

<http://www.joylutheran.org/stewardship/theology.htm>

JOY! LUTHERAN CHURCH
"A Theology of Stewardship"
(Guiding Biblical Principles for Teaching)

INTRODUCTION

The word "STEWARDSHIP" conjures up a wide assortment of ideas, images and reactions. Not all of them are true or healthy, especially when it comes to talking about Christian stewardship. Most ideas and behaviors about stewardship are based upon people's fears and a lack of understanding about what it means to be a "CHRISTIAN STEWARD"!

Christian stewardship is a growth process. It is also a never ending growth process that proceeds from the Baptismal font to the grave. It is a healthy way to live one's life, because it embraces life in a holistic way and gives meaning to life! **In this document it is important to know that the terms "A Christian" and "A Steward" are interchangeable.**

The purpose of "A Theology of Stewardship (Guiding Biblical Principles for Teaching)" is three fold:

- 1) To teach the members of JOY! Biblical stewardship principles!
- 2) To break the cycle of misunderstandings about Christian stewardship!
- 3) To develop a healthy congregational life style with good stewardship habits!

FOUR STAGES OF STEWARDSHIP GROWTH

Every person is at a different stage in their stewardship growth process. A person never arrives, but moves in and between the different stages throughout their Christian life. The stages are not a spiritual grading system, meaning that the people who are in stage #4 are not better than those in stage #1. The four stages help us (1) to define stewardship growth, (2) to develop a twelve month stewardship program that defines each stage, (3) to teach stewardship principles to each age group, and (4) to celebrate as our congregation matures in their stewardship response.

- 1. We learn to "WORSHIP GOD"!**
- 2. We learn to "DO ACTS OF LOVE"!**
- 3. We learn to "LIVE A CHRISTIAN LIFE AS OUR VOCATION"!**
- 4. We learn to "BE FREE TO GIVE"!**

"A Theology of Stewardship"

(Guiding Biblical Principles for Teaching)

1. STAGE #1 – "We Learn to WORSHIP GOD"!

A. Biblical References

1. Genesis, chapters 1 and 2

"In the beginning..." — In the beginning GOD is written all over the blue print of life. In the beginning God CREATED...God saw that it was GOOD... God was in the CENTER OF THE RELATIONSHIP between creation and the creator. God was the CREATOR and humans were the CREATURE. This is a picture of a "perfect stewardship relationship".

2. Genesis, chapter 3:1-7

"The big deception(the Biblical term is SIN)" — The temptation for us is to confuse the "job description" of God and of people. "When you eat of it (the fruit) your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."(Genesis 3:5) This is the "big deception", that we want to "play God" and therefore believe that we are "god" instead of being the creature whom God created, loved and gave a promise to provide everything we need. The created life of being a steward is destroyed through this "deception".

3. Genesis, Chapter 3:8-24

"Living in the wilderness" — Created to live in a stewardship relationship (Creator and Creature) has become broken and instead we live a life of hiding from God. In verse 8 it is described, "And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden." God did not create us to live in hiding, in a wilderness of dark colors and drought conditions. We were created to live in the bright colors of creation and enjoy its beauty!

4. Genesis, Chapter 3:9 and 15

"Hide and Go Seek, and God's Calling" — It is not God's nature (the Creator) to neglect us (the creature). "But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, 'Where are you?'" God always seeks, calls and invites us back into a holistic stewardship relationship. All major religions, except Christianity, teach us to (1) fear God and (2) to do something to satisfy an angry God or else suffer the consequences. Through out history this has included everything from (1) sacrificing humans (such as the Aztec natural religion) and/or animals to satisfy God or (2) living a life with the heavy burden of legalism and doing something to calm or quiet God's anger. Christianity is different! God really does love us and calls us to a restored relationship of being stewards — God is the CREATOR and we are the CREATURE. In Genesis 3:5 we have the first promise that God will send a Savior to redeem us instead of punish us. **Our stewardship response begins and is always restored through our devoted worship of God as the source of our life!**

B. Questions for Discussion

1. There is not such a thing as perfection in today's world, but imagine what it was like in "the beginning", a world lived in perfect harmony.
2. What are the qualities of this perfect world? And what would be the affects of these qualities upon the human spirit?

C. Stories of God Calling Us to a Stewardship **Worship** Relationship

1. The story of Dr. Isaac from the Congo, Africa ([Appendix #1](#))
2. The story of Oyungerel Bat-Ochir from Mongolia, Asia ([Appendix #2](#))
3. The story of "Bill", Gurnee, Illinois ([Appendix #3](#))

D. Making it Personal

1. Discuss YOUR story of "Living in the Wilderness".
2. Define YOUR relationship with God? (This includes describing both God and yourself.)
2. How did YOU first come to know God's call to live in a stewardship relationship with God through Jesus Christ?
3. Describe YOUR struggle to continue living as a steward in God's world?
4. How do YOU become your own god in YOUR life today? What deceptions do YOU hold on to?
5. Hiding from God seems to admit to shame. Where do YOU hide? How? Why?
6. Where do YOU look for quick fixes? What religious traps do YOU fall into in YOUR quest for God's wholeness?

