

# Stewards of grace

Working in community – growing in service



Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. – 1 Peter 4:10 (NRSV)



Everence

# Welcome

When I was 12, I took a hunter's safety training course. At 14, I participated in a baptismal preparation class to review the fundamentals of our faith. Like most teens, at 16 I eagerly enrolled in a behind-the-wheel training course – required before I could receive my driver's license.

What do these experiences have in common? All of them helped me prepare for increased responsibility in life.

Comparatively speaking, the training I received on how to manage money and become a good Christian steward of God's many gifts was limited. I only picked up basic principles along the way from my parents or a class in school. When it comes to learning how to integrate our faith with our time, talents, health, money, relationships, and other Kingdom stewardship issues such as creation care, where in life does this happen and who is responsible to provide the instruction? At Everence, we believe we all need to take some responsibility – parents, pastors, and the entire church community, which we are proudly a part of.

In Proverbs 22:6, parents are instructed to “train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray.” The very next verse reads, “The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is the slave of the lender.” (NRSV) In fact, 10 of the 29 verses in that chapter offer financial counsel. Coincidence? Not likely. Money and how we manage all of God's resources has always been, and continues to be, an important part of becoming faithful followers of God.

With this book, we provide you with a primer – not an in-depth examination – of the holistic stewardship of time, talents, health, money, creation care and relationships. Other resources we offer can take you deeper (many of which are referenced in this booklet), but to whet your appetite, and to get you thinking about these issues, we offer *Stewards of Grace*.

At Everence, our goal is to provide educational experiences (along with our financial services and products) that will help you integrate your finances with the faith values you hold. To learn more about how we can serve you in the areas of financial stewardship, visit us online at [www.everence.com](http://www.everence.com).



**Beryl M. Jantzi**  
Director of Stewardship Education  
Everence

Everence is a ministry of Mennonite Church USA and other churches.

*If you find this educational resource helpful, you may want to consider other study materials we offer in our online bookstore: <http://bookstore.everence.com> or contact Beryl Jantzi, Director of Stewardship Education, at [beryl.jantzi@everence.com](mailto:beryl.jantzi@everence.com). We welcome your ideas and suggestions for how we can partner with you in developing stewardship resources.*



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### A note to the teacher

You will discover that each chapter has more information and exercises than can be discussed in a typical Sunday school or small group discussion time. This leaves you with a wonderful opportunity to either:

1. Pick and choose the material you feel relates best to your class and leave the rest.
2. Divide each chapter into two sections, turning the 6-session series into 12. i.e.

Some chapters have exercises that could be taken home, filled out and discussed the following class period. All chapters have a series of questions you may want the class to take more time to process as part of the next class discussion.

Included with this resource are student study guides for each chapter. You are granted permission to copy and distribute these to class members. This booklet can serve as your teacher's guide. By making this educational experience a downloadable document from our website, we are trying to reduce unnecessary printing, warehousing and shipping expenses. We offer this resource free in the hope that more will discuss what we consider to be central themes to everyday discipleship.

Because this document is in digital form, we can make changes and adjustments as the material gets used. Please feel free to pass along suggestions for additional exercises or resources you have found helpful regarding any of these topics. We will consider including your ideas in future versions of this resource. Your comments are encouraged!

Sincerely,



Beryl Jantzi, Everence Stewardship Education Director



# Stewards of Time

The time of your life

Ecclesiastes 3:1-14; Luke 10:38-42

*"Most men pursue pleasure with such breathless haste that they hurry past it." – Søren Kierkegaard*

*"Even a clock that does not work is right twice a day." – Polish Proverb*

We probably have more than 20 watches and clocks on various electronic devices in our home. I carry at least two timepieces with me at all times – a wristwatch and a Blackberry. However, these timepieces rarely agree exactly with each other. In every case, they can be anywhere from several seconds to several minutes off.

As central as time is to each of us, most people seldom take the time to consider its role in life. Aside from temporal time, which is gauged by watches and calendars, there is another category we might call divine time – or all things eternal. What would happen if we thought about – and paid as much attention to – the things that are eternal as we do to events gauged by watches and calendars? Would our decisions of what is truly important be any different if we lived each day tuned into God's eternal time frame? Would our daily "to-do list" look different if we included a column for those things that impact the lives of others beyond the here and now?

*What would happen if we thought about – and paid as much attention to – the things that are eternal as we do to events gauged by watches and calendars?*

## **The here and now**

A person with one clock is only living with an awareness of the here and now. A person with two clocks – one that has an eye on eternity – is living with an awareness of God's ways and timing for things in this world and beyond. How many clocks are you in tune with? In what ways does living with both a temporal and an eternal clock impact our worldly and heavenly view?

Culturally, there is great divergence in how we understand and manage time. Could the same be said about how we view time from a spiritual point of view? As Christians living in this world, what we decide to do with the time we have should probably look different from those who see this life as all there is. Some cultures – mainly Western – impose a rigid and unforgiving attitude concerning the "good use" and management of time.

What does our attitude toward time (whether we're mostly task-oriented or mostly people-oriented) say about our spiritual focus?

*In what ways does living with both a temporal and an eternal clock impact our worldly and heavenly view?*

### **Time and culture**

I was at a meeting recently where a Latino man was leading worship and invited other Latinos to join him in front to lead a song. After a brief pause, he said in a lighthearted way, “We’re not on Latino time here. I want you to come now.” Everyone in the group laughed, knowing he was recognizing a cultural difference between Latinos and people from other backgrounds who may tend to be more time conscious. Culturally, those from a European background have much to learn from our brothers and sisters who come from a cultural context with a stronger relational focus rather than a task orientation.

As Christians, the world we live in is a time warp of sorts. We are *in* the world, but we are not *of* it. We need to be aware of and engaged in the everyday realities of work and family responsibilities – temporal time. But we also need to be conscious of a time and reality beyond this life.

Ecclesiastes 3 reflects both views. In verses 1-8, seasons, or chapters, of life are referenced. To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven. When we get to verse 11, we have these words:

*He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end. ... I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that men will revere him. – Ecclesiastes 3:11, 14*

While we live in this world, we live with the tension between these two views of time. We live with daily responsibilities we need to manage. We can feel pressed by time as though it is our master. On the other hand, time is a gift offered to help us build relationships and spend time in quiet reflection. Since time will never end as we transition from this life to the next, we experience a little bit of heaven as we linger and enjoy the special moments of each day.

### **Time as gift**

In Ecclesiastes 3, Solomon offers a view of time as a gift from God. Time is divided into seasons of life and life experiences rather than chopped into days, hours, minutes and seconds. When we view time as a gift, we realize it is here to serve us and we are not expected to become a slave to it. Just as the Sabbath was made for people, we should not feel bound by limitations brought on by busyness. Rather, we are called to receive these seasons of life as new opportunities to grow and serve.



What is the value of one year? Ask someone who has been diagnosed with a terminal disease.

What is the value of one month? Ask a mother whose baby arrived prematurely.

What is the value of one minute? Ask someone who just missed their plane.

What is the value of one second or a millisecond? Ask an Olympic athlete who came in second place.

#### Discussion questions for reflection and sharing

1. In Western society, we have turned time into a commodity that we buy and sell rather than view as a gift. Why do you think this is?
2. How does the idea that “time is money” distort a biblical understanding of “time as gift”?
3. What is the “value” of time if not viewed as money?

#### Time and the Bible

In the Scriptures, there are many references to time. We cannot help but note that the context of people living 4,000 years ago certainly affects the way they understood time in comparison to our 21<sup>st</sup>-century lives. There was far less concern for a literal accuracy of dates and times since they did not have the sophistication to measure time as we do today.

In the Bible, certain numbers took on symbolic meanings, such as the number 40. Forty simply meant a period of time, which may or may not have been intended to be taken literally. It often carried a sense of the sacred with it. We observe its usage on several occasions in both the Old and New Testaments:

- Noah and family were in the ark for 40 days and 40 nights.
- Moses was 40 when he was exiled to Sinai from Egypt.
- Moses remained in Sinai for 40 years.
- Moses was on Mt. Sinai 40 days and nights (two separate times).
- Twelve spies scouted out the land of Canaan for 40 days.
- Israel wandered in the wilderness for 40 years.
- Elijah wandered in the wilderness for 40 days.
- Jonah warned Nineveh they had 40 days in which to repent.

- Jesus fasted in the wilderness for 40 days and 40 nights.
- Jesus was present on Earth following his resurrection for 40 days before ascending to heaven.

When I turned 40, someone gave me a magnet that said, “40 isn’t old – if you’re a tree!” Well, that made me feel better!

#### Discussion questions for reflection and sharing

1. What times or dates carry symbolic meaning in our settings?
2. Are certain birthdays or anniversaries more significant than others? Why?

The Bedouin culture out of which the patriarchs came, and which is still alive and well in certain parts of the Middle East, has an interesting view of time. A story is told of a Westerner who was visiting a Bedouin group in order to learn more about their day-to-day activities. He asked the Bedouin leader,

“How long does it take to move your flock from one field to another?”

“Not long,” he was told.

“What time is tea served?” he asked.

“When the water boils,” the Bedouin replied.

“What time do you go to bed?” the man asked again.

“When I’m tired,” was the reply.

#### Discussion questions for reflection and sharing

1. What about these answers do you like?
2. Do you find yourself frustrated with this view of time?



Here is an honest confession put to the familiar form of Psalm 23.  
How true is it of your feelings on this issue?

*Psalm 23 (Revised)*  
by Marica K. Hornok

The clock is my dictator, I shall not rest.  
It makes me lie down only when exhausted.  
It leads me into deep depression.  
It hounds my soul.

It leads me in circles of frenzy,  
It fills my life with activities.  
Even though I run frantically from task to task,  
I will never get it all done.

Deadlines and my need for approval, they drive me.  
They demand performance from me,  
Beyond the limits of my schedule.  
They anoint my head with migraines, my in-basket overflows.

Surely fatigue and time pressures shall follow me,  
All the days of my life.  
And I will dwell in the bonds of frustration ... forever.

*For those of us who tend to be the Martha's of this world, it is an important reminder to put first things first – which is relationships.*

#### **Mary, Martha and time**

The story of Mary and Martha in Luke 10:38-42 offers a wonderful case study that connects so well to modern times. Beyond the message of the importance Jesus places on relationship, it is also a lesson in how we are to value and use time. Two sisters are preparing to entertain an important guest. When Jesus arrives, Mary immediately drops what she is doing and goes to visit with him. Martha, on the other hand, continues to work, thinking that is the greater good. Rather than spending time with Jesus like her sister, the Bible says Martha “was distracted by her many tasks.” (NRSV) When Martha complains about Mary’s lack of help, Jesus reprimands Martha and says Mary has chosen what is best.

After sharing this story once in a group, I had a modern-day Martha tell me that if Mary had continued to work a little longer, then both Mary and Martha would have been able to relax at the feet of Jesus. But what Jesus seems to be implying here is that time is primarily a tool for forging relationships rather than simply accomplishing tasks. For those of us who tend to be the Martha’s of this world, it is an important reminder to put first things first – which is relationships.

Stephen Covey, in his book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, addresses a challenge faced by all of us. How do we separate those things in life that may *feel* urgent but may not be important from those things that *are* important but not necessarily urgent? The “urgent” is defined as things that call for our immediate attention but may not have long-term significance. We hear the phone ring during dinner, and we feel we need to jump up and answer it even though meals are important family time. We have people asking us to take on an activity that we feel compelled to do based on someone else’s need to fill a role rather than our own sense of call to that role. Does this sound familiar?

