

Stewardship

Inspiring a deeper understanding of true giving



Living Each Day as a Steward!

Bible Studies

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Bible Study

The Steward's Identity

Prayer: Lord, we give you praise and thanks that you have called us to be your stewards and that in you we have a new identity, for you make us your children, your co-workers in the Gospel. As your stewards, we pray for your wisdom and strength so that we can be faithful caretakers of the gifts, talents, and resources you have entrusted to us. We ask your blessings on this study as we examine what it means to **live each day as stewards**. May all we do give you praise and glory. In your name we pray. **Amen.**

Objectives of Study:

To help God's people...

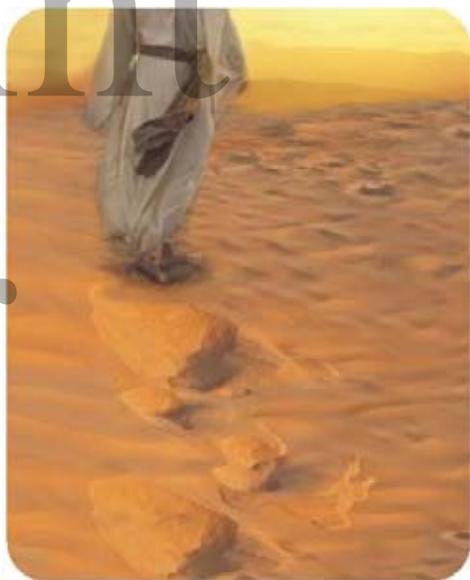
- understand our identity in Christ.
- understand our identity as Jesus' friends.
- understand our identity as God's children.
- understand our identity as God's stewards.

Introduction

Who are you? Most often we identify ourselves by our relationships: I'm a father or mother, son or daughter, husband or wife. I'm a carpenter or teacher or businessperson or work in another of the myriad of professions now available to all. Do we identify ourselves in any other way? Do we see ourselves belonging to God? Because God has created us and in Holy Baptism re-created us, we belong to him. We are his children. In and through him, all things have their beginning. *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth"* (Genesis 1:1). In his sovereignty, God chose us to be his stewards and to give us dominion over his creation. *"God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth'"* (Genesis 1:28).

Our New Identity in Christ

Within us, we have both the nature of the flesh and the nature of the Spirit. There is a constant battle between these two natures. The old nature, the old man, is born of the flesh and is ignorant of the things of God. He lacks appreciation of God's authority and goodness. *"The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him and he is not able to understand them, because they are spiritually discerned"* (1 Corinthians 2:14). The old man resents God. He rejects God and withholds from him his heart and mind. He acts on his own



Questions for Discussion:

1. Why is it important for you to understand God's purposes for you in order for you to **live each day as a steward**?
2. What two different mind-sets are presented in Romans 8:5-8? What do they cause to happen?
3. Can you be successful by the standards of the world and yet not fulfill the purposes for which God created you? How/how not?
4. What did Jesus say you will do if you love him (John 14:15)?
5. What are some things that you can do that will remind you throughout the day to glorify God?
6. You give praise and glory to God in public worship. How do you glorify him privately?

The Purpose of Witnessing

Read again that verse from Matthew 5:16. Our good deeds give glory to God. They are products of the light within us. They enable us to witness to our Savior. All we say and do points to Jesus who suffered and died and rose again so that we could have eternal life with him. Jesus' last command before his ascension was, "*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you*" (Matthew 28:18-19). The Great Commission given to the disciples is our commission as well. Whatever our vocations, our ages, or our gender, we need to tell others about the beautiful Gospel message. God uses us to speak to others. We are God's mouth to the world. "*...You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth*" (Acts 1:8).



We should be prepared to make the most of opportunities to share the Gospel with others. God does not want "*that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance*" (2 Peter 3:9). In our sphere of influence, we should question what we are doing or not doing to help others learn of heaven. Have we invited others to church? Are we sharing God's love through our actions such as sending cards or preparing meals or caring for those who can't help themselves? Are we sharing with those we may just casually run into how God is working in our lives?

The Purpose of Serving

"*And now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you but...to walk in all his ways...to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul...*" (Deuteronomy 10:12-13). Heartfelt service unto the Lord is an integral part of our stewardship. We serve the Lord by serving others (Matthew 25:40). Jesus tells us that when we help those who are hungry, thirsty, naked, and homeless, we are serving him. Paul exhorts us, "*Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men*" (Ephesians 6:7).

Jesus did not come to be served but to serve (Matthew 20:28). Just prior to his death on the Cross, Jesus gathered his disciples for the Last Supper. When the disciples were gathered around the table, "*[Jesus] got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying*

Stewardship of Self

Augustine wrote, “Thou hast made us for Thyself.” Paul reminds us that, “[we] are not [our] own. For [we] were bought with a price” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). When we fail to acknowledge our dependence upon God and follow our own will, we are rebelling against him. Our will supersedes what God desires for us. Dr. Lynn Hough wrote, “The will is the last citadel of the personality. Stewardship which does not include the surrender of the will to God misses the very central application of our being God’s possession.”



