Stewards by God's Design: The Three R's of the Christian Steward

Relationships – Responsibilities - Resources

My Relationship with Myself
Facilitation Guide

Goal: That the participant would understand and live out the truth that we are to steward the life that God has given each of us according to His purposes.

Key Point: The first gift God entrusts to me is my life. He owns me, loves me, and desires that I live according to His will.

Introduction: Ask participants to share who, besides their parents and spouse, has most helped them to develop their talents and abilities.

Background Information: Robert Kolb in *Speaking the Gospel Today* writes, "God created human creatures to be at peace within themselves. His command to love the neighbor as one loves oneself (Matthew 22:39) offends some Christians, who have cultivated the belief that the sinful human creature must hate creatureliness as well as the sin that perverts it. But that love or respect for self is part of God's design for His human creatures. At the same time, it is vital to recognize the source of that self-regard. Proper self-regard, which bestows true harmony on our lives, comes alone from our perception that God is Father and Creator and we are His creatures. Martin Luther could confess that we receive every temporal blessing, not just the blessings which flow from Christ's cross and empty tomb, 'without any merit or worthiness' in us. With this statement he was emphasizing that we human creatures have no prior claim on God. He was under no compulsion to call us into existence. His favor and mercy toward us began with His decision to create and to provide. This kindly disposition remains as mysterious to us as does His kindly disposition which accomplishes our forgiveness and re-creation in Jesus of Nazareth." Page 37

R. Scott Rodin in *The Steward Leader* writes, "Meaning on the second level—our relationship with our self—is found in a self-understanding and an acceptance of ourselves that is balanced and honest in the light of our true relationship with our triune Creator and redeemer God. This balance keeps us from being pulled into self-satisfaction on the one hand and self-deprecation on the other…If we were created for relationship with our self, our purpose is to have absolute certainty of who we are, why we are here and what we are to do." Page 35

God gives us the precious gift of both physical life and spiritual life. We are stewards of both gifts. Saint Paul writes in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

What is Paul saying about the life I am called to steward?

Answer: Paul is saying that it is Christ who gives us our identity. He redeemed us (bought us back) on the cross. We are Christians. We belong to Him. The result of Christ living in us is that we now live for Him and follow His direction in all we do.

What do the following passages say about this gift of life?

- Genesis 1:27

  Answer: We were created in God's image. Richard Caemmerer writes in *God's Great Plan for You,* "Out of all the things God has made, one is to be a reproduction and display of God Himself. Obviously this does not imply that the reproduction is as great or as powerful as the model. Isaiah says, 'We are the clay, and Thou our Potter.' Man is created. The Creator is greater than His creature, and He is there before him whom He creates. Even so man gives a display of God and gives it in a way that nothing else in all creation can provide." Page 20

- Romans 3:23

  Answer: The gift of life God gave us has been marred by sin. The life God intended for us is no longer the life we live. We not only commit sin, we are sinful. As sinful human beings we experience the consequences of our own sin and the sins of others.

- Jeremiah 29:11

  Answer: Despite our sin, God loves us and desires what is best for us. That is demonstrated most vividly by God sending His Son to take our sins upon Himself and pay for them on the cross. His plan for us is that we have hope and a good future in Christ.

  David M. Gosdeck writes in his commentary on *Jeremiah* in *The People's Bible,* "The Lord of their fathers, the Lord who throughout their history had proved his love and his power to save them again and again, spoke this word. He had plans for them, plans growing out of his infinite wisdom. These plans were laid in the foundation of his eternal love for them…His desire was to give them a future and hope, a lively expectation of something good to come, the good he himself had promised." Page 182

- 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

  Answer: St. Paul makes it clear in this passage that God is the Owner of our bodies. We are not free agents. We cannot do whatever we want with our bodies because they belong to Him. We are to glorify Him with the bodies He gives us. He is the Owner by way of creation and redemption.

In Mark 12 a scribe asks Jesus a question, "Which commandment is the most important of all?" Jesus answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." We are to love God with our whole being: heart, soul, mind, and strength.

What do the following passages have to say about our hearts and how we are to steward them for God?

Note: The Bible mentions the heart about 1000 times. The heart, in Scripture, is where our spiritual life is found and where our emotions and desires are located.

