

Called to Be Stewards

What it means to receive and give

by Leisa Anslinger



What first comes to mind when you hear the word “stewardship”?

I have asked that question throughout the United States and Canada, and in every group at least one brave person (often most of the people in the room) has exclaimed, “MONEY!” So imagine my surprise when I asked a group in Australia the question and the whole group in chorus replied, “AGRICULTURE!” These people have kept much more of the original meaning of the word “steward.” The steward is one who cares for the farm, livestock or vineyard of another. In fact, the *good* steward does not simply care for the valued property of another; the good steward nurtures it and brings it to yield with increase.

What does stewardship have to do with our lives, then?

When we really think about it, we know that all we are, everything we have, all we will ever be is given to us by God. That is quite a lot to take in, isn't it? Yet it is true.



Living as stewards means that we care for and nurture all that we have been given: our very selves, our

relationships, our material resources, every hour of every day we are alive. The good steward puts God first, nurtures loving relationships with family and friends, cares for one's health, lives simply rather than being consumed by material wealth, establishes a good balance between work and leisure, and so much more. These are all aspects of living a lifestyle of stewardship. When that nurturing “yields with increase,” we find abundance overflowing: our relationships flow out to draw others in; our material resources are shared willingly and with love; our care of our selves gives us physical and emotional energy with which to be productive. Recognizing that all is given to us by God, we nurture one more important thing: gratitude. In seeing that all is pure gift from God, we become grateful for the gifts we have been given.

We are created in God's image, designed to be living representations of God on earth. Our stewardship of our lives and resources is the way we bring God's love, care, attention, and mercy to the world.

The challenge: Stewardship requires us to trust in God's care for us. We must develop a sense of gratitude and be willing to be generous, as a response to all we have been given by God.

Let's get practical. Our daily decisions, from the way we use our time to the spirit with which we interact with others, take on new focus and meaning when we consider them from the perspective of stewardship. See the reverse of this sheet for practical ideas for growing as a good steward.

Let's be spiritual. As you can see, stewardship is also a deeply spiritual way of life. Remembering that everything is pure gift from God leads us to see that Jesus is our best teacher of what it means to live as a steward. The way in which we embrace stewardship is closely tied to the way we commit ourselves to being followers of Jesus Christ. We will be called to sacrifice for the sake of others, and to give as lavishly as

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our loving God who has given us everything. And in this, our lives will be forever changed.



The Stewardship Project
www.CatholicLifeandFaith.com

“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. ...By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (Jn 13: 34a-35)



Practical Ways to Grow as Good Stewards

Think of stewardship as caring and sharing

When we think about all that Jesus teaches us about living, we might say that Christ's message is one of caring and sharing -- to care for our neighbors as ourselves, to share all we are and have, to stay focused on the Father's loving way. Here are some practical ways to put these principles into practice in our lives:

Stewardship of self: Begin and end each day with prayer; eat healthy foods in moderation; exercise regularly; get enough sleep; care for your emotional well-being. Remember that our physical, mental, emotional and spiritual being is a vessel for Christ's presence in our world. Caring for self is a sign that you embrace Jesus' call to follow him.

Stewardship of relationships: Take time to be attentive to family members each day; listen and watch for signs that a friend needs your care or concern; tend to the physical and emotional needs of neighbors and those who are poor, ill, or lonely; nurture new friendships by being welcoming; care for those who are aging by visiting regularly.

Stewardship of time and talent:

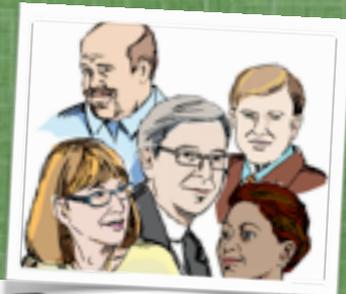
Be conscious of how much time you waste each day and commit to use your time more wisely; sacrifice time in service at home, in your parish, in your neighborhood or the home of a friend or family member, in your city or town; when possible, discover your talents through Living Your Strengths; recognize your talents as signs of God's grace in your life, and offer those talents intentionally in all aspects of your life.

Stewardship of material resources:

Make a conscious decision to use money wisely and share it generously; learn to distinguish wants from needs, and make progress in purchasing only when you need something; give to your parish and local services that care for those who have great need for material or financial help; make and keep a household budget; plan to eliminate credit card debt and to live within your means.

Stewardship of creation:

Be mindful of wastefulness of water, soil, electricity, and carbon fuels; recycle whenever possible; plant a garden; avoid pesticides; enjoy the beauty of creation!



"As all this suggests, our individual lives as disciples and stewards must be seen in relation to God's larger purposes. ... Those who enter into Jesus' New Covenant find themselves growing in a union of minds and hearts with others who also have responded to God's call. They find their hearts and minds expanding to embrace all men and women, especially those in need, in a communion of mercy and love." (SDR, 34)

How Are You a Good Steward?

We are already stewards, whether we are conscious of it or not. We will always have ways to grow as stewards, too, aspects of our lives in which we don't care or share as readily as we should. How are you already living as a good steward? What areas of your life need attention in order to grow as a steward in the coming year? Use this space to record your thoughts and your commitment for the future:



After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord -- and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet." (Jn 13:12-14)