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

Relationships – Responsibilities – Resources

My Relationship with Others

Goal: That participants would understand and live out the command to love one's neighbor as oneself.

Key Point: "God does not need your good works, but your neighbor does." Martin Luther

Introduction: Ask participants to tell about a time someone they didn't know helped them.

Background: R. Scott Rodin writes in *The Steward Leader*, "Meaning on the third level—our relationship with our neighbor—comes from an investment in the lives of others as a response to our nature as relational beings and the outworking of our relationship to God through Christ and in the Spirit. As God is triune in his very nature, so we were created to find meaning in our existence in community…When relationships are valued, communities, teams and families are endowed with meaning that reflects our created state before our triune God…If we were created for relationship with our neighbor, our purpose is to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. We were created to see our neighbors and their well-being in the same way we see our own, which calls us to value relationships as ends, not as means to be used for our own benefit." Page 36

Remind participants of Genesis 2:18 where God says, *It is not good that man should be alone.*

God created us to be in relationship with others. We were designed to live in community—beginning with those closest to us and extending in ever widening circles.

Ask participants to discuss why it is not good for someone to be alone. Share the following statistic: In 2017 the U.S. Surgeon General announced a threat to national public health that was more dangerous than smoking 15 cigarettes a day. It shortened a lifespan by eight years. And it affected almost half of the adult population. He wasn't talking about cancer or heart disease. He was talking about loneliness.

Read **Matthew 22:35-40.**

- What is the first great commandment?

Answer: The first and great commandment is to love God completely—heart, soul, and mind.

Jeffrey Gibbs writes in his *Concordia Commentary on Matthew 21:1- 28:20*, "It is, of course, the case that on this side of the consummation of the age, it will not be possible for any of Jesus' disciples fully to keep the greatest commandment. Our humanity has been too bruised. Even in the best of our relationships, we remain those who are infected with 'evil' (7:11). This is why

the Beatitudes begin where they do and why one can not even enter the reign of heaven except in the helplessness of a child (18:3)…It is also the case, however, that Jesus' disciples can and do love God…The fact that we Christians cannot always perfectly obey the command to love God with our whole being must not be allowed to obscure the fact that…we simply are able with the Spirit's help to respond to our God in obedience…To God in Christ alone goes the glory for this in my life and in the life of every Christian. But this is our life as we follow Jesus and embrace and accept Jesus' answer to the Law expert: the greatest commandment in the Law is to love the Lord our God with our whole being, and this love will express itself in serving and obeying him…the command to love one's neighbor is like the command to love God in that they cannot be separated. If I, as a disciple of Jesus, want to love and serve the Lord my God, that will necessarily entail love for my neighbor…Very, very often the expression of my love for God will look like love for my neighbor. The second commandment (Mt 22:39) is like the first (22:37-38); often I keep the first commandment by keeping the second." Pages 1170-1171

- What is the second?

Answer: The second great commandment is to love our neighbor as ourselves.

Gibbs writes, "…The command to love one's neighbor is like the command to love God in that they cannot be separated. If I, as a disciple of Jesus, want to love and serve the Lord my God, that will necessarily entail love for my neighbor…Very, very often the expression of my love for God will look like love for my neighbor…As most everyone with a lick of sense knows, love is an attitude of commitment to meeting the needs of others that is informed by genuine wisdom as to what those needs might be. Love is a verb, a wise and strong verb. Love for the neighbor looks at the neighbor, sees a need, and then takes action in order to meet that need. Because God in Christ did just that in perfection and because the second commandment (love your neighbor as yourself) is like the first (love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind), we as Jesus' disciples will ever and always seek to look outside ourselves to others and be willing to expend the energy and courage necessary to love our neighbor as we love ourselves." Pages 1170-1172

- Why are these commandments so important?

Answer: They are important because they identify where our priorities in life are to be, first God and then others.

In their *People's Commentary on Matthew*, G. J. Albrecht and M. J. Albrecht write, "Although Jesus was asked to single out one commandment, he insists on giving a two-part answer. The first commandment must come first, and the second commandment must come second, but they are equally important." Page 319

Read **Matthew 19:16-22.** A rich, young man comes to Jesus with an important question. He asks, "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" Jesus responds with an

interesting statement, “Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good.”

- Why did Jesus respond this way?

Answer: This story is also recorded in Mark 10:17-31 and Luke 18:18:30. Jesus was pointing out to the young man that he was asking the wrong question. He thought he could get to heaven by what he did. Jesus’ response was to point him in the right direction. Salvation is from God alone, not from the “good deeds” someone does.

