future actually evolved?
- How might this discussion inform us as we consider what our future vision of stewardship practice might look like?

3 An Unexpected Moment

Leader preparation: Consider moments that altered the way you felt and thought about your life or a significant issue in it. Were those moments planned, or did they come unexpectedly? Of course these kinds of experiences can occur in a variety of ways. In this activity, however, you will attempt to help the participants stay alert to “aha moments” that can come to us in unplanned and unbidden ways if we are attentive.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- poster “The Moorish Kitchen Maid with the Supper at Emmaus” by Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez, <http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>
- paper and pens
- newsprint or whiteboard and markers

Display the poster of the painting “The Moorish Kitchen Maid with the Supper at Emmaus” by Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez. Supply participants with paper and pens and encourage them to examine silently the picture and write notes of their observations based on responses to these questions that you have posted on newsprint or a whiteboard:

- Who are the individuals in the painting?
- What does each person seem to be involved in?
- What might they be experiencing at the moment the picture depicts?
- In the possible story of which this is a part, what do you think happened next? In other words, if the artist were to paint the next scene in the story, what would it look like?

Emphasize that the group members do not have to confine their observations to the preceding questions. But encourage them to reflect on those questions at minimum.

Distribute Bibles and invite the group members to read Luke 24:13–35. Encourage them to examine the painting, once again silently, and write notes of their observations for a second time, based on the preceding questions and any additional observations they wish to record.

Call the group together and form a circle. Beginning with yourself, as the leader, share one of your observations. Next, invite the person to your right to share an observation. Then invite the next person to the right to share an observation—and so on around the circle. Continue around the circle as many times as you

can, so long as individuals can articulate an observation that has not already been shared. It is permissible to pass to the next person if an individual has no new observation to share. Continue until the well of new observations has completely run dry.

Then ask these or similar questions:

- What were your first impressions of what was taking place in the painting?
- How did your impressions change after you had observed the painting for a longer period?
- How did your impressions change after you read the Bible passage?

If they have not already been touched on in the previous discussions, share with participants the following observations that have been made by some art critics: The individual standing in the foreground appears to be — and the title indicates — a black female servant. The young woman appears to be caught at a moment in which she has suspended her cleaning and is looking to the side, perhaps listening to a sound or a voice. Until a restoration of the painting in the 1930s, the section of the painting in the upper left was not visible. The seated men in the upper left appear to be Jesus Christ and two men. Critics are divided over whether the men are framed within a mirror, a window, or a painting. One critic said that the painting underscores that some of the most important spiritual matters are unheeded by most people as they occur in the humdrum and scurry of everyday life. Another critic speculated that the painting suggests in the young woman an internal experience, a dawning realization, or an inner inkling of the significance of what is taking place behind her. It has also been suggested that the woman has started to sense the divine presence of the Christ at a moment when Jesus remains unrecognized by the two disciples.

Having reviewed the preceding points, invite the participants to respond to these or similar questions:

- How do you think life changed for the woman in this picture as she moved from this moment to the future?
- As you have contemplated this painting and heard observations about it, what does this suggest to you about how and where spiritual insights sometimes break in upon us?
- How does this dawning, sometimes unexpected, awareness potentially change the future we prepare to walk into?
- What awareness is beginning to dawn for you concerning faithful stewardship practice? How do you think it might change the future you are moving into?

As you lead the discussion, be on the lookout for participants' dawning awareness that those things that alter our future — rivet it and redirect it — can occur at unexpected moments in the flow of ordinary life. In fact, it is perhaps only when the divine begins to crop up (and speak faintly in the background?) in the course of daily "routine" existence that most of us experience the "aha moments" that lead to questions, to the searching of the heart, and to lives that begin to prepare for genuine transformation. Encourage the participants to be sensitive to those unscripted, "surprise" moments as they move into the future and continue to seek to learn what faithful stewardship practice looks like for them.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

 **4 Stewardship Aspiration Time Line (Easy Preparation)**

Leadership preparation: The aim of this activity is to help the participants reflect on the evolution of their understanding and practice of stewardship as a step in moving toward framing what stewardship might look like in the days ahead. You may find that some have never really thought about the people and factors that formed them as Christ-following stewards of God's creation and multifaceted bounty. In essence, you will be assisting group members in coming to some conclusions about what kind of people they want to be.