In contrast, what is truly important may not always be pressing in the moment. These things may be more people-oriented in nature and focused on attending to relationships we have neglected or even devotional activities needed to maintain our connection with God; important – yes, urgent – no.

An interesting exercise is to administer a time audit of all that we do in a given day. Make a list of your activities and then ask yourself the following questions:

- Of all the activities I gave attention to, which had eternal importance – or were focused on forging deeper relationships – and which were task-oriented and based on a short-term sense of urgency?
- From this list, what did I focus on that was based on someone else imposing their agenda on me rather than my own sense of what is important?
- Were there important things I neglected to do because other tasks distracted me?
- Learning to say no to the “good” in order to do what is “best” is a challenge we all face as we become stewards of the gift of time God has provided. How good are you at saying no, for the reason of doing what is truly important?

### **Jesus and Sabbath time**

Jesus, as in most matters of life and faith, becomes a good model when thinking about prioritizing our time. In Mark 1:21 and Luke 4:16, the writers reflect on how Jesus went to the synagogue, as was his custom. Jesus modeled the value of visiting with the Mary’s and Martha’s, but he also paid attention to the broader community of faith as well.

Worship and gathering together with fellow believers fall into that category of what is important, but may not be urgent. We can all attest to how regular attendance in many of our churches has declined in the last decade, even as our overall membership has remained the same. It is increasingly acceptable to get away for the weekend and neglect Sunday morning worship and fellowship with our church family. What is truly important is not simply about what meets my needs, but has to do with what fosters the well-being of others I am in a committed relationship to –



*It could easily be argued that Jesus was a busy guy, but never could it be said that he was rushed.*

my church family. In addition to corporate worship, Jesus modeled personal Sabbath practices as well. In Mark 1:35-37, we read that while it was still dark, Jesus went to pray. Jesus clearly valued this as important time – time well spent.

It could easily be argued that Jesus was busy, but never could it be said that he was rushed. Jesus seemed to understand that time is a gift to serve us and is not intended to be our dictator (see Mark 2:27).

### **Conclusion**

Time is \_\_\_\_\_ .

- Temporal (limited) and eternal (unlimited)
- A gift of God, not a commodity to be bought and sold
- Seasonal – unclear starting and ending
- A tool from God – not our master

### **Discussion questions for reflection and sharing**

1. What reminders do you most need to take with you this week?
2. What are the changes you have been challenged to address in your life?
3. What new commitments concerning your use of time is the Holy Spirit inviting you to consider?

We are called to be stewards of the gift of time. Each new day/hour/minute is from God and as such should be cherished and shared for God's eternal purposes.

### **Additional reading and small group discussion resources**

Evans, Pamela. *The Overcommitted Christian: Serving God without Wearing Out*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001.

Ganger, Steve. *Time Warped: First Century Time Stewardship for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Living*. Goshen, IN: Mennonite Mutual Aid, 2004.

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## Getting started

1. What would happen if we thought about – and paid as much attention to – the things that are eternal as we do to events gauged by watches and calendars?
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### *Reflection and sharing*

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# Stewards of Talent

All hands on deck

Ephesians 4:4-7, 11-16

*“If a man has a talent and cannot use it, he has failed. If he has a talent and uses only half of it, he has partly failed. If he has a talent and learns somehow to use the whole of it, he has gloriously succeeded and won a triumph few men ever know.” – Thomas Wolfe*

*“Experience is not what happens to a man; it is what a man does with what happens to him.” – Aldous Huxley*

Several years ago while I was still a pastor, our family was preparing to leave for vacation the next morning. That evening I got in the car to take it to a gas station and fill up with gas. When I turned the key in the ignition, a strange sound erupted from the engine. The fan belt chose that moment to stop working. I called around trying to find a place that worked on cars that late in the evening and found none.

A member of the congregation heard about our predicament. Around 9 p.m., this quiet, unassuming member of our church family showed up with a new belt in hand. Within a short amount of time, he had the car repaired and we were on schedule for a morning departure.

I wanted to pay for the belt and his time when the job was done, but he refused to accept anything. Instead he said, “I’m not one to give a talk on a Sunday morning, but something like this, I can do.” That night our family was ministered to in a meaningful and caring way.

## **What floats your boat?**

Use your imagination for a moment. Imagine your church building as a boat. What kind of boat would it be if it were to reflect the nature of your congregation? Maybe your church is a hybrid of two or more floating vessels. Consider the following examples and share your reflections:

- A rowboat is powered manually and is limited in the number of passengers it can carry.
- A sailboat is powered by the “wind.” When no breeze is present, it may spend time standing still or risk capsizing in high winds.
- A catamaran is sleek and engineered for speed. It skims across the surface of the water and has little purpose but to bring pleasure to its captain and passengers.
- A canoe is unsteady by design and must stay close to shore and within sight of land.
- A cargo ship requires many workers and travels into deep waters and foreign ports.
- A cruise ship has a specialized crew that caters to feeding and entertaining its paying passengers.

- A fishing boat is a working vessel and has one specific job: to catch fish.
- Other options: houseboat, inflated inner tube, lifeboat, battleship, kayak, etc.

As you reflect on these images consider:

- Are you a passenger or a crew member in your church?
- When you arrived this morning, were you focused on what you would contribute as a member of the crew or what you might receive as a passenger?

*Not all can serve at the same time, nor should any one person be served all the time.*

On any given Sunday, we may find ourselves more in the role of a crew member or passenger or even a combination of the two. Both have their place. But there needs to be balance. Not all can serve at the same time, nor should any one person be served all the time.

#### **Captain and crew**

In Ephesians 4, the Apostle Paul is talking about the body of Christ. In verses 4-6, he writes,

*There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. (NRSV)*

Togetherness and unity of purpose is not of our own doing. Faith, hope, love – these are all God-given gifts. These are not things we do or create ourselves; they are gifts of God. And according to Paul, these are the building blocks of unity.

In verses 11-13 Paul writes,

*The gifts [Christ] gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. (NRSV)*

There was a dear couple from a congregation I served who enjoyed putting together jigsaw puzzles during their free evenings. They were working at putting together a 1,000-piece puzzle and had the goal to each place five pieces each night before going to bed. That's a challenging thing to do with 1,000 little pieces, especially at the beginning stage.

I'm no expert at putting together puzzles, but I have learned that the best way to start a puzzle is to work first on the four corners, piece together the perimeter and then work on the center.



What Paul has done in Ephesians 4:11-13 is describe the work of equipping by beginning with four servant-leader roles (apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastors or teachers) – the four corners of the big picture.

We may not use titles like apostles and prophets in the church today, but I contend that the functions of these roles are still as necessary now as they ever were.

The title of *apostle* refers to more than just the 12 disciples. Barnabas was identified as an apostle in Acts 14:14, as was James the brother of Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:7). Others included Silvanus (1 Thessalonians 1:1) and Andronicus and Junia (Romans 16:7).

Two qualifications were required to be considered an apostle. First, they must have seen Jesus during his time of ministry (1 Corinthians 9:1), and second, they had to have seen and witnessed the risen Lord (Acts 1:21-22). The apostles were important pillars in the early church because they were able to remind the people of what they had seen with their own eyes and heard with their own ears.

In the church of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the role of apostle has become a function of the older members of the congregation. These modern-day apostles have observed and witnessed the faithfulness of the Lord during the years. They provide stability and a sense of history and continuity in the midst of changing times. Our older saints serve as reminders that we stand on the shoulders of many who have come before us.

They are the captains of the faith who have weathered the storms of the past and stand before us as witnesses of God's faithfulness. They are able to tell us the stories of old, just like the original apostles passed on what they had seen and heard. The witness of those who are mature in the faith is an important element for equipping the modern church.

The *prophets* did not so much foretell the future as they did forth-tell, or declare, the will and purposes of God in order to keep the community of faith on course. Most of the prophets were wanderers – they had no home. They had a specific passion and function. They often spoke to a certain audience, be it leaders – like Moses speaking to Pharaoh – or to a specific people group, like Jonah going to the Ninevites.

Today the prophetic role continues in various forms. Ephesians 4:14-16 calls for leaders in the church to speak the truth in love and not be like infants “tossed back and forth by the waves.” Prophets work to move the ship back on course. The Bible also talks about mutual accountability, being responsible to and for one another. As we speak truth in love to one another, we are continuing the prophetic function of old and the mandate described by Paul to the church in Ephesus. This prophetic role is an important element of the equipping and sanctifying function of the church.

The *evangelists* were the missionaries of the early church. These were the people who felt called by God to bring the good news to others. They may have traveled far, or they may have stayed in their home community.

This role of evangelism and service has not changed during the centuries. In our congregations, we support a number of evangelists, missionaries, and service workers around the world. It's important to say their names in our worship gatherings from time to time so we can keep them in our prayers and thoughts.

These brothers and sisters are serving as our ambassadors for Christ and as extensions of the church body. The sign of an equipping church is to have people going out beyond their comfort zones, leaving the safe harbor for uncharted waters. (Matthew 28:16-20)

Finally, we have the *pastors*. The pastors of the early church were not wanderers. Evangelists cover territory a mile wide and a foot deep, whereas pastors cover territory a foot wide and a mile deep. They serve as teachers and counselors and shepherds. Pastors are called to care for the body and encourage its members, one person at a time. And that continues to be the goal today. (1 Timothy 4:11-16)

Apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastors – these were the cornerstones of the early church and the ministry roles from which equipping believers took place.

Having identified the four corners of the big picture, the work of filling in the center now begins. Putting the pieces together is as challenging as it is exciting.

### Discussion questions for reflection and sharing

1. Do you find these descriptions helpful for the purpose of transferring the roles described in Scripture to functions that continue today?
2. Who do you see in your congregation that has the gifts to serve in these areas of ministry?
3. What gaps does your church have in these areas? How can a church work to call forth and nurture these gifts that may be waiting to be tapped within the body?



### **All hands on deck**

I am reminded of a country parson who was preaching a pointed sermon to his congregation one Sunday. He was trying to reinforce a vision for ministry within his church family, and he started out by saying,

“Now the church needs to get up and walk.”

And deacon Jones in the back shouted out, “Let it walk.”

The preacher said, “Now the church needs to get up and run.”

And deacon Jones said, “Amen, let it run.”

“Now the church needs to get up and fly,” said the pastor.

“Amen, brother, let it fly,” said deacon Jones.

“Now, it’s going to take a lot of time and effort to make the church fly,” said the pastor.

And deacon Jones shouted back, “Let it walk, brother, let it walk!”

*That’s the thing about “equipping the saints for ministry” – it takes time, effort and commitment. It requires a willingness to set aside the luxury of being a passenger and to enlist as a crew member.*

That’s the thing about “equipping the saints for ministry” – it takes time, effort and commitment. It requires a willingness to set aside the luxury of being a passenger and embrace the necessity of enlisting as a crew member.

### **Discussion questions for reflection and sharing**

1. As you think about your congregation, are the four leadership functions currently active in your church in formal or informal ways?
2. In what ways does leadership discernment and development take place within your congregation? What improvements might be needed?
3. Are the functions of the crew members honored and appreciated?
4. Are people willing to use their gifts when called upon by the church? If not, what might be the reasons they hesitate to get involved?