Daniel Paavola writes in the *Reformation Heritage Bible Commentary on Mark*, “Jesus changes the focus from the man’s works to who God is. The challenge for the man is to stop counting his own good works and to see the enormous demands a perfect God can make. Then his hope for eternal life will go from Law to Gospel, from his deeds to the saving action of God.” Page 183

Jesus continues, “If you would enter life, keep the commandments.” When the young man asks, “Which ones?” Jesus responds, “You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

- Why did Jesus only quote the second table of the Law?

Answer: If someone is to be saved by what they do then they must keep the Law perfectly in every case. Only one person has ever done that—and that person is Jesus. Robert Sorenson writes in his *Reformation Heritage Commentary on Luke*, “Interestingly, Jesus makes no reference to the first three commandments, which reveal our obligations to God. Instead, He lists commandments from the second table (numbers 4 through 10). These commandments prescribe our actions toward our neighbor. In this fashion, Jesus focuses attention on this ruler’s behavior toward his fellow man…The ruler blithely claims to have fulfilled all the commandments Jesus mentioned. Implicitly, then, he claims to have treated his fellow human beings exactly as the Lord expects. By the end of the episode, however, it will be revealed that this ruler is not willing to be generous with his neighbor as Jesus asks.” Page 307

In *Matthew: The People’s Bible*, G. J. Albrecht and M. J. Albrecht write, “It is interesting to notice which of the Ten Commandments Jesus quoted to this rich young man. They all come from the second table of the law; they all deal with our duty toward our neighbor. Why doesn’t Jesus start with the First Commandment? In a sense, he does: ‘There is only One who is good.’ All of the other commandments flow out of the first one. That is why Martin Luther begins his explanation of each commandment the same way, ‘We should fear and love God…’ All sins of murder, adultery, theft, slander, and disobedience are first and foremost sins against God.” Page 279

Review with participants the second table of the Law in the column on the left side of the page. These commandments are the ones Jesus mentioned to the rich, young ruler. They help us answer the question, "What does the Christian life look like if I believe in the forgiveness of sins?" (Martin Marty in *The Hidden Discipline*, page ix)

Have participants read each commandment and ask, What does the Christian life look like if I believe in the forgiveness of sins?

The 2017 edition of *Luther's Small Catechism* by Concordia Publishing house suggests the following summary statements for commandments four through ten:

Fourth Commandment: "As Christians, we give parents special honor as God's representatives on earth—gifts of God through whom He gave us the gift of life." Page 81

Fifth Commandment: "As Christians, we look after our neighbors so that they may enjoy the life God has given them." Page 85

Sixth Commandment: "As Christians, we cherish marriage as the union of our different yet complementary natures as male and female." Page 93

Seventh Commandment: "As Christians, we rejoice in and look after the earthly goods that God has given us and our neighbor for the support of daily life." Page 105

Eighth Commandment: "As Christians, we seek to improve and protect the reputation of others so that people will think well of them." Page 110

Ninth and Tenth Commandments: "As Christians, we seek to live a life of contentment by giving thanks for the daily blessings that God provides for us and our neighbor." Page 115

Read **Matthew 7:12**. How does Jesus want us to treat others?

Answer: Matthew 7:12 says, *So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.* God's desire is that we love our neighbor as we love ourselves.

Why is this called the Golden Rule?

Answer: Because it is a concise summary of the Christian's responsibility to always treat others with love and respect. It is a fundamental principle of life not only for the Christian but for everyone.

Read **Luke 10:25-37**. Here Jesus responds to a lawyer who asked him the question, "And who is my neighbor?" How did Jesus answer?

Answer: Our neighbor is anyone God puts in our proximity who needs our help. It can be someone near or far. It can be someone we know or someone we don't know.

Having a positive relationship with other people is necessary for a life that is consistent with God's will. Paul writes in Romans 12:8, *If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.* How does one get along with others (steward our relationship with others faithfully, wisely, and fruitfully) even when it is difficult? What do the following Bible passages have to say about our relationship with other people?

- Matthew 7:3

Answer: Before we are critical of what someone else did or is doing, we need to examine our own lives and repent of the sin we see there.

- 1 Samuel 16:7

Answer: We desire to have a heart like God's heart who desires that everyone be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. We are not to judge another person or think of them as worthy or unworthy by the color of their skin, their ethnicity, or by any other outward appearance.

- Romans 14:10-12

Answer: We are accountable to God for how we treat others.

- 1 Peter 3:8-9

Answer: In this passage Peter describes the attitudes that lead to proper actions toward others. The words he uses include, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. We are not to return evil for evil but are to pray for and bless even those who mistreat us.

- 1 Timothy 2:4

Answer: As was mentioned earlier, God desires that all people be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. As Christians, our desire is the same. We will make it a priority to tell others about the saving work of God through the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Additional passages regarding how we are to treat others include:

Leviticus 19:18 *You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.*

Answer: Love is to mark our relationship with our neighbors in every case. Taking revenge and bearing grudges are not to be attitudes we take toward our neighbors.

