

GUIDELINES *for* Christian Stewards

For discussion, dialogue and instruction
in biblical, Christian stewardship



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by Dr. David S. Belasic





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“I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God,
to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God,
which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed
by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God,
what is good and acceptable and perfect.”
Rom. 12:1–2 (RSV)

“As each has received a gift, employ it for one another,
as good stewards of God’s varied grace.”
1 Peter 4:10 (RSV)

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This newly revised edition of *Guidelines for Christian Stewards* is gratefully dedicated to Belasic’s family, parents, teachers and colleagues in ministry—and especially to the members, friends and leaders of Redeemer Lutheran Church, Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio, and Redeemer Lutheran Church in Spokane, Wash. Their encouragement, partnership and example in living as Christian stewards—living to let their lives be a contribution to others in the Name of Christ—is a continuing blessing!



FOREWORD

Stewardship education is a challenge! In the Church it has often been associated chiefly, or only, with money! No wonder it is often “put off until later!” The result is often a very narrow understanding of what it means to be a believing, trusting, serving follower of Christ!

The material that follows is designed to expand the understanding of individuals and groups about both personal and corporate stewardship matters. It does matter! Because of that, the material is heavily biblical in its orientation . . . but it has very practical applications and challenges. It is designed for group discussion and aims at personal and corporate growth, maturity and transformation in values and practice for daily living. It helps Christians, both new and not so new(!), grow in their discipleship (Matthew 28, Romans 12), being Christ’s agents of blessing to the people whose lives they can touch.

Some people have used these materials for weekly 60 to 90 minutes discussion groups for four to 10 weeks. Others have found them useful for leadership retreats, new members orientation classes, family life discussion groups, etc. May our Lord bless your use of these newly updated *Guidelines for Christian Stewards* in every possible way!



SOME INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS

Growing in the biblical understanding of being Christ’s steward, agent, administrator, manager and trustee is a continuing process. We do not all grow in life with God, or in the development of God-given abilities, at the same rate. However, these are times when people are more open to learning, sharing and growing as disciples, stewards, of Christ and His Gospel . . . and its implications for daily living!

When using these materials, please provide a comfortable setting where open discussion can take place. Building relationships, friendships and sharing common goals—discovered in the Scriptures together—can make a huge difference in the spiritual life of God’s people in the Body of Christ and in the local congregation as well. Open discussion of the biblical sources of the material is a key ingredient for promoting a holistic concept of stewardship that involves all of life, not merely the “religious” or “institutionalized” portions of life. As followers of Christ and members of God’s Church, our purpose is to be God’s stewards in all of life—living to let our lives be a contribution to others in the Name of Jesus!

These materials are assembled to help us all be what God, in Christ, has declared and enabled us to be: precious, forgiven, loved, sent stewards! May God bless our journey!

■ David Belasic



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GUIDELINES *for* Christian Stewards



PART ONE

1 *The Church*, the “body of Christ,” the “people of the Covenant,” disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ, is also a “family of stewards”—individually and collectively.

A steward is a manager, a caretaker, a trustee, or distributor of all that God gives into one’s care. A definition of stewardship is “living all of life for God’s purposes,” seeing all of life as a sacred trust from God!

The original New Testament word for “stewardship” has its roots in the word *oikos*, meaning house, and *nemein* meaning “manage.” Stewardship has its foundation in managing or administering a house or a household in such a way as to distribute or dispense the resources owned by another and doing it according to the owner’s plan and desire. A steward, an *oikonomos*, is a person who is involved in the action and responsibility of managing, administering or implementing the plans of the Owner. According to the Scriptures, God is the Owner and people are managers.

The word *oikonomia* is often translated “stewardship,” as in Luke 16:2–4, but is also translated as “job.” In 1 Cor. 9:17 the words “commission, task, trust” are used. In Eph. 1:10 the English versions use the words, “God’s plan, the plan.” In Eph. 3:2 and 9 the words “administration, work to do, stewardship, secret plan, and fellowship” are used. In Col. 1:25 the word is translated as “divine office, commission, task.” In 1 Tim. 1:4 some of the ancient manuscripts use the words, “God’s plan, God’s work, divine training or edifying.” To be sure, being a steward, or carrying out our stewardship responsibilities as members of “the body of Christ,” involves the use of money, but much more. According to the Bible, stewardship involves all of life. It’s lifelong discipleship!

God is Owner.

We are the stewards.

2 *Our mission in life, as followers of Christ, is to be stewards.* It has to do with being and becoming what God, in Christ, has made us and redeemed us to be and to become! Living, learning, teaching, sharing this truth, this reality, is a vital part of being a steward. It is closely tied to the meaning of our baptism in the Name of the Triune God. It is a relational concept that is lived out with our LORD, other people and all creation. Since this is true, what changes do I/we need to make as Christians, as denominations?

