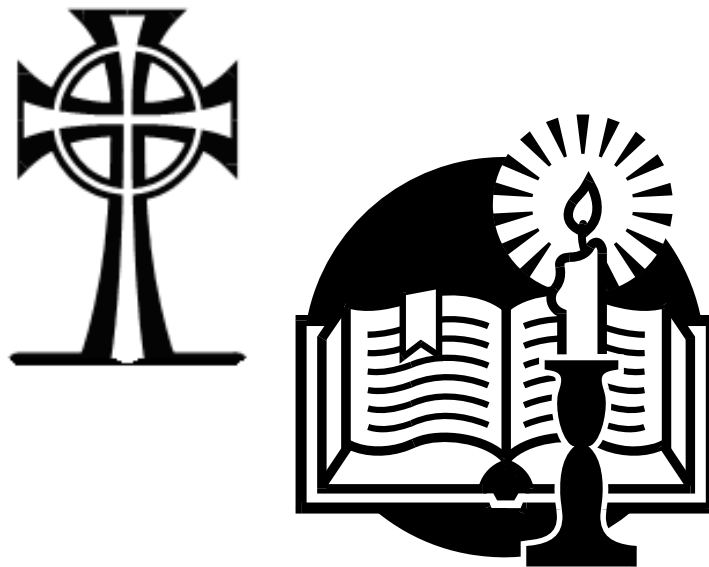


Lenten Devotional

Stewardship Principles



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

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

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

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

Lenten Devotional – Stewardship Principles

How to use:

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

Pray: Use the prayer to continue the devotional.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Questions for Reflection

What do you hear?

How does it make you feel?

Toward what are you being drawn?

What do you sense you should do?

Looking up Bible references:

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

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

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

Readings:

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

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

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

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

Reflection:

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

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

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

What do you hear?

How does it make you feel?

Toward what are you being drawn?

What do you sense you should do?

⁵⁹ Evangelical Lutheran Worship, Augsburg Fortress.

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

Monday, April 2

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

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

5

Share abundantly

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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What do you sense you should do?

⁶¹ Evangelical Lutheran Worship, AugsburgFortress.

⁶² Giving - The Sacred Art: Creating a Lifestyle of Generosity, Lauren Tyler Wright, 2008, SkyLight Paths, p. 88-89.

Tuesday, April 3

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

6

Give proportionately

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

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

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

⁶³ Evangelical Lutheran Worship, AugsburgFortress.

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

Wednesday, April 4

Readings: Isaiah 50:4-9a
Psalm 70

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

7

Commit intentionally

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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How does it make you feel?
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What do you sense you should do?

⁶⁵ Evangelical Lutheran Worship, Augsburg Fortress.

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

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

Stewardship Principle

8

Contribute regularly

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

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

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

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

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

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

What do you hear?

How does it make you feel?

Toward what are you being drawn?

What do you sense you should do?

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

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

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

⁶⁷ Evangelical Lutheran Worship

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

Friday, April 6 – **Good Friday**

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

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

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

Reflection:

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

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

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

9

Live genuinely

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

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

What do you hear?

How does it make you feel?

Toward what are you being drawn?

What do you sense you should do?

⁶⁹ Evangelical Lutheran Worship, AugsburgFortress.

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

Saturday April 7 – **Holy Saturday**

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

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

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

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

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

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

Stewardship Principle

10

Accept a challenge

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

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

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⁷¹ Evangelical Lutheran Worship, Augsburg Fortress.

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

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

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

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

Focal Verse: “The Lord is my strength and my might; he has become my salvation.”
Psalm 118:14

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

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

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

Jesus said, “You cannot serve God and wealth.” ... in the United States we try to do precisely that which Jesus says we cannot do. We try to serve both God and wealth.

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

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

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

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

What do you hear?
How does it make you feel?
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What do you sense you should do?

⁷³ Evangelical Lutheran Worship, AugsburgFortress.

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