### **Priming the pump**

An old cowboy was in the desert dying of thirst. He came upon an old ghost town, and in the center of town was a rusty old crank water pump. There was a cup of water next to the pump with a note attached. It said, “Do not drink this water. This is to be used to prime the pump, which will then supply you with all the water you want. When you are satisfied, refill the cup for the next person who passes this way.” The cowboy had a decision to make. He could either drink what little water was in the cup or take the risk and pour that water down the pipe to prime the pump and receive all he would want or need.

It's kind of like that for us as well. So many churches are stuck in ruts of doing church the way it has always been done. It may seem safest to leave well enough alone. Why stir the waters and risk losing what little energy and availability people are already willing to share with the body?

God has supplied our congregations with all that is needed to do things far beyond what we could hope or imagine. (Ephesians 3:20-21) What are you going to do with your cup of water as a church? What would it look like to pour out the old, dried-up structures in faith that God will supply you with a new infilling of dreams and possibilities? (Philippians 2:17) As we open ourselves to new ideas from new leadership and new initiatives, we unleash a renewed vision reminiscent of the book of Acts. Who are those crew members in your congregation that have been sitting on the sidelines just waiting for someone to come and invite them forward so they can use their gifts in new ways?

### Discussion questions for reflection and sharing

1. Who are the new people in your midst who might be asked to become involved in the church's ministry?
2. What gifts are most needed to bring revitalization in your body?
3. When was the last time your congregation made an intentional effort to pray to the Lord of the harvest to bring forth workers? (Luke 10:2)

### Empowering the crew

Glenn McDonald, a Presbyterian minister, wrote an article in *The Christian Century* entitled "Imagining a New Church." In it, he identifies six marks of Discipleship. McDonald suggests that as we take on these marks of discipleship, we will more fully understand our specific calls to ministry and service within the body of Christ and within the world. These marks of discipleship include:

#### *1. A heart for Christ alone*

All other loyalties and priorities must yield themselves to the place God should hold in our life. The Lord is a jealous God and does not tolerate any competition. (Exodus 20:4-6)

#### *2. A mind transformed by the Word*

As a church, we have maintained a high regard for the Scriptures, but at the same time we are becoming a biblically illiterate people. Faithfulness for the future church requires a commitment to the authority of Scripture in our life together.



We need to recapture an emphasis for being biblically literate. Only then can we transform ourselves, let alone hope to transform our world. (2 Timothy 3:13-14)

### *3. Arms of love*

This creates an image for me of reaching out our hands in service to others, regardless of their race, creed or nationality. We are called to meet felt needs as they become known to us. (1 John 4:7-8)

### *4. Knees for prayer*

Increasingly I am hearing a call to prayer throughout the church, and I applaud it. To be a praying people, we must first become a humble people. Prayer at its core is recognition of our inability to do the work of the church on our own, as well as an acknowledgement of our total dependency on God. (2 Chronicles 7:14)

### *5. A voice to speak the Good News*

Proclamation of the story of salvation is what sets us apart from service-oriented civic organizations. To be faithful is to say that Jesus has saved us so that we will in turn share the good news of salvation in word and deed. (Romans 10:9-10)

### *6. A spirit of sacrifice*

The call to sacrifice and take up our cross may not be a great marketing concept, but it is at the heart of the gospel. We have tended to concentrate on the benefits of discipleship and downplay the call to commitment. Paul knew better than most what saying yes to Jesus really meant. The writer of Acts quotes what the Lord said to Ananias about Saul, who was being given a special call to serve among the Gentiles: “I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.” (Acts 9:16) In case we think we are off the hook, we have the words of Jesus in Mark 8:34 addressed to all who decide to follow him when he says, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”

#### **Discussion questions for reflection and sharing**

1. As you consider McDonald's six marks of discipleship, which do you see most evident in your life and in the life of your congregation?
2. Which area is the one in need of greatest attention?
3. What is the relationship between immersing ourselves in the spiritual disciplines and discerning our calling in life?

**Conclusion**

Take what time remains to gather in groups of 2-3 and:

- Share what gifts you see at work in others in your circle.
- Share which mark of discipleship you want to focus on during the next week.

**Additional reading and small group discussion resources**

Bugbee, Bruce and Don Cousins. *Network*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005.

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## Student Handout

# Stewards of Talent

All hands on deck

Ephesians 4:4-7, 11-16

### Getting started

1. What stories do you have of someone ministering to you with gifts you do not possess?
  
2. What examples are there in your church of people who provide a valuable service behind the scenes and call little attention to themselves?

### What floats your boat?

Use your imagination for a moment. Imagine your church building as a boat. What kind of boat would it be if it were to reflect the nature of your congregation?

- A rowboat is powered manually and is limited in the number of passengers it can carry.
- A sailboat is powered by the “wind.” When no breeze is present, it may spend time standing still or may risk capsizing in high winds.
- A catamaran is sleek and engineered for speed. It skims across the surface of the water and has little purpose but to bring pleasure to its captain and passengers.
- A canoe is unsteady by design and must stay close to shore and within sight of land.
- A cargo ship requires many workers and travels into deep waters and foreign ports.
- A cruise ship has a specialized crew that caters to feeding and entertaining its paying passengers.
- A fishing boat is a working vessel and has one specific job: to catch fish.
- Other options: houseboat, inflated inner tube, lifeboat, battleship, kayak, etc.

As you reflect on these images consider:

1. Are you a passenger or a crew member in your church?
  
2. When you arrived this morning, were you focused on what you would contribute as a member of the crew or what you might receive as a passenger?

### Captain and crew

Apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastors – these were the cornerstones of the early church and the ministry roles from which equipping believers took place.

*Reflection and sharing*

1. Did you find the descriptions of apostle, prophets, evangelists and pastors helpful for the purpose of transferring the roles described in Scripture to functions that continue today?
2. Who do you see in your congregation that has the gifts to serve in these areas of ministry?
3. What gaps does your church have in these areas of ministry? How can a church work to call forth and nurture these gifts that may be waiting to be tapped within the membership of the body?

**All hands on deck**

*Reflection and sharing*

1. As you think about your congregation, are the four leadership functions currently active in your church in formal or informal ways?
2. In what ways does leadership discernment and development take place within your congregation? What improvements might be needed?
3. Are the functions of the crew members honored and appreciated?
4. Are people willing to use their gifts when called upon by the church? If not, what might be the reasons they hesitate to get involved?



### **Priming the pump**

#### *Reflection and sharing*

1. Who are the new people in your midst who might be asked to become involved in the church's ministry?
2. What gifts are most needed to bring revitalization in your body?
3. When was the last time your congregation made an intentional effort to pray to the Lord of the harvest to bring forth workers? (see Luke 10:2)

### **Empowering the crew**

Glenn McDonald, a Presbyterian minister, wrote an article in *The Christian Century* entitled "Imagining a New Church." In it, he identifies Six Marks of Discipleship. McDonald suggests that as we take on these marks of discipleship, we will more fully understand our specific calls to ministry and service within the body of Christ and within the world. These marks of discipleship are:

1. A heart for Christ alone
2. A mind transformed by the Word
3. Arms of love
4. Knees for prayer
5. A voice to speak the good news
6. A spirit of sacrifice

#### *Reflection and sharing*

1. As you consider McDonald's Six Marks of Discipleship, which do you see most evident in your life and in the life of your congregation?
2. Which area is the one in need of greatest attention?

3. What is the relationship between immersing ourselves in the spiritual disciplines and discerning our calling in life?

### **Conclusion**

Take what time remains to gather in groups of 2-3 and:

1. Share what gifts you see at work in others in your circle.

2. Share which mark of discipleship you want to focus on during the next week.

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# Stewards of Health

The rhythm of life

2 Corinthians 4:7-18

*“The object of the spiritual journey is the healing of body, mind and spirit.”*

– Thomas Keating, *Invitation to Love*

*“... and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless.”*

– 1 Thessalonians 5:23. (NRSV)

*How do we find a healthy balance in our responsibility to care for our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit?*

Talking about our bodies isn't the easiest conversation to have. Many people obsess about our physical nature to the point where all that matters is being buff and beautiful. On the other hand, others seem to give little, if any, attention to these “jars of clay,” as Paul describes it in 2 Corinthians 4. How do we find a healthy balance in our responsibility to care for our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit? Knowing how important humor is to our well-being, have fun with the following creation story that has made its rounds on the Internet – author unknown.

In the beginning, God created the Heavens and the Earth and populated the Earth with broccoli, cauliflower and spinach, green and yellow and red vegetables of all kinds, so Man and Woman would live long and healthy lives.

Then using God's great gifts, Satan created Ben & Jerry's ice cream and Krispy Kreme donuts. And Satan said, “You want chocolate with that?” And Man said, “Yes!” and Woman said, “As long as you're at it, add some sprinkles.” They gained 10 pounds. And Satan smiled.

And God created the healthful food yogurt for Man and Woman to enjoy. And Satan brought forth white flour from the wheat and sugar from the cane and combined them. And Woman and Man – they both grew.

So God said, “Try my fresh green salad.” And Satan presented Thousand Island dressing, buttery croutons and garlic toast on the side. And Man and Woman unfastened their belts.

God then said, “I have sent you heart-healthy vegetables and olive oil in which to cook them.” And Satan brought forth deep-fried fish and chicken-fried steak so big it needed its own platter. And Man gained more weight, and his cholesterol went through the roof.

God then created a light, fluffy white cake, named it Angel Food Cake and said, “It is good.” Satan then created chocolate cake and named it Devil's Food.

God then brought forth running shoes so that His children might lose those extra pounds. And Satan gave cable TV with a remote control so Man would not have to toil changing the channels. And Man and Woman laughed and cried before the flickering blue light and gained pounds.

Then God brought forth the potato, naturally low in fat and brimming with nutrition. And Satan peeled off the healthful skin and sliced the starchy center into chips and deep-fried them. And Man gained pounds.

God then gave lean beef so that Man might consume fewer calories and still satisfy his appetite. And Satan created McDonald's and its 99-cent double cheeseburger. Then said, "You want fries with that?" And Man replied, "Yes! And super size them!" And Satan said, "It is good." And Man went into cardiac arrest. God sighed and created quadruple bypass surgery.

### **Thinking holistically**

I am reminded of the comforting words of a nutritionist friend of mine who speaks of *everyday* foods and *occasional* foods. Not all that is sweet and savory is bad. It is more a matter of how frequently we enjoy such foods. Donuts, cakes and fries can be part of our occasional diet, but as is the case in many aspects of life, we are called to self-discipline and moderation with such pleasures.

As a way of getting in touch with our physical selves, take two minutes to get in touch with your heartbeat (for those who cannot find your pulse, have a friend dial 911). Pause in silence as you feel the rhythm of life-giving blood flowing through you.

### **Discussion questions for reflection and sharing**

1. As you feel the pulse of your heartbeat, consider the wonderful gift of life and the amazing physical bodies we have been given by God.
2. Consider how fragile and precious life is in this world. We are literally one heartbeat away from entering eternity.
3. What other thoughts come to mind as you get in touch with this body rhythm?

Besides our heartbeat, there are other healthy rhythms associated with being balanced and whole. Take time to discuss other aspects of life that we need to keep in balance – spiritually, emotionally, intellectually, socially, etc.



*Being stewards of health includes healthy eating and exercise, but these two aspects of self-care alone do not fully make us whole.*

### Discussion question for reflection and sharing

How well-balanced are the following parts of your life?