Being a Christian steward, a Christ-follower, involves the way we view life—all of life, our whole human vocation, the ordering of our life, our discipleship, the making of decisions, the deployment of all of God’s blessings. Please consider 1 Peter 4:7–11, especially v. 10.

The way we look at our being, how we understand being created “in the image of God,” and our purpose for living, are all tied into the concept of being a steward in all of life in the Name of God. Our purpose is to let our life be a contribution to others in the name of Christ! Please consider Gen. 1:26–28; 1 Cor. 12:7; and Rom. 12:1-2.



3 *The time and place for being a steward is the present, the here and now.* We serve God in serving other human beings and in taking care of the silent creation God gave us to oversee. We do not have a religion of escapism (some have distorted it to be so) nor passivity in the face of life's realities. We live in a faith relationship with our Creator God who loved us so much He gave His Son for us and now sends His Spirit to dwell within us. This faith sets us into a relationship not only with our Creator, but also affects our relationship with all God's creatures and with the material world God created. Christianity is the most "physical" of the world religions. In the Incarnation of God in the person of Jesus Christ (God with us) we learn to understand the preciousness of life, of this world and our privileged positions as stewards in the Name of God (John 1).

4 *A steward's view of life broadens the vision, pushes back the horizon!* Life is more than a single cell. It is a "body concept" involving ALL people, all of the earth and the universe. We are stewards of fellow human beings, the fragile planet, the voiceless creatures and the whole of God's creation.

Being a steward means more than having one brand of economics, sociology or politics. Each steward is a part of God's community of stewards. We are Easter people, people of "the Way" with a worldwide view. We grow to follow Christ who is the way, the truth and the life.

We believe Jesus Christ is the "Chief Steward." Because He cared for us to the fullest and made us "Children of God" in a unique sense, He has called and enabled us by His Spirit to be stewards. Please consider 1 Cor. 12-14; Romans 12; Rom. 8:14; and Genesis 1-2.



CHRISTIAN



5 A steward IS (has)

- privileged (Rom. 12:1-2)
- a chosen servant (Matt. 20:1-16)
- important (Gen. 42:6; 43:16, 19; Esther 1:8)
- responsible (Luke 12:48)
- accountable (Is. 22:15-21; Heb. 13:17; 1 Kings 4:6, 16:9)
- called to responsive faith/trust/obedience (Luke 16:10; 1 Cor. 4:2)
- a sense of dignity (Gen. 1:26-28; Is. 36:3, 22; 37:2)
- a sense of belonging (1 Cor. 3:21-23)
- a manager of another's belongings (Genesis 1; Ps. 24:1; Ps. 89:11; Rom. 16:23)
- a close identification with the Master (Luke 8:3)
- a caretaker, custodian, trustee (Eph. 3:2)
- a sense of "watchfulness," alert (1 Cor. 4:1; Heb. 13:17)
- a servant-steward (1 Peter 4:10)
- a unique place and position in God's plans (Luke 16:1-2)

A steward IS NOT

- the Owner, Lord, Master (Ps. 24:1; 50:10-12)
- an "ordinary servant" (Luke 8:3)
- just "one of the others" (Matt. 16:8)
- to pursue power (Luke 16:1-2)
- irresponsible (Luke 12:42-48)
- lazy, greedy (1 Peter 4:10; 1 Cor. 12:7)
- a puppet on a string (Gen. 1:28; Matt. 5:13-16)
- the same as the silent creation/creatures (Ps. 19:1-4 and 8:4-9)!

**Some Biblical examples . . .
references for discussion**

- Genesis 1–2 • created in the image of God 1:26–28
- Genesis 42–44 • Joseph, overseer, governor, steward
- 1 Chronicles 27–29 • an account of various types of stewards
- Dan. 1:11, 16 • stewards of people; abilities
- Gen. 15:2 • an acquired one; heir, member of household
- Is. 22:15–21 • a steward can be replaced for unfaithfulness
- Luke 12:42–48 • a steward’s responsibility increases with blessings given
- Matt. 20:8 • a steward oversees workers
- John 2:8 • a steward oversees, helps, a wedding party
- Luke 8:3 • a wife of a chief steward/overseer
- 1 Cor. 4:1–2 • being stewards of the “mysteries of God”
- Eph. 3:1–10 • believers are stewards of God’s grace
- Eph. 2:19ff • stewards and participants, not just observers
- 1 Cor. 12:4–11 • stewards are given abilities “for the common good”
- 1 Peter 4:7–11 (esp. v. 10) • stewards cannot merely live for themselves
- Rom. 16:23 • Erastus, city treasurer

6 *Stewardship is not merely a means!* The Bible indicates that our mission, purpose, aim, goal, objective, for all of life is to be stewards! The “deeds” of stewardship come from our being stewards. Our aim is not merely to give money, time or ability; to build buildings, acquire property, manage budgets, etc. Our mission is to be stewards! Stewards seek to serve, enable, take care of, preserve, reconcile, relieve, bring life, hope and help to all (Gal. 6:1–10; 1 Peter 4:7–11; Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12).