- Proverbs 4:23

  Answer: We are instructed to guard our hearts. In the *Concordia Commentary on Proverbs*, Andrew Steinmann writes, "That the son needs to guard his heart refers to his spiritual, emotional, and intellectual life as well as his ability to critically evaluate situations and use his will. The reason for this mandate is that the source of life comes from it…. This is an allusion to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, who through the Word of God and Baptism dwells in the heart of each believer and flows forth with life-giving power."

  Roland Cap Ehlke notes in his commentary on *Proverbs in The People's Bible*, "Notice especially verse 23, in which the heart is called the 'wellspring of life.' It is the very source of life. In the Bible, the heart represents the entire inner life of human beings. This means that not only the emotions, but also the intellect and will spring from the heart. That's why God is constantly looking past outward appearances and directly into the heart."

- Romans 10:10

  Answer: St. Paul connects the heart and the mouth in these verses. The heart is where faith resides and the lips confess the truth of the Gospel. In his commentary on *Romans* in *The People's Bible*, Armin Panning writes, "Once again drawing from Deuteronomy 30:14, Paul says that Word 'is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart.' In practice, the order of heart and mouth is reversed from what Paul uses here. The Word first penetrates the heart and creates faith there. Then faith, if it is true and living faith, shows itself in the confession of believing lips. Paul uses the chronological sequence of heart and mouth when he repeats this great truth in verse 10." Page 173

- 2 Timothy 2:22

  Answer: The heart of the mature believer does not get caught up in quarrels and disagreements but shows that it belongs to Christ by the pursuit of righteousness, faith, love, and peace. "Paul is telling Timothy that when it comes to the youthful passions, he is not to tolerate them, but move away from them and toward the Word…'Those who call on the Lord' is another way of describing the Church. Having been baptized and born again in

Christ, these are those who call on the Lord in faith, according to His grace and mercy. (A pure heart) is a heart that is free from sin and sin's corruption. The Church is made of those in whom God has created a clean and pure heart and given a right spirit (Ps 51:10)" writes Mark Love in the *Reformation Heritage Bible Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*.

- John 7:38

  Answer: These words remind us of the conversation Jesus had at Jacob's well with the Samaritan woman. There He also talked about "living water." This "living water" is life giving water that quenches the thirst of the soul. Lenski writes in his commentary on John, "He who comes to Jesus not only finds his own soul satisfied but also becomes a medium for conveying the same spiritual satisfaction to others—this of course, when the work of Jesus shall be finished and the Holy Spirit gives to believers after Pentecost, v. 39." Page 576

- Luke 12:34

  Answer: A person's priorities in life serve as an indicator of where his or her loyalties lie (where their heart is). The greatest treasure we have is Christ. He came to deliver us from sin, death, and the devil. We are to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. The *Concordia Commentary on Luke 9:51-24:53* puts it this way, "Now, what is this heavenly treasure, and what does Jesus mean when he concludes 'for where your treasure is, there also your heart will be'?…The catechumen already knows from the Sermon on the Plain that this heavenly treasure is Christ, and the heavenly treasures are Christ's gifts that bring the catechumen into and keep him in Christ's kingdom…To be rich toward God, then, is to be a recipient of Christ and his gifts, a member of his kingdom through catechesis, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper." Page 512

What do the following passages have to say about our souls and how we are to steward them for God?

Note: Martin Luther wrote about the spirit, soul and body in his commentary on Luke 1:46: ***The nature of man consists of the three parts—spirit, soul and body****; and all of these may be good or evil, that is, they may be spirit or flesh. But we are not now dealing with this division.*

The first part, the spirit*, is the highest, deepest, and noblest part of man. By it he is enabled to lay hold on things incomprehensible, invisible, and eternal. It is, in brief, the dwelling place of faith and the Word of God. Of it David speaks in Psalm 51:10: "Lord, create in my inward parts a right spirit," that is, a straight and upright faith. But of the unbelieving he says in Psalm 78:37: "Their heart was not right with God, nor was their spirit faithful to Him."*

The second part, the soul*, is this same spirit, so far as its nature is concerned, but viewed as performing a different function, namely, giving life to the body and working through the body. In the Scriptures it is frequently put for the life; for the spirit may live without the body, but the*

body has no life apart from the spirit. Even in sleep the soul lives and works without ceasing. It is its nature to comprehend not incomprehensible things but such things as the reason can know and understand. Indeed, reason is the light in this dwelling; and unless the spirit, which is lighted with the brighter light of faith, controls this light of reason, it cannot but be in error. For it is too feeble to deal with things divine. To these two parts of man the Scriptures ascribe many things, such as wisdom and knowledge—wisdom to the spirit, knowledge to the soul; likewise hatred, love, delight, horror, and the like.