- Work and play
- Laughter and contemplation
- Time alone and socializing with others
- Name additional complementary pairings

### Mind, body and soul

*Read together 2 Corinthians 4:7-18.*

Just as simple jars of clay can be used in many ways from practical functions to decorative, so too our physical selves take on many natures. Being stewards of health includes healthy eating and exercise, but these two aspects of self-care alone do not fully make us whole.

Let's take some time to reflect on the ways in which we are "fearfully and wonderfully made." (Psalm 139:14) So often it is only when part of our being is out of sync that we take time to appreciate what being healthy really means.

### Discussion questions for reflection and sharing

1. Share together what comes to mind as you consider the physical limitations you are most in touch with today because of your own or a loved one's health challenge.
2. As you consider the aging process and all that means, what concerns come to mind?
3. Read Psalm 139:13-16 and consider what modern metaphors or images we might make today.

*We always carry around **in our body** the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed **in our body**. – 2 Corinthians 4:10*

We are familiar with the idea of our bodies being a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19), but how often do we consider what Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 4:10 as *revealing Jesus in our body*? Paul was probably more aware of

*We are familiar with the idea of our bodies being a temple of the Holy Spirit, but how often do we consider what Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 4:10 as revealing Jesus in our body?*

his mortality and the fragile nature of life because he often suffered physically for being a disciple of Jesus. He saw his body as a means by which he gave testimony to his faith.

### Discussion questions for reflection and sharing

Read 1 Corinthians 6:19 and compare to 2 Corinthians 4:10.

1. How do these ideas written by Paul translate to our own day and time?
2. In what ways do we view our bodies as a means by which Jesus is revealed?
3. Read Romans 12:1-2 and reflect together on what it means to give our bodies as living sacrifices.

If we think of our body as a vessel created by God in our mother's womb (Psalm 139:13), we begin to comprehend that this body we call "ours" is really on loan. If we are created in the *image of God* (Genesis 1:26), we are in fact a reflection of God. It's not that we are called to be obsessed with being beautiful and buff, but there is an implied principle in this spiritual understanding that we are called to treat this physical body with honor and respect.

### Discussion questions for reflection and sharing

Read Psalm 139:13 and Genesis 1:26.

1. How would you describe the current cultural view of the physical body? In what ways is the cultural view of the body consistent or inconsistent with the biblical perspective?
2. In light of Psalm 139, 2 Corinthians 4 and Genesis 1, what is the response we should make to the cultural messages we are receiving about the physical body?
3. How does our body image translate to our feelings about our spiritual image? Is there a connection? Should there be?
4. Does a positive or negative body image impact how we express ourselves spiritually to God or others?

### Health and attitude

Several years ago there was a show on TV called "Hee Haw." One of my favorite parts of that show was when several men with long, forlorn faces would come out and sing:



*Gloom, despair and agony on me. Deep, dark depression, excessive misery. If it weren't for bad luck, I'd have no luck at all. Gloom, despair and agony on me.*

The men would go on to sing about how bad their life was and conclude this sad saga by crying on each other's shoulders. For some reason, after watching this scene on the show each week, my own life didn't seem so bad. What strikes me as I think about my response to this comedy sketch is how much our attitude and outlook on day-to-day events can affect our overall view of life.

Take time to read the words of Paul from 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 and note the contrast in terms he uses in verses 8-9.

*Afflicted ... but not crushed,  
Perplexed ... but not driven to despair,  
Persecuted ... but not forsaken,  
Struck down ... but not destroyed.*

*The song of this world is ultimately one of **gloom**, but the song of the church is ultimately one of **glory**.*

Notice there are expressions of struggle – but also messages of hope. The song of this world is ultimately one of **gloom**, but the song of the church is ultimately one of **glory**. Life is filled with these contrasting, and sometimes polarizing, messages.

### Discussion questions for reflection and sharing

Read 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 (note the contrasts spoken of here).

1. Who in our circle of acquaintances has a healthy attitude about aging – inwardly being renewed day by day (verse 16)?
2. What are your fears about the aging process and the impact it may have on your body?

### Finding alignment

We are a complex creation of interconnected parts all miraculously held together in this biological and chemical collection of organs, muscles and fluids. Each part of our being influences the others. We are more than the sum of our individual parts because within it all dwells the presence of our Creator – now is that amazing or what?

What should amaze us daily is how well it all works – even when individual parts may hurt or get out of balance. Being whole means being aware of interconnected internal and external, physical and intellectual, mortal and immortal aspects of our being.

Review the descriptions below on the Wellness Wheel (p. 37) and consider what areas may be in need of alignment and balance. Rather than being discouraged by

what areas may be less than ideal, rejoice at how well we can function in spite of being less than perfect. No one is in perfect alignment, but we are able to use our areas of strength to help us in the areas where growth is needed.

### **Wellness wheel (see page 37)**

Each of the spokes on the wheel represents one aspect of your health and wellness. Place a dot on each of the spokes indicating where you see yourself. When you have placed all the dots, draw a line connecting the dots. In the center circle, write a number from 1-10 indicating your current sense of closeness to God, with 1 being very distant and 10 being very close. Now connect the dots you placed on each spoke and see what kind of circle (or other shape) you create.

### **Discussion questions for reflection and sharing**

1. What does the shape you created by connecting the dots look like? Is it well-rounded, lopsided, perfectly aligned?
2. What are your current areas of strength? What are your growth areas?
3. If you were to identify one aspect of your personal health to work with this next month, what would it be? How will you work at strengthening this area?

### **Conclusion**

1. What new insights or valuable reminders have resulted from the discussion you shared as a group?
2. How can you as a class work at supporting one another toward greater health and wholeness?
3. Are there new initiatives that could come from this class and this discussion that could be taken to the broader congregation to encourage a stronger emphasis on health and wholeness? Brainstorm proactive ways you might help make a difference in this area in your congregation and maybe even in your broader community.

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## Student Handout

# Stewards of Health

The rhythm of life

2 Corinthians 4:7-18

### Getting started: Thinking holistically

As a way of getting in touch with our physical selves, take two minutes to get in touch with your heartbeat (for those who cannot find your pulse, have a friend call 911). Pause in silence as you feel the rhythm of life-giving blood flowing through you.

1. As you feel the pulse of your heartbeat, consider the wonderful gift of life and the amazing physical bodies we have been given by God.
2. Consider how fragile and precious life is in this world. We are literally one heartbeat away from entering eternity.
3. What other thoughts come to mind as you get in touch with this body rhythm?

Besides our heartbeat, there are other healthy rhythms associated with being balanced and whole. Take time to discuss the other aspects of life that we need to keep in balance – spiritually, emotionally, intellectually, socially, etc.

How well-balanced are the following parts of your life?

- Work and play
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- Time alone and socializing with others
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### Mind, body and soul

*Read together 2 Corinthians 4:7-18.*

Just as simple jars of clay can be used in many ways from practical functions to decorative, so too our physical selves take on many natures. Being stewards of health includes healthy eating and exercise, but these two aspects of self-care alone do not fully make us whole. Reflect on the many ways in which we are “fearfully and wonderfully made.” (Psalm 139:14)

1. Share together what comes to mind as you consider the physical limitations you are most in touch with today because of your own or a loved one’s health challenge.

2. As you consider the aging process and all that means, what concerns come to mind?

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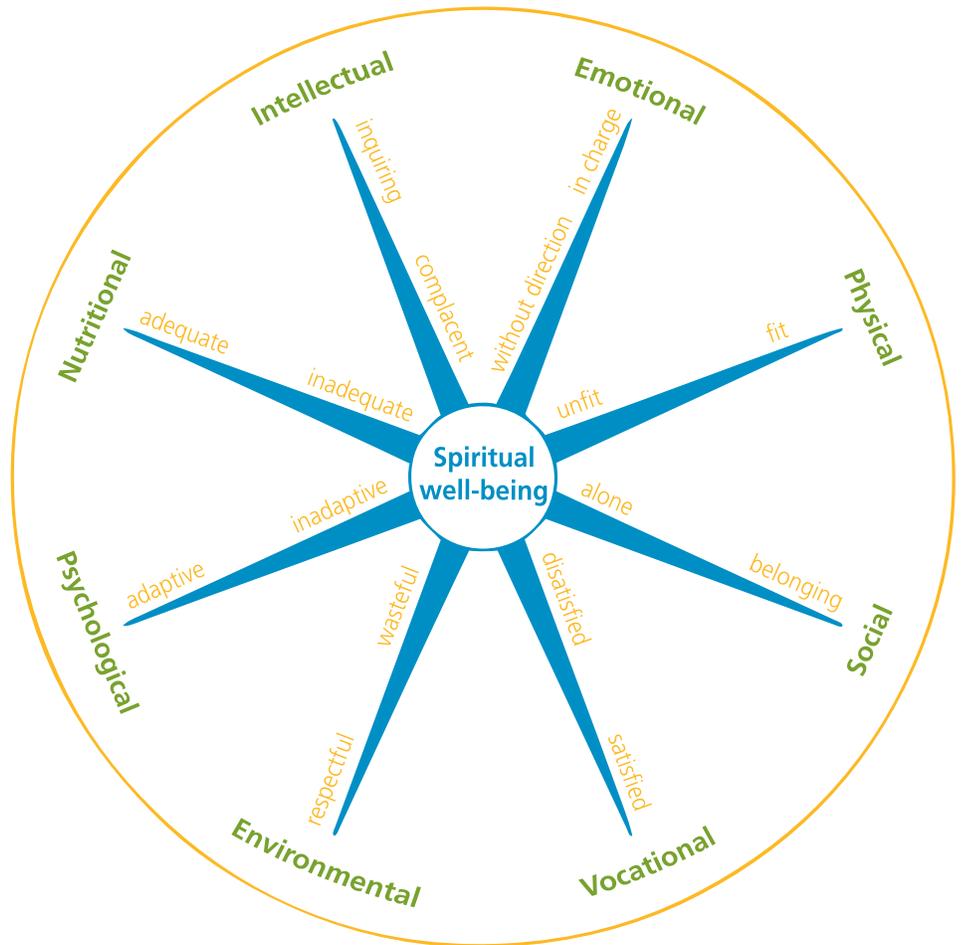
*Afflicted ... but not crushed,  
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*Read 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 (note the contrasts spoken of here).*

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### **Conclusion**

1. What new insights or valuable reminders have resulted from the discussion you shared as a group?
2. How can you as a class work at supporting one another toward greater health and wholeness?
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# Stewards of Money

God, money and me

Psalm 24:1-2

*"Your money, or your life.' We know what to do when a burglar makes this demand of us, but not when God does." – Mignon McLaughlin*

*"They deem me mad because I will not sell my days for gold; and I deem them mad because they think my days have a price." – Kahlil Gibran*

## God our provider

Lessons in stewardship appear early in Scripture. The first lesson we learn is that God is the Creator (Genesis 1) and because of this, ownership rights are God's. David in Psalm 24 makes the connection that since God is the Lord of the land (landlord), God is also sole owner of all that is.

*The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters.*

– Psalm 24:1-2

It is repeated numerous times in Scripture the ways that God provides for his people. In the Garden of Eden, food was plentiful (Genesis 2:4-9). Escaping Egypt, Israel's provisions were sparse but adequate (Exodus 16:21). During the centuries, God became known as Jehovah Jireh – God Our Provider. In spite of this proven track record, God's people still complained and wondered about where their next meal might come from or whether they would die of thirst in the desert. (Exodus 17:5-7)

## Discussion questions for reflection and sharing

1. Have you ever been in a situation where you questioned whether God would provide for your basic needs?
2. What areas of your life are hardest to trust God to provide for?