2. Stage #2 — "We Learn to do ACTS OF LOVE!"

A. Biblical References

1. Galatians 5:13-26

"You Shall Love Your Neighbor as yourself" — If worship of God is the highest act of stewardship, then the care for all people is the next most important expression of our stewardship response. As God's People we are asked in Galatians 5, verse 22, to live as servants of one another and care for people in the following way: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law."

2. Matthew 15:32-38 and John 6:1-14

"Jesus is the Perfect Example of Caring for People" — Jesus's life is marked by his persistent care for people with whom he had contact. He took the initiative, not waiting for people to ask him first. In both of these Biblical accounts of the "Feeding of the Multitudes", Jesus acts out of compassion; not because the people were his friends or because they were of his own race and nationality. Jesus acts because as the Bible says in I John 4:19, "We love because he first loved us." Jesus is teaching us to "DO ACTS OF LOVE"! We do not apply a litmus test of who is worthy or deserves our love. We love and do acts of love because Jesus set an example for us.

3. Hebrews 13:1-2

"Reaching out to those who Have no Community" — Our culture today has removed us from family and a circle of friends, and so we live as strangers in our own homes and communities. We are a culture that lives with the motto of "Do your own thing", and so we fail to have a support group of family and friends. The call of the Christian steward is to build community that cares and loves and shares — through doing acts of love.

B. Questions for discussion

1. Visualize a news report (newspaper, radio, TV) that gives stories on the acts of love by American citizens. What do you hear, see, and feel?
2. Why does our culture dwell of the devil and destruction stories rather than the redemptive and caring stories?

C. Stories of God calling us to Stewardship **Doing Acts of Love** Relationship

1. The Story of Lutheran Social Services of Illinois ([Appendix #4](#))
2. The Story of Habitat for Humanity ([Appendix #5](#))
3. The Story of Lake County's PADS Program ([Appendix #6](#))

D. Making it Personal

1. Recall a story in which YOU acted out of love and kindness towards another person (friend, family or stranger), and how YOUR actions changed the "culture of the moment".
2. What is YOUR most common excuse for not caring about another person?
3. Driving on Chicago's roadways is best described as "survival of the fittest!". If YOU dare, share YOUR driving habits! Who is changed when a person applies "Acts of Love" on the roadways?
4. What litmus tests do YOU apply before YOU reach out to do "Acts of Love"?
5. Recall a situation in which YOU were the recipient of "Acts of Love" and how did this affect YOU?
6. How do YOU contribute to building JOY! LUTHERAN CHURCH into a caring community where the member and stranger experience "Acts of Love"?

3. Stage #3 — "We Learn to LIVE A CHRISTIAN LIFE AS OUR VOCATION!"

A. Biblical References

1. Philippians 3: 12-16

"Not Perfection, Faithfulness" — Often, people associate being a Christian with being perfect. Nothing could be further from the truth. A Christian is fully aware of their sins and daily need for God's love and grace. God calls us through Jesus Christ to be FAITHFUL! As Philippians 3:13-15 states, Brethren, I do not consider that I have made it my own...I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus...Let those of us who are mature be thus minded." Being a Christian steward is finding a balance in our life and every moment, hour and day is lived in FAITHFULNESS!

2. Ephesians 4:1-6

"Live a Life Worthy of God's Calling" — A Christian steward is never "off duty". Our calling is not for special days, moments or emergencies. Our calling is to be a Christian steward at home, at work, at play, what ever we may doing. As a Christian our vocation is "BEING CHRISTIAN". I am first and foremost a Christian, and happen to use my talents as a laborer, a teacher, a store keeper, a manager, a doctor, etc. As the Apostle Paul reminds us in Ephesians 4:1-3 "...lead a life worthy of your calling...with patience...in love...maintaining peace...".

3. Matthew 5:38-48

"Build Mature Relationships and Live as One of God's Stewards" — While we can not return to the "once perfect life of the Garden of Eden", we are called to a "higher righteousness" (we do not use the word standard, as that infers a legalism or that we can obtain a higher quality of life through our own doing.) Jesus calls us in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:38, "You have heard it said...but I say to you..."(look at the behaviors he compares) —and then he compared a Christian life lived as our vocation and a life out of relationship with God. "You have heard that it

was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you..."

4. Matthew 25:14-30

"Invest Your Life!" — Being a Christian steward is not a part time job. There is no "time off, coffee breaks, or leisure time!" All of our time, what ever we are doing, is a part of our investment as a steward. This point is well made in the Parable of the Talents in Matthew. The point of the parable is to invest our selves and our talents and abilities. The one who went and hid their one talent, had it taken away. The ones who had two and five talents invested theirs and multiplied their gifts. INVEST YOUR LIFE! Is the call of God's Children, for this is our VOCATION!