Supplies:

- 11" x 17" sheets of paper and pens

Provide each participant with an 11" x 17" sheet of paper and a pen. Offer the following instructions, using your own words: You are likely aware of what a time line looks like. We are going to create stewardship faith practice time lines. First, think about past influences and convictions in your life related to stewardship. Then, indicate something about your aspirations for the future.

Place the paper in the landscape position. Draw a line horizontally across the page, running from one side to the other. Place the line so that it is about halfway from both the top and the bottom of the page. Begin by primarily thinking about two things:

1. People, events, and influences that have helped form your stewardship response.
2. Assumptions, convictions, and ideas about stewardship that you have embraced.

Plot these influences, assumptions, convictions, and ideas along the time line to indicate when they appeared and/or were first active in your life. Begin on the left hand side of the sheet with the earliest entries and work across the sheet to the right for more recent entries. At some point along the time line—and it will vary according to what you need to plot, given your own experience—place the word NOW in capital letters. To the right of the word NOW, plot what you sense God is calling you to or moving you toward in terms of stewardship practice. If you wish, you can use words, symbols, or simple drawings (are some combination of these) as you work on the time line.

The following is a very rough, highly simplified example of what a participant might place on the time line:

- Began giving 10¢ a week to church out of allowance.
- Noted that parents volunteered at food pantry.
- NOW
- Give with joyous generosity rather than out of obligation.
- Commit at least two hours a week to community and environmental efforts.

When the group members have completed their time lines, invite them to share what they have plotted from the past and what they aspire to in the future. As the participants share and talk about what they have placed on the time lines, you may find it beneficial to consider the following questions: What common experiences, influences, and assumptions have the participants encountered? What patterns seem to emerge, if any, concerning what individuals aspire to move toward in terms of future faithful stewardship practice?

5 Fish and Bread

Leader preparation: Read John 6:1–15. This is one of those stories we have heard so often that we may mistakenly think that we have plumbed its depths. In the first place, presuming that we could plumb the depths of any significant biblical text is a bit like supposing that we have the capacity to insert a straw and drink the ocean dry. In addition, this is one of those passages in which we are apt to focus on the logistical wonders of bread and fish multiplied without closely examining the human interactions and attitudes. For that reason, read the text thoughtfully and at a measured pace. Read several commentaries. You may also want to compare the accounts from the Synoptic Gospels: Matthew 14:13–21; Mark 6:30–44; Luke 9:10–17.

Supplies:

- Bibles

Divide the group into clusters of four or five persons each. Provide Bibles for everyone. Invite the clusters to read John 6:1–15. In your own words, offer the following instructions: Each cluster is to come up with two pantomime scenes. In the first one, depict something about the disciples' view of stewardship and the risks/rewards of generosity. In the second one, depict something about Jesus' view of stewardship and the risks/rewards of generosity. As you create your scenes, remember that you can use motions, gestures, expressions, and props — but there is to be no dialogue.

When the clusters are ready, invite them to present their scenes to the total group. For example, in depicting the view and attitudes of the disciples, one cluster might use one of its members to mime furtively eating one of several apples under the cover of a blanket while the other members demonstrate they are hungry and in search of food. For the second scene, a cluster might reflect Jesus' approach by having one of its members mime sitting down to a big meal only to arise at several points and invite other members of the cluster—perhaps even members of the larger group—to come, sit, and eat as well.

Once the clusters have presented their pantomimes, stimulate discussion by asking these or similar questions:

- Where do you see the scarcity mentality of the disciples manifesting itself in our world today?
- Where do you see displayed the impulse to share out of an attitude of perceived abundance?
- What kind of future would you anticipate in a culture or world dominated by the disciples' view?
- What kind of future would you anticipate in a culture or world dominated by Jesus' view?