## Money: Master or servant

When we talk about money, people get anxious. It's not a subject we are comfortable discussing. We have a tendency to categorize this subject as private – but how private is it really? We send messages about our financial standing every day in conspicuous ways by the cars we drive, the houses we live in, the clothes we wear, the schools we or our children attend, the vacations we enjoy, the hobbies we

embrace – etc. What we are really “saying” when we don’t talk about money is that this topic simply isn’t anyone’s business but our own.

In contrast to our silence on the matter, we discover a completely different attitude about the subject in Scripture. The prophets of the Old Testament, Jesus and the writers of the epistles were anything but quiet about the issue of money. Consider this comparison of topics and the frequency of their appearance in Scripture:

- 50 references to baptism.
- 225 verses related to prayer.
- 300 verses related to faith.
- 700 verses focused on love.
- But at least 2,350 verses in Scripture have to do with money and possessions.
- 16 of 38 parables spoken by Jesus are about money and possessions.
- The only subject spoken of more often is that of the Kingdom of God.

*Money and possessions have been – and continue to be – the greatest obstacle to full and complete loyalty to God.*

What do these statistics tell us? The prophets and Jesus recognized that money has a god-like power. Matthew quotes Jesus as saying, “You cannot serve both God and Money.” (Matthew 6:24) Money and possessions have been – and continue to be – the greatest obstacle to full and complete loyalty to God. Jesus spoke directly to this fact when he shared these bold words in the Sermon on the Mount. Paul also tells his apprentice Timothy that the love of money can quickly lead us astray from God’s priorities for our lives (1 Timothy 6:10).

### **Jesus, Paul and money**

Jesus and Paul cautioned the people of their day with the same words we need to hear today. We are equally tempted to misuse the money we have been given from God. As stewards, we are called to use money in ways that help fulfill God’s purposes in this world. Maybe money is talked about only second to the Kingdom of God because of our tendency to take this tool and make it an end in itself rather than a means of faithful service to God.

### **Discussion questions for reflection and sharing**

1. What becomes our greatest challenge in keeping our priorities in line with the words of Jesus and Paul?
2. What would people know about our money priorities based on what they see of our lifestyle and consumer choices?
3. What is it that keeps us from talking about our money decisions and dilemmas with each other?
4. In what ways does money have a god-like power?



Besides our hesitancy to talk about our consumerism, we have even greater reservations when talking about our giving. The three greatest barometers that determine a church member's commitment to a congregation is Sunday morning attendance, participation in the life of the congregation, and giving. Attendance and congregational participation are fairly easy to gauge. However, in most of our congregations, pastors – who have the responsibility to tend their flock – have no idea of the giving practices of their people.

I know of pastors who do not want to know who gives what. In many congregations, everyone knows what the pastor makes, but we don't think the pastors should know what the people give. I think there may be good reason for pastors to know the giving practices of their members. It not only is a barometer of an individual's commitment to the congregation, but a way to gauge an individual's and family's well-being should the giving go down over time.

#### Discussion questions for reflection and sharing

1. Do you think the privacy or secrecy concerning giving patterns of church members is helpful or harmful? Explain.
2. What does Matthew 6:1-4 mean when it says not to let your left hand know what your right hand is doing?

*But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret.*

– Matthew 6:3-4a

3. Is the caution here about church leaders not being aware of our giving practices or about not broadcasting to others what we may – or may not – give to those in need?
4. If we maintain secrecy in giving, is it because we want all members treated equally by the leadership? If so, are all visited equally, are all represented on committees equally?
5. In what ways does secrecy surrounding our money practices give money a “god-like” power over us?

In Acts 2:45, we have a wonderful story of generosity demonstrated by the early church as a response to the empowerment of the Holy Spirit following Pentecost. Generosity to the point of sacrifice was a supernatural manifestation of the Spirit. By that I mean it's not something most of us would practice separate from our commitment to following Jesus and feeling compelled to give to others instead of keeping it for ourselves.

*Money, as a tool, has the power to accomplish much for us. Money also has the power to influence how we see ourselves and where we fit in society. Though it is limited, money's power is godlike and competes with our loyalty to God. But God alone is the source of our life and invites us to celebrate and be content in God's goodness and provision. (Edwin Friesen, **God, Money & Me**, Mennonite Foundation of Canada, 2004, pg. vii)*

Maybe you have that natural gift of generosity. I, for one, don't. My natural tendency is to look out for myself. Except for my decision to follow Jesus and my sense of call to serve others, it is not "natural" for me to give away a significant portion of my income. It is beyond my nature – or supernatural – to part with the money I have earned.

**Discerning God's call for my life**

Jesus associated with people of all socioeconomic levels. He showed no favoritism and spoke about the various barriers people face related to their entrance into God's Kingdom. Below are several texts that identify ways Jesus related to and challenged people concerning their relationship to money and possessions.

Discuss as many of the texts among yourselves as time allows, and suggest any common themes or lessons you observe based on the following questions. You may want to divide these texts among several pairings of class members, then report back to the whole group what you have learned.

Name	Text	Lessons
Zacchaeus	Luke 19:1-10	
Joseph of Arimathea	Matthew 27:57-61 Mark 15:42-46 Luke 23:50-53	
Women Followers	Luke 8:3 Luke 23:55-24:10 Mark 15:40; 16:1	
Roman Centurion	Matthew 8:5-13 Luke 7:1-6	
Rich Young Ruler	Matthew 19:16-30 Mark 10:17-31 Luke 18:18-30	
Philemon	Philemon 1	
Joseph, called Barnabas	Acts 4:36-37	
Ananias/Sapphira	Acts 5:1-11	
Rich Christians	James 2:1-13	
Lydia	Acts 16:13-15, 40	
Cornelius the Centurion	Acts 10	
Ethiopian Treasurer	Acts 8:26-40	
Simon the Sorcerer	Acts 8:9-25	

Adapted from *The Word in Life Study Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1993), 118.



### Discussion questions for reflection and sharing

1. What is it that each of the characters did with their wealth prior to meeting Jesus?
2. How did their attitudes toward wealth change after encountering Jesus?
3. What lessons do we learn from their transformations – if there was one?
4. Is there one particular lifestyle or model identified for all Christians to follow based on these texts? If so, what is it? If not, what might this suggest?
5. What is God calling *you* to do – and be – in relation to your use of financial resources?

### Conclusion

Some portions of Scripture are clearly prescriptive for all followers of Jesus, such as the 10 Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount. Other teachings are descriptive of how Jesus related to one particular individual based on a unique set of circumstances. An example of this is Jesus' call to the Rich Young Ruler to sell all he had and give to the poor and follow him.

Since this scenario is descriptive, there are truths for all of us to learn, but I don't believe that what Jesus says to this one person is what we are all called to do in all circumstances. Since the young man in this story was clearly tied too strongly to his stuff, this was the only way for him to be challenged to free himself from the god-like power of wealth that had gripped his heart.

Our challenge is to read the stories and teachings within their particular context and determine how the truths of these lessons apply to us today. For this, we need to be in a trusting relationship with each other. We also need to be able to talk about subjects that may typically be difficult and out of our comfort zones. Since we are all life-long learners when it comes to following Jesus, we can all contribute to the conversation and benefit from the experiences others bring. May God grant us wisdom and joy in this journey of discovery and faithfulness.

**Additional reading and small group discussion resources**

Dungan, Nathan. *Prodigal Sons & Material Girls: How Not To Be Your Child's ATM*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons INC, 2003.

Friesen, Edwin. *God, Money & Me: Exploring the Spiritual Significance of Money in Our Lives*. Winnipeg, MB: Mennonite Foundation of Canada, 2004.

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## Student Handout

# Stewards of Money

God, money and me

Psalm 24:1-2

### Getting started

Lessons in stewardship appear early in Scripture. The first lesson we learn is that God is the Creator (Genesis 1) and because of this, ownership rights are God's. David in Psalm 24 makes the connection that since God is the Lord of the land (landlord), God is also sole owner of all that is.

*The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters.*  
– Psalm 24:1-2

### God our provider

Read: Genesis 2:4-9; Exodus 16:21; Exodus 17:5-7

1. Have you ever been in a situation where you questioned whether God would provide for your basic needs?
2. What areas of your life are hardest to trust God to provide for?

### Money: Master or servant

1. What becomes our greatest challenge in keeping our priorities in line with the words of Jesus and Paul?
2. What would people know about our money priorities based on what they see of our lifestyle and consumer choices?
3. What is it that keeps us from talking about our money decisions and dilemmas with each other?
4. In what way does money have a god-like power?

5. Do you think the privacy or secrecy concerning giving patterns of church members is helpful or harmful? Explain.
  
6. What does Matthew 6:1-4 mean when it says, “But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret”?
  
7. Is the caution here about church leaders not being aware of our giving practices or about not broadcasting to others what we may – or may not – give to those in need?
  
8. If we maintain secrecy in giving, is it because we want all members treated equally by the leadership? If so, are all visited equally, are all represented on committees equally?
  
9. In what ways does secrecy surrounding our money practices give money a “god-like” power over us?

**ME: Discerning God’s call for my life**

Discuss as many of the texts among yourselves as time allows, and suggest any common themes or lessons you observe based on the following questions. You may want to divide these texts among several pairings of class members, then report back to the whole group what you have learned.

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<i>Name</i>	<i>Text</i>	<i>Lessons</i>
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Adapted from *The Word in Life Study Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1993), 118.

#### **Discussion questions for reflection and sharing**

1. What is it that each of the characters did with their wealth prior to meeting Jesus?
2. How did their attitudes toward wealth change after encountering Jesus?
3. What lessons do we learn from their transformations – if there was one?
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### **Conclusion**

Some portions of Scripture are clearly prescriptive for all followers of Jesus, such as the 10 Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount. Other teachings are descriptive of how Jesus related to one particular individual based on a unique set of circumstances. An example of this is Jesus' call to the Rich Young Ruler to sell all he had and give to the poor and follow him.

Since this scenario is descriptive, there are truths for all of us to learn, but I don't believe that what Jesus says to this one person is what we are all called to do in all circumstances. Since the young man in this story was clearly tied too strongly to his stuff, this was the only way for him to be challenged to free himself from the god-like power of wealth that had gripped his heart.

Our challenge is to read the stories and teachings within their particular context and determine how the truths of these lessons apply to us today. For this, we need to be in a trusting relationship with each other. We also need to be able to talk about subjects that may typically be difficult and out of our comfort zones. May God grant us wisdom and joy in this journey of discovery and faithfulness.

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# Stewards of Creation

Lord of heaven and earth

Genesis 2:15; Leviticus 25:23; Psalm 24:1

Earth facts

- The United States releases 25 percent of the world's carbon dioxide.
- From 1975 – 2000, new houses in the United States grew 38 percent bigger despite having fewer people in each household, on average.
- Lack of safe water and sanitation is the world's largest cause of illness.

(*Creation Care: Keepers of the Earth*, Luke Gascho)

## Care of creation and Christian discipleship

What level of importance should we give to the subject of caring for the Earth? Chances are, responses will vary widely, but ask this question in church and you may hear comments such as:

- Isn't this topic a result of New Age influences on the church?
- Would Jesus drive an SUV?
- Didn't God say the Earth is here for us to use and have dominion over?
- Much of the electricity we use in our country comes from coal, so are we really making a difference by driving hybrid cars? Besides, my car is paid for.
- With all the tree huggers and secular green organizations, shouldn't we be careful about being "unevenly yoked" to organizations that have no faith perspective at all when they address this issue?
- How can you claim to be a steward of creation if you hunt for sport?