Luke 6:27 *But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,*

Answer: No matter how our neighbors treat us, as disciples of Christ we are to treat them with love, care, and compassion. Arthur Just writes in his *Concordia Commentary on Luke*, "This radical command (love your enemies) is a call to action, not just emotion, for to love one's enemies requires an unnatural act of the will. Your enemies are those who hate and persecute you…The context here is religious persecution, which Jesus pictures as an inevitable consequence of being part of the baptized community. The general attitude that Christians must have is love for all who persecute them 'on account of the Son of Man' (6:22)." Page 292

Romans 13:8-10 *Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.*

Answer: Again, we see God's desire for our relationships especially with our neighbors—we are to love them unconditionally. Armin Panning writes in *Romans: The People's Bible*, "…all of God's commandments urge love. Paul cites four of them and summarizes the rest with a quotation from Leviticus: 'Love your neighbor as yourself' (19:18). Every commandment requires love for God or for our neighbor. Hence Paul can say, 'Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law…In appreciation for having been accepted by God, the Christian now wants to show appreciation by living the new life that conforms to God's commandments. Such a life reflects the life of love toward God and our neighbor that God urges here." Pages 216-217

Romans 15:2 *Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.*

Answer: We are to consider the good of our neighbor and help him or her in every circumstance. Panning writes in *Romans: The People's Bible*, "Paul's point is that we shouldn't be guided simply by self-interest and do as we please. Rather, our concern should be for our neighbor. We should act 'for his good, to build him up.' That kind of looking out for others doesn't come naturally. We are all inclined to be very protective of ourselves—to look out for number one…Then where are we to find the strength to rise above such natural, selfish inclinations? Paul's answer: Christ, who didn't do just as he pleased but rather looked wholly to the interests of others." Page 228

Matthew 7:1-2 *Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.*

Answer: We need to be very careful how we consider the actions of our neighbors. Jeffrey Gibbs says in his *Concordia Commentary on Matthew 1:1 – 11:1*, "Jesus' words, then, in 7:1-5 are urgent words, and his disciples must take them to heart. Only with an eye to such arrogant and condemnatory judging does Jesus ever call a disciple what he typically calls his enemies: 'hypocrite!' Whatever the situation, a disciple of Jesus must know that perceiving the sins or failings of another believer always brings the opportunity for self-examination and confession

of one's own failures. If a Christian determines to correct a fellow believer, the heartfelt conviction will always be this: 'There but for the grace of God go I.'" Page 370. We are to put the best construction on everything as the Eighth Commandment urges us.

Colossians 3:12-14 *Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.*

Answer: Here St. Paul tells us the virtues that should mark our relationships with our neighbors. Because we belong to Christ our actions will be marked with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Helping and forgiving our neighbor is standard operating procedure for us as Christians. These virtues are not ours to accomplish but are gifts from God who gives us the strength and power through Word and Sacraments to live in relationship to our neighbor as He desires.

Ephesians 4:25 *Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.*

Answer: We are to speak the truth to our neighbor, but always in love. Jerald Joersz writes in the *Reformation Heritage Bible Commentary on Galatians, Ephesians, and Philippians*, "That is, what does it mean for Christians to discard the old way of life? He zeroes in on specific behavior that threatens to tear the fabric of their common life. Having 'put off' the old self through Baptism into Christ, the individual believer must get rid of conduct the old self likes to do. First on the list is lying, which undermines trust. Many marriages fall apart when one lie is stacked on top of another. Lying has a similar effect on other relationships as well. Paul applies the OT exhortation in Zec 8:16 (where 'neighbor' means fellow Israelite) to the fellow Christian." Page 146

Leviticus 19:34 *You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.*

Answer: God has created us all, so we are all valuable in His sight. Whether a person is just like us or is from another country or another race our responsibility is to love that neighbor as ourselves. The Israelites would be particularly sensitive to this because they had been foreigners in Egypt. We are to treat all people with love and respect.

John 15:13 *Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friend.*

Answer: Jesus demonstrated that self-sacrificing love for us. We are to extend that same love to others.

Philippians 2:3 *Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.*

Answer: Love for our neighbor means that, through the power of the Holy Spirit, we put self-interest and selfishness behind us and look to the needs of others first. Joersz writes, "In the Greco-Roman world humility carried negative connotations. Self-disparagement signified that one was shamefully weak and poor. Jesus, who was 'gentile and lowly in heart' (Mt 11:29), gave new meaning to this quality of the Christian life (cf. Mk 10:45). Paul here defines Christ-like humility: to consider others better than oneself. This presupposes a sober assessment of our sinfulness and the recognition that we creatures are utterly dependent on Him." Page 203

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