The following considerations may be helpful to keep in mind and even highlight with the group: The story of the feeding of the five thousand is included in all four Gospels. The Gospel writers seem to have individually felt that it was an important incident that said something significant about Jesus. Perhaps the miraculous aspect was one facet they wanted to lift up. But it is also possible that they believed the contrast between the disciples' scarcity concerns and Jesus' abundance mindset was also noteworthy. The account in John is the only one in which the fish and bread were said to have come from a boy in the crowd. Some scholars have speculated that the writer of this Gospel included the detail in order to say something about the generosity of someone on the fringes — children had minimal status in first-century Jewish society — compared with most of the adults and their overcautious tendency to hold back what they had. Some scholars take the position that no miracle was performed in this story. They speculate that

there were a number of people who had food in the crowd but that, not wanting to share, they did not bring the food out into the open until they were in essence shamed or inspired by the example of the first person to offer the loaves and the fishes. What some of these scholars seem to fail to recognize is that — given the sometimes miserly, uncharitable character of human nature — this might well constitute a miracle that is just as difficult to conceive of as the possibility that Jesus single-handedly multiplied a small quantity of food. Of course, there is the possibility that the miracle lay in both the actions of Jesus and the thawing generosity of the people in the crowd.

⑥ Coat Mangling 101

Leader preparation: This activity utilizes a coat that can be physically manipulated by the group. For that reason, don't choose a coat that is new or that you wish to safeguard from inadvertent damage. In fact, you might want to purchase an inexpensive thrift store coat that participants can bend, twist, and mutilate without remorse.

The key to this activity is helping group members begin to crystallize and articulate what their future stewardship actions, and those of the church, might look like. Good questions to ask are: What do participants hope for? What do they intend to do to help those hopes become reality?

If your group is rather large, you may find it helpful to form more than one circle. Otherwise the sharing might stretch on and on to the point where, in addition to a coat, you may need to provide participants with sleeping bags.

Supplies:

- slightly oversized, medium-weight coat

For this activity, use a flexible, slightly oversized coat, such as a medium-weight overcoat or a raincoat— a coat that can be easily twisted and that extends below the waist to at least mid-thigh or to the knees. Also be sure that the coat is one you do not mind being stretched, tied in knots, stomped on, or otherwise treated in ways that are not condoned by the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Outerwear.

Ask the group members to form a circle. Take the coat in your hands and offer the following instructions: As you receive the coat, do something to or with it that symbolizes what you would like to have happen to this church and/or your life related to stewardship. For example, you might want to simply spread wide the arms of the coat indicating a new sense of openness and freedom in embracing what God has created or in giving of your time, spiritual gifts, and financial resources for the benefit of the Christian community and the greater community. Or, you might twist one of the arms behind the coat symbolizing your frustration with the general lack of generosity within the church and your desire to “twist a few arms”—all in the spirit and gentleness of Christ, of course — to encourage the Christian fellowship to be more open-minded, openhearted, and openhanded. When you have finished manipulating the coat and explaining what your actions are meant to communicate, pass the coat to the person on your left.

You might wish to give a minute or two for reflection before beginning to pass the coat around. You might also want to be the first person to manipulate the coat and explain what your actions symbolize as a way of giving group members a bit more time for reflection and to provide them with an additional sense of the procedure for the activity.

As the coat is passed around and explanations are offered, be alert to common themes that emerge. Do not hesitate to welcome clarifying questions from the rest of the group and to encourage participants to consider what steps they might need to take to help their stewardship wishes and desires take a more solid shape in reality as regular practice.

Sending & Serving Activities

7 A Stewardship GPS (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: It is all well and good to think about stewardship and intellectualize about faithful practice. Thought and discussion — especially the kinds that are marinated in prayer, enlightened by careful discernment, and integrated with the whole of life — can be invaluable. But thought and discussion that challenge no personal assumptions and stir no movement beyond the status quo can devolve into empty exercises. The work of the Holy Spirit moves us from where we are to where God calls us to be. Keep that in mind as you provide leadership for this activity. Encourage and support your group members as they wrestle with the possibilities of thinking, acting, and responding to God in new and hopefully transformative ways as they become more faithful stewards.