Let's not gloss over these questions, but let's keep them in mind as we consider Scripture and our relationship to this cosmic rock hurtling through space we call home, along with 6 billion other people. Take some time to review the following statement from the 1995 *Confession of Faith from a Mennonite Perspective*. Test Scripture and allow it to create the framework for your conversation. Read each paragraph along with the text on which it is based.

## Creation care and the Mennonite confession of faith

In 1995 the *Confession of Faith from a Mennonite Perspective* was adopted for use within the church. Since then, many congregations have used this resource as a way of preparing people for membership in our congregations. Read together Article 5 on Creation and Divine Providence and review the related Scripture as desired when you discuss this aspect of faith.

### *Article 5. Creation and Divine Providence*

We believe that God has created the heavens and the Earth and all that is in them, [1] and that God preserves and renews what has been made. All creation ultimately

has its source outside itself and belongs to the Creator. The world has been created good because God is good and provides all that is needed for life. [2]

We believe that the universe has been called into being as an expression of God's love and sovereign freedom alone. Creation witnesses to the eternal power and divine nature of God, who gives meaning and purpose to life and who alone is worthy of worship and praise. [3] We acknowledge that God sustains creation in both continuity and change. We believe that God upholds order in creation and limits the forces of sin and evil for the sake of preserving and renewing humanity and the world. [4]

God also works to save human beings and the world from death and destruction and to overcome the forces of sin and evil. We therefore are called to respect the natural order of creation and to entrust ourselves to God's care and keeping, whether in adversity or plenty. Neither the work of human hands, nor the forces of the natural world around us, nor the power of the nations among which we live are worthy of the trust and honor due the Creator on whom they depend. [5]

[1] Genesis 1:1; Isaiah 45:11f; John 1:3.

[2] Genesis 1:31; 1 Timothy 4:4.

[3] Psalm 19:1-6; Romans 1:19-23.

[4] Genesis 9:8-17; Psalm 104; Ephesians 3:9-11.

[5] Psalm 33; Matthew 6:25-33; Matthew 10:26-31.

### Discussion questions for reflection and sharing

1. Were you aware that this statement was part of our Confession of Faith?
2. What about this statement do you agree or disagree with?
3. Do you consider the care and stewardship of creation an extension of our witness in today's world? Why or why not?

### What is your ecological footprint?

We have all heard or read about the disparity between the use of energy and the level of consumption in industrial nations as compared to third-world countries. Below is an exercise to bring the statistics a little closer to home. Take a few minutes to fill this out and report back to each other how you scored. This assessment was developed by New Community Project, which is a faith-based organization concerned with issues of caring for creation.



*If all the world's people lived like we do, we'd need four more planets to provide for us.*

### *A lifestyle assessment tool from the New Community Project*

An “ecological footprint” is the amount of the Earth’s productive capacity that a person uses to meet his or her consumption patterns. If the world’s productive area were divided evenly among the world’s 6-plus billion people, there would be about 4.5 acres per person. Currently, the footprint of the average person in the world is around 5.1 acres, meaning we’re already over budget as a human family.

But it gets worse: more than 50 of the poorest countries in the world have a per capita footprint significantly below five acres, while North Americans (not including Mexico) draw on an average 23.7 acres per person. Here’s another way to look at it: If all the world’s people lived like we do, we’d need four more planets to provide for us.

Let’s get started on calculating your ecological footprint!

### *Ecological footprint calculation*

1. How many people are in your household? **Points** \_\_\_\_\_
  - 1 (30 points)
  - 2 (25 points)
  - 3 (20 points)
  - 4 (15 points)
  - 5 (10 points)
  - 6+ (5 points)
  
2. How is your home heated? **Points** \_\_\_\_\_
  - Natural Gas (30 points)
  - Electricity (40 points)
  - Oil (50 points)
  - Renewable (0 points)
  
3. What is the setting of your hot water heater? **Points** \_\_\_\_\_
  - Vacation (5 points)
  - Warm (10 points)
  - Hot (20 points)
  - Don’t know (25 points)
  
4. At how many meals per week do you eat meat or shrimp? **Points** \_\_\_\_\_
  - 0 (0 points)
  - 1-3 (10 points)
  - 4-6 (30 points)
  - 7-10 (45 points)
  - 11+ (60 points)

5. How many homemade meals do you eat per week (include packed lunches, etc.)?

Points \_\_\_\_\_

Under 10 (25 points)

10-14 (20 points)

15-18 (15 points)

18+ (10 points)

6. Do you purchase locally grown food items? Points \_\_\_\_\_

Most of the time (20 points)

Sometimes (30 points)

Rarely (40 points)

I grow my own vegetables (subtract 5 points from total)

7. Do you buy organic foods? Points \_\_\_\_\_

Mostly (0 points)

Rarely (20 points)

8. If you or your family own vehicles, what type are they (add points for each vehicle)? Points \_\_\_\_\_

Hybrid (10 points)

Motorcycle (20 points)

Compact (35 points)

Mid-sized (60 points)

Small pickup (70 points)

Minivan or van, SUV (100 points)

Pickup (130 points)

9. How do you get to school/work? Points \_\_\_\_\_

Car (50 points)

Public transit (25 points)

School bus (20 points)

Walk (0 points)

Bike/skates (0 points)

10. How many daily car trips does your household take? Points \_\_\_\_\_

None (0 points)

1-2 (10 points)

3-4 (20 points)

5+ (30 points)



11. How many energy-efficient features are in your home (low-flow shower head, low-flush toilet, compact florescent light bulbs, Energy Star appliances, insulation around water heater, etc.)? **Points** \_\_\_\_\_
- 0 (40 points)
  - 1-3 (25 points)
  - 4-6 (15 points)
  - 7+ (10 points)
12. Does your household try to reduce the amount of waste and toxins in the house (buying bulk food, reusing containers, natural cleaners, etc.)? **Points** \_\_\_\_\_
- Most of the time (0 points)
  - Sometimes (10 points)
  - Rarely (20 points)
  - Never (30 points)
13. Does your household compost? **Points** \_\_\_\_\_
- Most of the time (0 points)
  - Sometimes (5 points)
  - Never (15 points)
14. Does your household recycle newspapers, aluminum, glass and plastics? **Points** \_\_\_\_\_
- Most of the time (5 points)
  - Sometimes (10 points)
  - Rarely (15 points)
  - Never (20 points)
15. How many garbage bags of waste do you set out for pick up weekly? **Points** \_\_\_\_\_
- 0 (0 points)
  - ½ (5 points)
  - 1 (10 points)
  - 2 (20 points)
16. How many bottled beverages do you drink per week? **Points** \_\_\_\_\_
- 0 (0 points)
  - 1-3 (5 points)
  - 4+ (10 points)

17. Regarding lawn care, you use: **Points** \_\_\_\_\_

Nonmotorized mower (0 points)

Electric mower (10 points)

Gas-powered push mower (15 points)

Riding mower (20 points)

*and* (add to total)

Pesticides/fertilizer (10 points)

Frequent irrigation (10 points)

**Total: Points** \_\_\_\_\_

**Bonus Section Points to subtract from total** \_\_\_\_\_

18. You have been instrumental in helping an institution, such as a church, school or workplace; live more responsibly (setting up a recycling program, purchasing paper with high recycled content, ending use of lawn chemicals, having an energy audit, etc.).

Yes: -50 points.

19. You have been instrumental in helping a community or larger network live more responsibly (instigating a community-wide recycling program, bringing a multi-site company online for recycling or for purchasing compact fluorescent light bulbs, etc.).

Yes: -100 points

20. You actively take responsibility for other people's wastefulness (pulling recyclables out of the neighbor's trash, picking up aluminum cans along the roadway, etc.)

Yes: -25 points

21. Do others sometimes notice and/or comment on your environmentally conscious lifestyle?

Yes: -25 points

**Grand Total: Points** \_\_\_\_\_

(from New Community Project and written by David Radcliff – permission granted for congregational use)

### **Footprints II**

As I looked back on my life, I could see the footprints I had left as I walked through this world – like footprints in the sand. At first, the prints were deep and distinctive – as if I had been stomping along or carrying something quite heavy. Then, later on, I noticed they gradually became lighter – and were soon joined by other footprints,



both human and animal, walking alongside. “Lord,” I asked, “why were my feet making such deep imprints for a while, but then became lighter and seemed to be joined by others?”

“My child,” the Lord replied, “in the beginning you had the idea that life consists in the abundance of possessions, and you gathered as much of my Earth as you could carry. But then,” the Lord said with a smile, “you realized that life is much more than these things – not only lightening your footprint, but lightening your impact on the good earth.”

“And the steps beside mine?”

“At first there was no room in your world for these others, but after the change... they turned out to be the treasure you had been seeking all along.”

– New Community Project

*Peace through justice/Care for Creation/Experiential learning*

[www.newcommunityproject.org](http://www.newcommunityproject.org); 888-800-2985

718 Wilder Street, Elgin, IL 60123 (used with permission)

### Discussion questions for reflection and sharing

1. How does the ecological footprint calculation exercise affect you as you consider the impact we in the West have on the rest of the world?
2. To what extent should we be concerned about reducing our consumption and ecological footprint?
3. To what extent is this an issue of caring for our neighbor?
4. To what extent do we prioritize this issue alongside the other concerns facing our 6 billion global neighbors?
5. What practical things have you and your family discussed that can help reduce your footprint?
6. If you are familiar with the original version of “Footprints,” what parallels do you make between the original and the adapted version?

### Stewardship and ownership

*The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it; for he has founded it on the seas, and established it on the rivers. Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? Those who have clean hands and pure hearts, who do not lift up their souls*

*to what is false, and do not swear deceitfully. They will receive blessing from the Lord, and vindication from the God of their salvation.*

– Psalm 24:1-5 (NRSV)

A story is told of a group of scientists who discovered how to create life out of dirt. They were quite proud of themselves and invited the media to come and witness this amazing feat. God also decided to come and listen in. After a lengthy introduction, the scientists declared that the creation theory and the need for a God as Creator could now be set aside since they had shown what could be done through the scientific process.

As they were about to begin their exercise with a box of dirt they had brought for the purpose of the demonstration, God's voice boomed over the crowd. "Excuse me – would you mind using your own dirt?"

God's fingerprints are over all of creation. Nothing that exists was made without God – be it the earth, the sky or the sea. As we reflect on our achievements, we need to be careful to avoid an arrogant spirit concerning what we have accomplished without recognizing first what God has done to make our actions and successes possible.

### **Stewardship and partnership**

A pastor went to visit the home of a member who was known for his love of gardening. After touring the backyard, the pastor made the comment of how beautifully manicured the lawns and gardens were and what a glorious work God continues to do with creation. The master gardener considered this for a moment, then quietly responded saying, "Well, you should have seen it when God was working at it by himself."

Read Genesis 2:15-17 and note how God invites Adam and Eve to partner with him in tending the Garden of Eden. The traditional interpretation uses the words "till and keep." More accurate interpretations for our day might be to "preserve and protect."

In Genesis 1:28 the words "subdue" or "dominion" are often used. But to have dominion is not to dominate, but rather to be a steward. The word *dominion* has association with the concept of kingly rule. A king who serves well is one who cares for the subjects within his realm. Domination is a misuse of power, be it over people or over the resources God has placed here to tend and protect.

