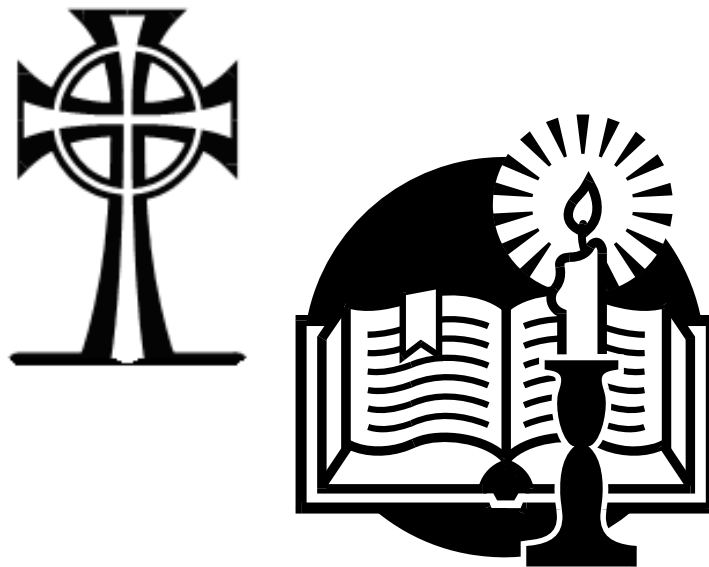


Lenten Devotional

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, March 25 – **Fifth Sunday in Lent**

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

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

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

Reflection:

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

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

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

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

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

What do you hear?

How does it make you feel?

Toward what are you being drawn?

What do you sense you should do?

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

Monday, March 26

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

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

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

Reflection: How We Acquire Money

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

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

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

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

Stewardship Principle

9

Live genuinely

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

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

What do you hear?

How does it make you feel?

Toward what are you being drawn?

What do you sense you should do?

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

Tuesday, March 27

Stewardship Principle

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

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

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

10

Accept a challenge

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

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

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

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

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

What do you hear?

How does it make you feel?

Toward what are you being drawn?

What do you sense you should do?

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

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

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

Wednesday, March 28

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

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

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

Reflection:

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

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

Stewardship Principle

1

Respond gratefully

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

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

What do you hear?

How does it make you feel?

Toward what are you being drawn?

What do you sense you should do?

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

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

Thursday, March 29

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

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

2

Obey responsibly

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

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

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

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

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

What do you hear?

How does it make you feel?

Toward what are you being drawn?

What do you sense you should do?

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

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

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

Friday, March 30

Readings: Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

Jeremiah 33:1-9

Philippians 2:12-18

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

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

Reflection:

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

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

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

3

Sacrifice proportionately

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

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

What do you hear?

How does it make you feel?

Toward what are you being drawn?

What do you sense you should do?

⁵³ Book of Common Prayer, © 1977.

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

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

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

Saturday, March 31

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4

Give willingly

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

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

What do you hear?

How does it make you feel?

Toward what are you being drawn?

What do you sense you should do?

⁵⁷ Lutheran Worship, ©1982.

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