Supplies:

- paper and pens or pencils

It is likely that most of the participants are at least somewhat familiar with the uses of a GPS (global positioning system) and may have used one to receive directions while driving or walking to an unfamiliar destination. Since individual comfort levels with various technologies vary widely, review the following features of GPS units: These devices can be used to get from where you are to where you wish to be. They provide information about distance to your destination and an estimated time of arrival—if you take the suggested route. They provide text and voice instructions to indicate what turns to take at specific streets, roads, or highways. Devices will help reroute — recalculate — you if you take a wrong or different turn.

Give each member a sheet of paper and a pen or pencil. Offer the following instructions in your own words: With the uses and features of a GPS in mind, we are going to consider where we are in terms of faithful stewardship practice, where we would like to be, and what route we might take to move toward our preferred destination. We will do this with the understanding that the Christian journey is more about aspiration and direction than it is about fully arriving while we continue to draw mortal breath.

At the top of the sheet of paper, write one or two sentences or a short list of words or phrases to describe your current feelings about and approach to stewardship. At the bottom of the sheet, write one or two sentences or a short list of words or phrases describing where you would like to move toward regarding faithful stewardship. In the space between the top and the bottom of the sheet, record some of the turns or steps — in terms of actions, attitudes, and perspectives — you feel you might need to take to move toward where God is calling you to be.

After participants have completed their stewardship GPS schematics, divide the group into clusters of three or four persons. Ask the members to take turns sharing what they have worked on. As this sharing takes place, encourage the cluster members to make modifications to their schematics that might be stimulated by

the sharing, questions, and comments of others in the clusters. Later, if there is enough time, provide an opportunity for a few volunteers to articulate any new insights or resolves that have been stimulated by this activity.

8 Visions of a Time to Come

Leader preparation: You may find it helpful to read several commentaries as you prepare to lead this exploration and discussion. Be prepared, however, for the possibility that the commentaries you consult will — at least on the surface — appear to agree roughly to the degree that opponents in a political debate might seem to see eye to eye. Because of its rich imagery, the Book of Revelation has been subject to a wider array of interpretations (and to a more serious level of abuse) than any other book in the Bible. Guide participants away from speculation related to the end of the world, the return of Christ, and the relative merits of the welter of apocalyptic literature and films that have been produced over the past few decades. Remember that the Book of Revelation is primarily about the ultimate triumph of God and God’s purposes and God’s nature. The important issues do not really center on things such as the veracity of positions concerning the rapture and Armageddon; they have much more to do with the imperishable characteristics of God that will endure and shine for eternity and how that divine nature can be reflected in us — people called to be remade in God’s image through Jesus Christ.

Supplies:

- Bibles

Distribute Bibles and invite two volunteers to read aloud from the Book of Revelation. Ask the first volunteer to read Revelation 21:10, 22–27, and the second to read Revelation 22:1–5. After the reading, make the following comments and observations concerning the passages: The images in the passages did not describe the present; they pointed to the future. Even as they pointed to the future, they were not necessarily intended to depict concrete physical realities. In other words, focusing on a literal throne with a splash-you-wet water feature flowing from it (Revelation 22:1–2) can miss the point. The writer was more interested in suggesting the spiritual life realities that were to emerge rather than any physical ones.

The writer and/or compiler of the Book of Revelation did not seem overly concerned with consistency from one passage and vision to another. For example, earlier passages indicated the presence of the temple (see Revelation 7:15). Here, however, it is stated that there is no temple. God and the Lamb (Jesus) serve as the spiritual temple of the people of God. Though such differences may be puzzling and even problematic for those focused on harmonizing descriptive details, the author likely was more concerned with communicating powerful, evocative images that would captivate and catapult the hopes and imaginations of the faithful as they looked toward the future.