The original role for Adam and Eve (in addition to being God's companions) – and the ongoing duty for us all – was to care for, protect and enjoy what God had created.



### Discussion questions for reflection and sharing

1. Where do you most see God's "fingerprints" (evidence of God's presence) when you look at creation?
2. In what ways do you see us needing to partner with God just as Adam and Eve were created to partner with God in Eden (Genesis 2:15-17)?

*Since land was here before humanity and since it will be here long after we leave, it is a resource to be treated with care and respect.*

### The practice of usufruct

There is a wonderful and obscure word that has resurfaced recently as a result of renewed conviction about caring for creation. It is the word "usufruct." Its origins date back to the time of the Roman Empire. It was a concept that recognized that land in particular was to be held in trust for future generations. The idea of land ownership was held very loosely. Since land was here before humanity, and since it will be here long after we leave, it is a resource to be treated with care and respect.

Thomas Jefferson reintroduced this word into our nation's consciousness as the laws of land were being formulated at the beginning stages of our nation. Jefferson was a farmer who at his core understood the importance of being stewards of the land. He emphasized in his writings that we were "trustees," not owners of the land. This emphasis by Jefferson became known as the Stewardship Doctrine, which traced its roots back to the teachings of Leviticus 25:23: "The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants."

*Jefferson's philosophy that the earth belongs in usufruct to the living at least partially reiterates the biblical paradigm of the earth as intergenerational commons, the fruits and benefits of which should be accessible to every member of every generation. He takes the position that no landholder has a natural right to control the land or dispose of it after his or her death. The land is entailed to the larger society; it reverts to the larger society upon the holder's death. Society may choose to pass the land on to beneficiaries or assignees chosen by the original landholder, but there is nothing in natural law which requires this. By universal law, indeed, whatever, whether fixed or moveable, belongs to all men equally and in common, is the property for the moment of him who occupies it; but when he relinquishes the occupation, the property goes with it.'*

(Intergenerational Justice in the United States Constitution, The Stewardship Doctrine: ©Constitutional Law Foundation, 50 W. 36th St., Eugene, Ore.)

### **Conclusion**

The land, water and sky were always important to people who lived off it and depended on it for food, shelter and survival. With more of us losing this sense of connection, we need to keep in mind that this world, though not permanent, is our current home and, should the Lord tarry, will become the home of others who will follow us.

As you leave your place of meeting today and step outdoors, take a moment to look up and down and around at the wonder of what no human had a hand in making. All of creation is a gift from God offered as a gesture of love to all of humanity.

*God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning – the sixth day. (Genesis 1:31)*

### **Additional reading and small group discussion resources**

Gascho, Luke. *Creation Care: Keepers of the Earth*. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2009.

New Community Project. *Peace through Justice/Care for Creation/Experiential Learning*. 718 Wilder St., Elgin, IL 60123.

# Stewards of Creation

God of heaven and earth

Genesis 2:15; Leviticus 25:23; Psalm 24:1

## Getting started

What level of importance should we give to the subject of caring for the Earth? Chances are, responses will vary widely, but ask this question in church and you may hear comments such as:

- Isn't this topic a result of New Age influences on the church?
- Would Jesus drive an SUV?
- Didn't God say the Earth is here for us to use and have dominion over?
- Much of the electricity we use in our country comes from coal, so are we really making a difference by driving hybrid cars? Besides, my car is paid for.
- With all the tree huggers and secular green organizations, shouldn't we be careful about being "unevenly yoked" to organizations that have no faith perspective at all when they address this issue?
- How can you claim to be a steward of creation if you hunt for sport?

Discuss your thoughts about these responses as well as other common objections you've heard or may feel yourself.

## *Creation care and the Mennonite confession of faith*

Article 5. Creation and Divine Providence

We believe that God has created the heavens and the Earth and all that is in them, [1] and that God preserves and renews what has been made. All creation ultimately has its source outside itself and belongs to the Creator. The world has been created good because God is good and provides all that is needed for life. [2]

We believe that the universe has been called into being as an expression of God's love and sovereign freedom alone. Creation witnesses to the eternal power and divine nature of God, who gives meaning and purpose to life and who alone is worthy of worship and praise. [3] We acknowledge that God sustains creation in both continuity and change. We believe that God upholds order in creation and limits the forces of sin and evil for the sake of preserving and renewing humanity and the world. [4]

God also works to save human beings and the world from death and destruction and to overcome the forces of sin and evil. We therefore are called to respect the natural order of creation and to entrust ourselves to God's care and keeping, whether in adversity or plenty. Neither the work of human hands, nor the forces of the natural world around us, nor the power of the nations among which we live are worthy of the trust and honor due the Creator on whom they depend. [5]

[1] Genesis 1:1; Isaiah 45:11f; John 1:3.

[2] Genesis 1:31; 1 Timothy 4:4.

[3] Psalm 19:1-6; Romans 1:19-23.

[4] Genesis 9:8-17; Psalm 104; Ephesians 3:9-11.

[5] Psalm 33; Matthew 6:25-33; Matthew 10:26-31.

### **Discussion questions for reflection and sharing**

1. Were you aware that this statement was part of our Confession of Faith?

2. What about this statement do you agree or disagree with?

3. Do you consider the care and stewardship of creation an extension of our witness in today's world? Why or why not?

### **Ecological footprint calculation**

1. How many people are in your household? **Points** \_\_\_\_\_

1 (30 points)

2 (25 points)

3 (20 points)

4 (15 points)

5 (10 points)

6+ (5 points)

2. How is your home heated? **Points** \_\_\_\_\_

Natural Gas (30 points)

Electricity (40 points)

Oil (50 points)

Renewable (0 points)

3. What is the setting of your hot water heater? **Points** \_\_\_\_\_

Vacation (5 points)

Warm (10 points)

Hot (20 points)

Don't know (25 points)



4. At how many meals per week do you eat meat or shrimp? **Points** \_\_\_\_\_
- 0 (0 points)
  - 1-3 (10 points)
  - 4-6 (30 points)
  - 7-10 (45 points)
  - 11+ (60 points)
5. How many homemade meals do you eat per week (include packed lunches, etc.)? **Points** \_\_\_\_\_
- Under 10 (25 points)
  - 10-14 (20 points)
  - 15-18 (15 points)
  - 18+ (10 points)
6. Do you purchase locally grown food items? **Points** \_\_\_\_\_
- Most of the time (20 points)
  - Sometimes (30 points)
  - Rarely (40 points)
  - I grow my own vegetables (subtract 5 points from total)
7. Do you buy organic foods? **Points** \_\_\_\_\_
- Mostly (0 points)
  - Rarely (20 points)
8. If you or your family own vehicles, what type are they (add points for each vehicle)? **Points** \_\_\_\_\_
- Hybrid (10 points)
  - Motorcycle (20 points)
  - Compact (35 points)
  - Mid-sized (60 points)
  - Small pickup (70 points)
  - Minivan or van, SUV (100 points)
  - Pickup (130 points)
9. How do you get to school/work? **Points** \_\_\_\_\_
- Car (50 points)
  - Public transit (25 points)
  - School bus (20 points)
  - Walk (0 points)
  - Bike/skates (0 points)

10. How many daily car trips does your household take? **Points** \_\_\_\_\_
- None (0 points)
  - 1-2 (10 points)
  - 3-4 (20 points)
  - 5+ (30 points)
11. How many energy-efficient features are in your home (low-flow shower head, low-flush toilet, compact florescent light bulbs, Energy Star appliances, insulation around water heater, etc.)? **Points** \_\_\_\_\_
- 0 (40 points)
  - 1-3 (25 points)
  - 4-6 (15 points)
  - 7+ (10 points)
12. Does your household try to reduce the amount of waste and toxins in the house (buying bulk food, reusing containers, natural cleaners, etc.)? **Points** \_\_\_\_\_
- Most of the time (0 points)
  - Sometimes (10 points)
  - Rarely (20 points)
  - Never (30 points)
13. Does your household compost? **Points** \_\_\_\_\_
- Most of the time (0 points)
  - Sometimes (5 points)
  - Never (15 points)
14. Does your household recycle newspapers, aluminum, glass and plastics? **Points** \_\_\_\_\_
- Most of the time (5 points)
  - Sometimes (10 points)
  - Rarely (15 points)
  - Never (20 points)
15. How many garbage bags of waste do you set out for pick up weekly? **Points** \_\_\_\_\_
- 0 (0 points)
  - ½ (5 points)
  - 1 (10 points)
  - 2 (20 points)



16. How many bottled beverages do you drink per week? **Points** \_\_\_\_\_

- 0 (0 points)
- 1-3 (5 points)
- 4+ (10 points)

17. Regarding lawn care, you use: **Points** \_\_\_\_\_

- Nonmotorized mower (0 points)
- Electric mower (10 points)
- Gas-powered push mower (15 points)
- Riding mower (20 points)

*and* (add to total)

- Pesticides/fertilizer (10 points)
- Frequent irrigation (10 points)

**Total: Points** \_\_\_\_\_

**Bonus Section Points to subtract from total** \_\_\_\_\_

18. You have been instrumental in helping an institution, such as a church, school or workplace; live more responsibly (setting up a recycling program, purchasing paper with high recycled content, ending use of lawn chemicals, having an energy audit, etc.).

Yes: -50 points.

19. You have been instrumental in helping a community or larger network live more responsibly (instigating a community-wide recycling program, bringing a multi-site company online for recycling or for purchasing compact fluorescent light bulbs, etc.).

Yes: -100 points

20. You actively take responsibility for other people's wastefulness (pulling recyclables out of the neighbor's trash, picking up aluminum cans along the roadway, etc.)

Yes: -25 points

21. Do others sometimes notice and/or comment on your environmentally conscious lifestyle?

Yes: -25 points

**Grand Total: Points** \_\_\_\_\_

(from New Community Project and written by David Radcliff – permission granted for congregational use)

*Discussion questions for reflection and sharing*

1. How does the ecological footprint calculation exercise affect you as you consider the impact we in the West have on the rest of the world?
2. To what extent should we be concerned about reducing our consumption and ecological footprint?
3. To what extent is this an issue of caring for our neighbor?
4. To what extent do we prioritize this issue alongside the other concerns facing our 6 billion global neighbors?
5. What practical things have you and your family discussed that can help reduce your footprint?
6. If you are familiar with the original version of “Footprints,” what parallels do you make between the original and adapted versions?

**Stewardship and partnership**

Read Genesis 2:15-17 and note how God invites Adam and Eve to partner with him in tending the Garden of Eden. The traditional interpretation uses the words “till and keep.” More accurate interpretations for our day might be to “preserve and protect.”

1. Where do you most see God’s “fingerprints” (evidence of God’s presence) when you look at creation?



2. In what ways do you see us needing to partner with God just as Adam and Eve were created to partner with God in Eden (see Genesis 2:15-17)?

### **Conclusion**

As you leave your place of meeting today and step outdoors, take a moment to look up and down and around at the wonder of what no human had a hand in making. All of creation is a gift from God offered as a gesture of love to all of humanity.

*God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning – the sixth day. (Genesis 1:31)*

### **Additional reading and small group discussion resources**

Gascho, Luke. *Creation Care: Keepers of the Earth*. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2009.

New Community Project. *Peace through Justice/Care for Creation/Experiential Learning*. 718 Wilder St., Elgin, IL 60123.