The third part is the body with its members*. Its work is only to carry out and apply that which the soul knows and the spirit believes.*

- Ezekiel 18:4

  Answer: God owns our souls—the souls of all people. God is the one and only owner of everything. Because our souls belong to God our desire is to live in obedience to Him. We know that we are sinful human beings in need of a Savior. Jesus came to redeem not only my soul, but the souls of all people.

- Matthew 16:26

  Answer: Jesus reminds us in this verse what is most important in life and it is not the things of this world. G. J. Albrecht and M. J. Albrecht write in *The People's Bible Commentary on Matthew, "*Dear Christian if your primary concern is to save this life, to get the most out of this life in pleasure and satisfaction and enjoyment, you will end up losing everything. But if you lose your life for Jesus' sake, if you dedicate all to him, follow his guidance, and obey his instructions implicitly, you will live a meaningful and God-pleasing life in this world and enjoy all the blessings of everlasting life in heaven." Page 242

- James 1:21

  Answer: James, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, tells us to put away filthiness and wickedness and to receive the Word of God. This Word is a means of grace which has the power to create faith, forgive sins, and grant eternal life (save your souls).

- Psalm 63:1

  Answer: This psalm reflects the thoughts of David as he flees from his son Absalom. David longs for God's presence and care. H. C. Leupold writes in his *Exposition of Psalms*, "He (David) seeks Him in this hour of need as ardently as he ever did. He feels his need of Him with a thirst and a longing that possess his whole being ('soul…and flesh'). The 'dry and weary land where no water is' is an apt description of the wild, inhospitable region between Jerusalem and the Jordan. But the fact that having God and seeking Him go hand in hand is well expressed by Maclaren: 'In the region of the devout life the paradox is true that we

long precisely because we have.' The physical aspect of the land may have suggested as a kind of parable the utterly dry and arid state of the soul that is deprived of God." Pages 464-465

- 1 Peter 2:11

  Answer: As redeemed Children of God we must be ever vigilant that we do not succumb to the "passions of the flesh" which are sinful desires. Such sinful desires get in the way of our relationship with God and "wage war against our soul."

What do the following passages have to say about our minds and how we are to steward them for God?

- Proverbs 19:21

  Answer: We make plans (in our mind), but if they are not in line with the purposes of God they will fail.

- Romans 8:6

  Answer: Paul notes that those who focus their minds on earthly things (things of the flesh) are placing their emphasis on the wrong things.

- Romans 12:2

  Answer: God's Word will renew our minds and our thinking by making God's will known to us so that we can live according to it.

- Mark 8:33

  Answer: Jesus tells Peter that he is outside of God's will. He has focused on what he (Peter) thinks is right and not on the things of God.

- Philippians 2:5

  Answer: We are to have minds like Christ. He humbled himself and took on the form of a servant. Jesus gave Himself for us to redeem us from sin, death, and the power of the devil. We, as stewards by God's design, respond to His great love for us by humbly serving our neighbor.

What do the following passages have to say about our strength and how we are to steward it for God?

- 1 Peter 4:11

  Answer: God gives us the strength to serve others as He desires. He gets all the glory!

- Ephesians 3:16-18

  Answer: It is the Holy Spirit that gives us the strength to understand how great the love of Christ is for us. We are to share that great love of Christ with others.

Finish the study by referring to the quote from Richard Caemmerer on the left side of the page. Ask the question, “What kind of being has God created you to be?” and give participants the opportunity to respond.

Close with prayer: Most gracious Lord, You have called us to be Your disciples and Your stewards. You have redeemed us by taking our sin upon Yourself and paying for those sins on the cross. Guide us and empower us through Your Word to steward faithfully, wisely and fruitfully, the life you have entrusted to us. In Your Holy Name we pray, Amen.

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