The writer’s image envisions future abundance, the source of which is God. This abundance includes trees that, taken together, continuously yield food so that there is no lack of nourishment; leaves that bring healing for the nations (including the Gentiles); and an enlightened discernment and life-giving wholeness within the context of the uninterrupted relational presence of God and the people of God. Note that the gathered people of God do not just lounge around on recliners on celestial cotton-candy clouds. The future relational connection between God and God’s people is described as one in which those people will “worship” God (v. 4)—or, as the NIV puts it, the people will “serve” God.

Stimulate discussion by posing these or similar questions:

- What do the future-oriented images of these Revelation passages evoke for you concerning your own future and your practice of living stewardship?
- What does the image of abundance suggest about stewardship and our competing impulses to greedily keep for ourselves and generously share with others?
- What does the healing available to the nations suggest about how widely God calls us to extend our stewardship efforts?
- What do the images of these passages suggest to you about the importance of the relational in experiencing abundance and wholeness in the context of the shape of faithful stewardship in your future?

9 The Shape and Color of Stewardship

Leadership preparation: Think carefully about whether this activity fits the needs and inclinations of the participants. Some individuals will revel in the creative possibilities of this approach. Others may find it frustratingly artsy and ethereal. If you utilize this approach, select space where the possibility of a few inadvertent paint smudges and spills will not cause emotional meltdowns or cleanup complications. You will also need to be sure that participants are appropriately prepared and dressed for such an activity.

Supplies:

- 5' x 5' squares of poster board or cardboard (one square for every three to four participants)
- paints (at a minimum brown, black, orange, yellow, white, blue, green, red)
- brushes (preferably 1½" in width)

Divide the group into clusters of three or four persons each. Provide each cluster with a 5' x 5' square of poster board or cardboard, small cans of paint in a variety of colors, and a paint brush for each person. Before the clusters embark on becoming Team van Gogh or Team Jackson Pollock, invite all the participants to sit with their feet flat on the floor, close their eyes, and visualize some images as you read a series of questions. Then — in an unhurried manner — read aloud the following, pausing between each question to allow participants sufficient visualization time:

- As you think of your future stewardship practice, what color would you associate with it? Would it be bright and orange? Would it be gray, blue, yellow, black?
- What physical shape might you visually associate with your future stewardship practice? Would it be sharp and pointed? Might it be open like a horseshoe or the letter C?
- What size would you picture your future stewardship practice as being? Would it be bigger than a breadbox? Smaller than a punctuation mark? Pocket-size and portable?
- What kind of attitude might you visualize your future stewardship practice as having? Would it be easy-going, unhurried, and generous? Would it be highly charged and focused?
- What feelings might you associate with how you visualize your future stewardship practice? Might you associate delight with it, or stress or anxiety or contentment?

Invite participants to gather in the clusters. Provide the following instructions: First, I ask each of you to share some of the images that came to you as you listened to the questions and what those images say to you about how you are feeling and thinking about your future approach to faithful stewardship. Then use the materials you have been given to visually create what you saw in your mind's eye as I read the questions to you. Discuss with your cluster team members how much space you will need individually. Or perhaps your cluster will decide to collaborate on a joint image or images that encapsulate some of the common and contrasting images that all of you visualized. It is up to your cluster how you approach this assignment.

When the clusters have finished creating their images, invite them to share what they have worked on and what it says about how they are feeling and thinking about the future shape, hue, and texture of stewardship in their lives.

Close this activity by inviting the participants to offer prayers of two or three sentences expressing thanksgiving for God's bounty and/or asking God to guide participants as they seek to faithfully shape their future stewardship practices.

Reflect

Since this session focused on the future, take time to think about and process your thoughts and feelings concerning what you visualize regarding your ongoing response to God's call that you become an increasingly faithful steward. Ask yourself questions such as these: What kind of person do I wish to be in the years ahead? What role do I see my future stewardship practice drawing me to within the community of faith and the wider human community? What is God calling me to consider that I may not have considered before? What choices will I need to make to faithfully respond to God's call?