# Stewards of Relationships

Getting to the heart of it all

1 John 3:16-20

*"A lot of people have gone further than they thought they could because someone else thought they could." – Unknown author*

*"You can never establish a personal relationship without opening up your own heart." – Paul Tournier*

*No one lying on their deathbed has ever said, "I wish I would have spent more time at work."*

No one lying on their deathbed has ever said, "I wish I would have spent more time at work." End-of-life regrets so often surround what hindsight teaches us concerning relationships. At the end of the day and at the end of this life, relationships are really what it is all about.

Relationships, like people themselves, come in many forms. They can get complicated and messy. Some people are in relationships they wish they could get out of while others find themselves on the outside of relationships they wish they could get into. At the end of the day – and at the end of our life – what we really need most is to belong and to be loved.

We were all born into a family. Maybe it was only a family of two, or maybe it was a family of 12. For most of us, this included immediate and extended family members. Many, but not all, people marry sometime in life – though statistics show a gradual decline in the number of people who marry. Some, but not all, couples have children. Many, but not all, have the opportunity to have significant people in their lives who serve as mentors. Most, but not all, have significant people they call close friends. And all of us have at least the opportunity to develop a relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Even though it may be easier to focus on what we do not have in relationships, I would challenge us to take time to consider what we do have. In 1 John 3:16 we read, "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us." To say we are loved is not about whether we have 10 best friends or that we are married to the most wonderful person in the world, or that we have the most thoughtful children.

The greatest relationship gift is one we can all have – a relationship with God through Christ who offers the purist and deepest qualities of selfless love any of us can experience. All other relationships fall short and will disappoint, even as we ourselves fall short and disappoint those we care about.

In this lesson, we want to take time to review various forms of relationships, such as mentors, friends and family. Rather than focus on what we have not experienced, let's be grateful for the circle of relationships we do enjoy.

### **Mentor relationships**

There are two types of mentoring: natural and intentional. Natural mentoring comes in the form of supervisors, managers, coaches, teachers, favorite aunts or uncles, etc. We may not introduce these people with the mentor title, but that in essence is how they function in our lives. We watch them and value what we hear them say and see them do.

On the other hand, intentional mentoring results from structured programs where mentors and mentees are intentionally paired. Many congregations have integrated mentoring into their youth ministry programs. Others appoint mentors during a time of preparation for baptism. Think back over your life and consider those who have functioned in either of these mentoring roles in your life.

### **Discussion questions for reflection and sharing**

1. Who have been important mentors in your life?
2. Were these people natural or intentional mentors? How were you paired together in these relationships?
3. Do you serve as a mentor to someone else? What have the rewards of this relationship been for you?

### **Mutuality and mentoring**

What famous pairings come to mind as you think of people who have worked together or served together? In these relationships, the gifts of the one complement the other. Neither would have been as effective alone as they were working in tandem. These relationships were mutually beneficial. Here are a few familiar pairs. Can you think of others from history, modern culture or Scripture?

### **Historic pairs**

1. Abbott and Costello
2. Ben and Jerry
3. Lewis and Clark
4. Bonnie and Clyde
5. Others?



### **Biblical pairs**

1. Elisha and Elijah
2. Ruth and Naomi
3. Moses and Aaron
4. Eli and Samuel; Samuel and Saul; Saul and David; David and Jonathan
5. Jesus and Peter; James and John
6. Paul and Timothy
7. Priscilla and Aquila
8. Others

### **Friendships: To belong and be loved (John 15:13-17)**

Jesus had friends. Is it fair to say he needed friends? It's rather impressive to consider that Jesus as Son of God and Lord of Lords wasn't much for lofty titles when it got right down to it. He preferred to think of his followers as friends (John 15:13-15). We also know Jesus had a close relationship with Lazarus. In John 11:3, Mary, the sister of Lazarus, sends word to Jesus about Lazarus: "The one you love is sick." Later, in John 11:35, we read that "Jesus wept" after hearing of the death of Lazarus, his dear friend and brother of his friends Mary and Martha.

Jesus did not insulate himself from the pain associated with friendship. We are also made aware of how much Jesus needed these close relationships for wholeness and his well-being. Jesus was a social as well as spiritual being – just like us. We know that Jesus would get away to spend time by himself and with God (John 6:15; Matthew 14:23), but Jesus also took time to get away from the crowds and his work to be renewed by hanging out with his friends. (Luke 10:38-42)

### **Discussion questions for reflection and sharing**

1. Describe a relationship from your past or present that you might compare to what Jesus and Lazarus might have shared.
2. In what ways do you think Jesus was strengthened in his ministry, because of his relationship with Lazarus, Mary and Martha?
3. As you review your life, what friendships have there been that helped get you through difficult times?
4. What happens when we see Jesus only as a transcendent spiritual being and diminish his human social and relational needs?
5. Name a time when you felt a gap in your life due to limited friendships.
6. How important is it to belong and be loved? How do friendships contribute to meeting these basic human needs? Can we depend on others too much to fill these emotional needs?

## Family relationships

### Marriage

Six biblical methods for acquiring a spouse:

1. Have God create a wife for you while you sleep. It will cost you a rib.  
(Genesis 2:19-24)
2. Purchase a piece of property and get a wife as part of the deal.  
(Ruth 4:5-10)
3. Go to a party and hide. When the women come out to dance, grab one and carry her off to be your wife. (Judges 21:19-25)
4. Even if no one is out there, just wander around a bit and you'll definitely find someone. It's all relative, of course. (Genesis 4:16-17)
5. Become an emperor of a huge nation and hold a beauty contest.  
(Esther 2:3-4)
6. A wife ... I don't think so! (1 Corinthians 7:32-35)

There are other stories from Scripture with even less appealing methods described. Marriage relationships are a blessing, but are often challenging at the same time. One of the challenges of being married is to diligently avoid becoming isolated as a couple from other people. In the church and in society, there is a tendency to rely so much on our partner that you fail to maintain your other relationships. This is especially true when it comes to maintaining healthy contact with people who are not married.

Those who are married need to develop an enhanced awareness of singles, divorced people, widows and widowers. The number of unmarried people in our society continues to increase.

### Discussion questions for reflection and sharing

1. How do those who are married work at maintaining connections with other important relationships in their lives?
2. How can those who are married channel appropriate attention to others who also need care and nurturing?
3. Do single people in your church feel welcomed?
4. Does your congregation have specialized ministries for singles as well as for those who want to grow in their marriages? Why can this be challenging? Are there ways to partner with other congregations to address these issues?



*Parents and siblings*

We have all had parents at one time – many have siblings. Family has been described as the place where we can go where they have to take us in. That may be overly simplistic, but in most cases is true. I remember when I was growing up wishing at times I belonged to a different family. I’m sure no one else ever felt that way! Other families seemed to take better vacations and appeared to have it all together. Having been a pastor, I have learned that all families have their struggles and none are perfect. We are all dysfunctional to one degree or another.

Even Jesus had family “issues.” (Luke 2:41-52; Matthew 12:46-50) His brothers were not among the first to believe and follow. (John 7:1-5) I’m glad the gospel writers included these bits of family trivia about Jesus. One of the hardest settings in which to be a Christian is among those who know us best. Do you suppose Jesus was ever tempted to wish he were in a different family?

*To be a good steward of relationships, we also need to find ways to give back.*

**To whom much is given ...**

Jesus modeled how to draw strength from his relationships – including his relationships with God, his disciples and his special friends. These relationships, in turn, empowered him to face his life’s challenges. Below is a Relationship Ledger that may help you consider the wealth of relationships you have. Our tendency may be to stick to ourselves and enjoy what it means to belong and be loved. But to be a good steward of relationships, we also need to find ways to give back.

Use the following exercise to take inventory of all that God has given you in the gift of relationships and what you in turn have given back. List the names of mentors, friends and family that have enriched your life.

List the names of mentors, friends and family who have enriched your life in the first column. In the second column, name those you are intentionally called to nurture and serve.

**Relationship Ledger**

Mentors, friends and family (Gifts received)	Those I am nurturing (Gifts extended)
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### **Discussion questions for reflection and sharing**

1. How well balanced is your Relationship Ledger?
2. How did you develop these relationships?
3. Are you open to serving as an intentional mentor and friend as an expression of relational stewardship?
4. What opportunities exist in your congregation and community to give of yourself as a mentor and friend?

### **Additional reading and small group discussion resources**

Ganger, Steve. *Priority Parenting: Reclaiming Your Home for Heaven's Sake*.  
Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2005.

Kauffman, Gerald and Marlene. *Monday Marriage: Celebrating the Ordinary*.  
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# Stewards of Relationships

Getting to the heart of it all

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## Getting started

*Read: 1 John 3:16-20*

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Relationships, like people themselves, come in many forms. They can get complicated and messy. At the end of the day – and at the end of our life – what we really need most is to belong and to be loved.

## Mentor relationships

There are two types of mentoring: natural and intentional. Natural mentoring can come from everyday situations wherein anyone can be your mentor. You can learn through friendships that develop with neighbors, schoolmates or coworkers. On the other hand, intentional mentoring comes from a structured program where the mentor and the mentee are chosen from a list and matched through a formal procedure.

Discussion questions for reflection and sharing

1. Who have been important mentors in your life?
2. Were these persons natural or intentional mentors? How did you get paired together in these relationships?
3. Do you serve as a mentor to another person? What have the rewards of this relationship been for you?

## Mutuality and mentoring

What famous pairings come to mind as we think of people who have worked together or served together? In these relationships, the gifts of the one complement the other. Neither would have been as effective alone as they were working in tandem. Here are a few familiar pairs. Can you think of others from history, modern culture or Scripture?

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2. Ben and \_\_\_\_\_
3. Lewis and \_\_\_\_\_
4. Bonnie and \_\_\_\_\_
5. Others

### Biblical pairs

1. Elisha and \_\_\_\_\_
2. Ruth and \_\_\_\_\_
3. Moses and \_\_\_\_\_
4. Eli and S \_\_\_\_\_; Samuel and S \_\_\_\_\_; Saul and D \_\_\_\_\_;  
David and J \_\_\_\_\_
5. Jesus and P \_\_\_\_\_; James and J \_\_\_\_\_
6. Paul and T \_\_\_\_\_
7. Priscilla and A \_\_\_\_\_
8. Others

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### *Discussion questions for reflection and learning*

1. Describe a relationship from your past or present that you might compare to what Jesus and Lazarus might have shared.
2. In what ways do you think Jesus was strengthened in his ministry because of his relationship with Lazarus, Mary and Martha?
3. As you review your life, what friendships have there been that helped get you through difficult times?



4. What happens when we see Jesus only as a transcendent spiritual being and diminish his very human social and relational needs?
5. Name a time when you felt a gap in your life due to limited friendships.
6. How important is it to belong and be loved? How do friendships contribute to meeting these basic human needs? Can we depend on others too much to fill these emotional needs?
7. Share a story about when the concept of “community” was important in your life.

#### **Family relationships**

Married people need an enhanced awareness of singles, divorced people, widows and widowers. The number of unmarried people in our society continues to increase.

#### *Discussion questions for reflection and sharing*

1. How do those of us who are married work at maintaining connections with other important relationships in our lives?
2. How can those of us who are married channel appropriate attention to others who also need care and nurture?
3. Do single people in your church feel welcomed?

4. Does your congregation have specialized ministries for singles as well as for those who want to grow in their marriages? Why can this be challenging? Are there ways to partner with other congregations to address these issues?

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**To whom much is given ...**

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**Relationship Ledger**

Mentors, friends and family (Gifts received)	Those I am nurturing (Gifts extended)
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*Discussion questions for reflection and sharing*

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