Faith Aflame: 360 Degrees

Stewardship Learning Community
Living in God's Economy
God the Generous Giver

Opening Prayer

Scripture Read **Luke 15:11-32**. Discuss: Who is the main character in this parable? Is it the younger son who wastes the father's resources? Is it the older son who is indignant toward both his father and his brother? Is it the father who gives generously to both sons?

Introduction

Generosity is a mark of the faithful Christian steward. Stewards can be generous because God was first generous to them. Gordon MacDonald writes in *Generosity: Moving Toward Life That Is Truly Life*, "God is the first generous giver. He has provided the highest model of generosity, and He calls for Biblical people to follow. The generous giver is someone whose heart generates love. It is not a sentimental or romantic love, but a love built on compassion and care, a love that is drawn to the broken and fragmented creatures and conditions of our world. This kind of love values human beings as those created in God's image…Genuine Christianity compels the true Christian to become a generous person because the central act of our faith is an act of generosity. "He became poor that we might become rich'" (pages 10-11, 13).

- What is the "highest model of generosity" that God has provided?
- What is the motivation for generosity?
- Explain MacDonald's words, "the central act of our faith is an act of generosity."
- How would you define generosity?
- Some have used the term "generous" to describe the father in the parable; others have used the term "foolish." How would you describe the father's actions?

A Stewardship Prayer

Heavenly Father,
How generous You are! The earth and sky declare the wonder and majesty of Your creation. Yet, Lord, You love and care for us.

You sent Your Son to take our sins upon Himself and pay the price for our salvation.

Thank You for Your generosity and love. Thank You for sending Your Son to die for us. Thank You for sending Your Spirit to bring us to greater understanding of Your will for our lives.

Give us generous hearts, dear Lord, so that others might hear of Your love and follow You.

We ask it in Jesus' name,
Amen.

The Younger Son (Read verses 11-20)

Donald Kraybill describes the actions of the younger son in his book, *The Upside-Down Kingdom*:

"According to Jewish custom, the younger of two sons was entitled to one third of his father's property. Wealth could be passed on in two ways: by a will at the father's death or as a gift during the father's lifetime. In contrast to Western culture, if the son received the property as a gift, he did not have the right to dispose of it until after the father's death. To dispose of it while the father was living was treating the father like a corpse. Jewish custom expected children to honor their parents by obeying and supporting them financially." (pages 167-168).

As you answer the following questions remember that a steward is one who manages what belongs to another.

- What kind of steward was the younger son?
- How did this son steward his relationship with his father?
- How did this son steward his relationship with his brother?
- How did this son steward his inheritance?

The Older Son (Read verses 25-30)

The older son stayed home, worked hard, and behaved himself. When his brother returns home he wants justice and fairness. He is angry at his father and at his younger brother. Where is the punishment the younger son deserves? Where is the recognition for all his years of hard work? What is to become of his inheritance now that the younger son is back? He is consumed by his anger and refuses to go to the celebration. The older son was, as Mark Twain suggests, "A good man in the worst sense of the word."

- What kind of steward was the older son?
- How did this son steward his relationship with his father?
- How did this son steward his relationship with his brother?
- How did this son steward his inheritance?

The Father (Read verses 12b, 20-24, 31-32)

What can we think of a father shamed by his sons who acts as he does? Kraybill suggests several responses from a Jewish father. "A reasonable father might slam the door in his face and declare him an alien. He might…launch into a tirade about disobedience…prescribe punishment to teach the boy a lesson" (page 169). He might have good reason to throw them both out. But he doesn't. Kraybill continues, "Instead of spanking the son who brings disgrace, he elevates him to the high post 'of most honored guest.' God is like a parent who asks no questions, even when treated as dead. This is limitless, unconditional love with no strings attached. This story takes us to the very heart of God and exposes God's nature—agape" (page 170).

- The father was not a steward like the sons--he was the owner. What difference does that make?
- Who does the father represent in the parable? What examples of extravagant love does He show to both sons?
- How does God show us this same kind of extravagant love?
- What is the steward's response to the extravagant love of the Owner?

As God's steward what are some things you can do personally to grow in generosity?

Closing Prayer

Provide time at the end of each session for questions, comments and group prayer. The prayer can take one of the following forms or be done in a way the group decides.

Adoration…
Confession…
Thanksgiving…
Supplication…
Praise…
Remember…
Ask…
Yield…

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