The giving of self is illustrated by the Macedonians Paul wrote about in 2 Corinthians 8:3-5. “*For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints—and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord...*” In spite of their economic hardships, the Macedonians responded generously and sacrificially to the plight of the people in Jerusalem. They were able to give beyond their ability because they had first given themselves to the Lord. Their will was subject to God’s will. The Macedonians found it a privilege and a joy to give what they had to people in need. Because of their love relationship with Jesus, they delighted in giving. Mature stewards do the right things for the right reasons.

God’s Word and Sacraments are his means of grace through which he empowers us to give of ourselves. As the Holy Spirit works through Word and Sacraments, he teaches us to become givers rather than takers and transforms us into people who use our lives, gifts, and resources in service to the Lord as Christian stewards. When we become self-giving people, God is pleased because he wants us, not our gifts. When God has all of us, our deeds of stewardship grow into a lifestyle of stewardship.

Questions for Discussion:

1. What does God want you to give him (Proverbs 23:26)?
2. What did the Magi do as they gave Baby Jesus their gifts (Matthew 2:9-11)?
3. The Macedonians were faithful stewards who received joy from their generosity. Why were they able to give so sacrificially? Can you see yourself doing what they did? Why or why not? Is sacrificial giving of this kind something God expects of all Christian stewards?

Living a Disciplined Lifestyle

This intimate relationship that Jesus has established with us and through which we are enabled to grow and to **live each day as stewards** is further nurtured by a disciplined lifestyle that incorporates spiritual disciplines. Examples of spiritual disciplines are praying, worshiping, fasting, serving, and giving. Richard Foster, in his book *Celebration of Discipline*, writes “God has ordained the disciplines of the spiritual life as the means by which we place ourselves where he can bless us.” The spiritual disciplines that we develop put us where Jesus can work within us to transform us and use us. By grace, God works through these disciplines to mold us and change us into stewards who can bless others as we’ve been blessed.

can be used in his service. Our worship is seen in our obedience and submission to him. As we **live each as stewards**, we are worshiping God.

The Spiritual Discipline of Giving

Jesus said, *“It is more blessed to give than to receive”* (Acts 20:35). We receive much joy from giving. Through the discipline of faithful giving, we give witness to our relationship with the Lord. In our giving, we acknowledge God for who he is and what he has done for us.

In practicing the spiritual discipline of giving, we learn to make giving a priority. Jesus said, *“Where your treasure is there your heart will be also”* (Matthew 6:24). Money goes to what we love most or, in Matthew’s words to where our hearts are. Paul encourages us to give the first portions of our incomes regularly to the Lord (1 Corinthians 16:2). By making out the first check to the Lord’s work, we affirm that Jesus is our treasure. Our gifts represent our love and gratitude to him. We also learn to give cheerfully (2 Corinthians 9:7), not begrudging the offerings we bring to the Lord. We learn to be faithful in our giving, providing consistency in our stewardship lifestyle. By giving our money, we break the grip that money can have on us, freeing us to be devoted, instead, to our Lord.

Questions for Discussion:

4. How would practicing these spiritual disciplines benefit you?
5. Can your persistent praying change God’s mind (Exodus 32:9-14 and 2 Corinthians 12:7-10)?
6. What are some different ways in which you worship God?
7. In the first 11 chapters of Romans, Paul writes much about God’s mercy and grace in spite of our sinfulness. What response does he seek in Romans 12:1?
8. How can the spiritual discipline of giving be a blessing?

A Lifestyle of Walking Humbly with God

Micah 6:8 states, *“He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.”* God wants us to walk in close fellowship with him and promises to draw near to us when we draw near to him (James 4:8). As we walk humbly with God, we will get to know him and grow in faith and trust in him. When we **live each day as stewards**, we demonstrate our love for and our trust in him.



In order to walk humbly with God, we need to fear and obey him. *“And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways...and to keep the commandments and statutes of the Lord, which I am commanding you today for your good?”* (Deuteronomy 10:12-13). How else but in reverence could we walk with God who is our Creator and Owner! What an awesome privilege God gives us ... to walk with him!

Transformed by God's Spirit working through Word and Sacraments, we are enabled to understand both our identity and purpose as God's stewards. As a result, we live each day as stewards. When God's grace and love fill our hearts and minds, our stewardship is not limited to specific acts, but, instead, becomes a lifestyle. We express our faith in the way we live our lives. Stewardship is our response to the faith that God gives us through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. By God's grace and through the Word, we are given the high honor of being God's stewards.

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