B. Questions for Discussion

1. The biggest heresy (false teaching) of the Christian Faith is believing that we earn our favor with God or satisfy God by what we do. Discuss and name these heresies?
2. "Look at how they love one another!", is the description of the early Christian Community by the non-believer. Does the description still apply?

C. Stories of God calling us to **Live a Christian Life as our Vocation**

1. The Story about "Old Faithful" ([Appendix #7](#))
2. The Story about Dorothy Day ([Appendix #8](#))
3. The Story of "What Made You Do This?" ([Appendix #9](#))

D. Making it Personal

1. Recall a time when YOU or someone else accused a Christian of being a hypocrite, because they were not perfect? What was YOUR misunderstanding?
2. YOU enjoy coming home after a days work and being "off duty". How do YOU feel about being "on duty" 24 - 7 - 365?
3. Who do YOU believe has the highest status? A Christian doctor or a Christian garbage collector? Why? Is this the way YOU really feel, or are YOU just giving the answer expected?
4. We usually describe a vocation as the work we go to each day. How is YOUR life enriched and expanded when YOU live YOUR life in relationship to God and YOU call this life style YOUR vocation?
5. If YOU feel too much is expected of YOU, how do YOU feel? Do YOU feel cheated? Do YOU say, "I've done MY share, let someone else do it?" Or do YOU say, "It's my life's calling?"
6. What talents and abilities are YOU not using as one of God's stewards? Make a plan for using all of your gifts!

4. Stage #4 — "We Learn to BE FREE TO GIVE!"

A. Biblical References

1. Psalm 24

"It All Belongs to God! Sorry!" — The song from the ancient Psalm sums up the belief of the Christian steward, "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein." (Verse 1) As the story goes, "There are no

trailers allowed in heaven.” It’s always been only about oneself and one’s relationship with God. The stuff is here for us to be stewards of (care-takers). So don’t hold on too tightly, it will one day disappear.

2. Luke 12:32-48

“Manage...Manage...Manage...Not the Owner” — Jesus reminds us in Luke 12 that the “faithful and wise steward” is the one who understands that they are taking care of the “household”, not owning and abusing the household items. Translated this means that for the Christian steward, we know that our pocketbooks, checkbooks, purses, stocks/bonds, titles and all other trinkets and toys are not ours; but we are mere managers of these gifts. What are we to do with what has been given to us to manage? “To be found faithful”, Jesus says, “Every one to whom much is given, of him will much be required...”

3. I Timothy 6:17-19

“Be Generous!” — The two year old cries out, “Mine!”. The mature Christian steward says: “I Give you what you own, What ever that gift may be, All that I have belongs to you, A trust O Lord from you!”
The two attitudes are as different as night and day. We are to “do good, to be rich in good deeds, liberal and generous...”

4. 2 Corinthians 8

“Not ‘How Much is Enough?’, But Rather, ‘I’m Free to Give!’” — Jesus did not ask, “How much do I have to give to these sinful people?” He gave his all. Jesus is our model. The Apostle Paul argues this point to the Christians in Corinth. We get involved sometimes in asking, “How much should I give?”
The Christian answer is that we need to be involved in “Sacrificial Giving”. We give of our time, talents and finances because God through Jesus Christ first gave unconditionally to us. The SURPRISE of sacrificial generosity is that we are really blessed. WHY? Because when we 1) Worship our God, 2) Do acts of love, 3) Live a vocational life of serving, and 3) Give freely — we’ve come as close to heaven on earth as it will ever get!!!

B. Questions for Discussion

1. The age old debate in Christianity is how much is expected of Christians? What is the measure of expectation to give (time, talent, financial)?
2. Compare the Old Testament “tithe (10%), and the New Testament concept of “Sacrificial - Proportional Giving”?

C. Stories of God calling us to **Be Free To Give!**

1. The Story of Some Members Who Risked ([Appendix #10](#))
2. The Story of Discovery — “That’s not the kind of People we are!” ([Appendix #11](#))
3. The Story of Broadview Lutheran Church ([Appendix #12](#))

D. Making it Personal

1. What is YOUR stewardship lifestyle?
2. In Malachi 3:8, the Old Testament Prophet has some pointed words for God’s People. ““Will a person rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, ‘How are we

robbing you?' In your tithes and offerings." How do YOU respond to these words?

3. Martin Luther said, (paraphrased) "There are two conversions for the Christian, the conversion of the heart, and the conversion of the pocket book." Describe YOUR two conversions?

4. There is a saying, "The one who dies with the most toys wins!" How do YOU react to this saying?

5. Do you have a financial plan for the disposition of your assets when YOU die? How may YOU be a good steward through this process?

6. List the ways YOU are blessed?

PRAYER OF THE STEWARD: "Merciful Father, we offer with joy and thanksgiving what you have first given us—our selves, our time and our possessions, signs of your gracious love. Receive them for the sake of him who offered himself for us, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen!" (From the Lutheran Book of Worship)