Stewards continue to re-examine our understanding of what it means to be a steward. The Church, historically, has made mistakes and suffers from many cultural influences that color our thinking (e.g. power/establishment/nationalism/politics/finances, etc.). Christian stewards must beware of the problems created by wanting to be “boss” or to “control” others. Stewards

grow in taking on the “mind of Christ” our Servant–Savior (Phil. 2:5–11).

Stewardship dare not be a limited concept in our thinking and living. We ask ourselves: How can we rediscover it, expand it? What does the Bible teach? What does our Lord say?

7 *Being a steward is a relational concept.* We are not living in isolation.

It means being related to our Creator. Consider Genesis 1, Psalm 8, John 1 and Colossians 1.

We remember our kinship to the dust ... our frailty, our weakness. Acts 17:28ff; Eccl. 3:1–14.

We remember we are unique. “... a little less than the angels” ... having dignity, honor and a special responsive relationship to our Creator!

We remember we are loved and called by God, in Christ, to newness of life! 1 John 4:10–11; Col. 3:12–17; 1 Peter 2:1–10; 2 Cor. 5:14–6:2.

8 *Being a steward means being related to other human beings.* Gen. 1:26–31

We remember our maleness and femaleness. Gen. 2:7, 22.

We remember our being part of a larger “body.” 1 Cor. 12:27.

We remember ALL people are the concern of the Lord. Ps. 24:1.

We remember the two great commandments: LOVE God and neighbor. Matt. 22:36–39.

It means being related to creation. Genesis 1–2; Eccl. 12:1–7; Colossians 1; Ephesians 1.



We cannot misuse the “dominion” concept in our attitude toward the earth, the seas, the air, or the expanding universe. Does “subdue” mean to “pillage” or to “take care of, use properly/enhance?” Can we keep borrowing from the future? How do we use God’s non-renewable gifts? Energy? Water? Air? The earth does not belong to people, but people belong to the earth, and the earth and everything in it belongs to the Lord! (Psalm 24).

How do we care for the earth/planet, universe? Are there more ultimate questions and concerns than “my/our happiness?” Can we just “go along with the tide of the times?” What does the new dimension of the nuclear age say to us as stewards? How are we involved? What are the blessings? Dangers? Is a human being “above nature?” “In nature?” “With nature?”

From the biblical perspective, especially because of the meaning of God’s Covenant, the blessings of Holy Baptism, and Christ’s call of discipleship, life that is centered in God (theo-centric) is of necessity centered in human beings (anthropocentric) and the earth on which we live and the silent creation we enjoy (geo-centric). Stewards see life from the perspective of faith in Christ, relationship with other human beings and nature.

Stewards who are loved by God can have positive influences on others. The continuing need for stewards is to be FOR, not merely against; to be actively and positively oriented to this world, as well as the world to come; to be contributors to life, not just preservers; to be people of hope in God (1 John 4:19; John 13:34–35; Matt. 25:31–46; Is. 41:17–20), living in the power of the resurrection!

9 *Stewards are aware that we live in a “fallen world.”* We struggle to do right and yet are faced with doing wrong (Rom. 7:15–25; Gal. 5:13–25). We take the power of sin, greed and evil seriously. We do not minimize it. Sin affects everyone. As Christians we reject the version of historical progress and consumerism that makes history itself progressive and redemptive. We believe God is the Owner of this universe and has given us the privilege of being stewards. We believe that God has provided the remedy for sin in the blood of Christ shed for the forgiveness of sins. Christian stewards are people who live in repentance and faith, for the Church lives only by the forgiveness of sins in Christ.

Christian stewards do not believe that the material world as such is sinful, evil or owned by demons (Eph. 6:12ff). We do not believe, as some do, that only the “spiritual” is good and the physical/material world is evil. Stewards of the Christian persuasion dare not abandon this world prematurely! In Christ, God chose to come to this planet in human form (for us, in our likeness!) and because of Him we serve God and others, and the creation, here and now (1 Peter; John 3:16; 1 John 4; James 4:14–26).

In an age of isolation, individualism, despondency, fear, loss of vision, purpose and meaning stewards have a lot to offer all people in the name of God. Stewards are empowered to be creative, peace-bringing, children of God. Secure in the grace of God in Jesus Christ we can fulfill our calling to be God’s stewards—gratefully living all of life for God’s purposes (Romans 12)!

