

BIBLICAL STEWARDSHIP PRINCIPLES

BACKGROUND

The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod at its 1995 Convention (Resolution 4-07a) asked the Department of Stewardship to "articulate the biblical principles of financial stewardship (Bylaw 9.01) which should guide all of our stewardship and appeal efforts, and disseminate these to all synodical entities, agencies and auxiliaries prior to the 1998 convention."

PREAMBLE

The principles that follow are designed to be used by entities, agencies, auxiliaries and congregations of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod in all stewardship education and fund-raising activities.

These principles reflect the definition of stewardship commonly in use throughout The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod.

CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP is the free and joyous activity of the child of God and God's family, the church, in managing all of life and life's resources for God's purposes.

God's people are identified in various ways in the Bible, such as God's children, followers, disciples, stewards and the like. In your study of the principles which follow, you may want to substitute some of those and other titles and discuss how they add or take away from the impact on us as God's stewards.

The "we" mentioned throughout the "will" and "will not" statements that follow refers to those who serve the above-mentioned groupings as they relate to God's stewards.

Each of the document's eight sections begins by listing the stewardship principle which has been formulated, its meaning, the key Scripture passages and implications (wills/will not). You will notice that in each of the principles the "will/will not" sections are introduced with "As children of God through faith in Jesus Christ, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, we..." These words are purposely repeated throughout the document to remind the reader that the motivation and power for the "wills/will nots" come only from the Lord Himself. Each group is to identify additional implications suitable to its situation.

All entities of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod are encouraged to consider these principles and implications in all approaches and contacts with God's stewards.

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All Scriptural references in this document are taken from The New International Version published by Zondervan Bible Publishers for Concordia Publishing House.

**SUMMARY OF
PRINCIPLES WITH MEANINGS**

- I. GOD'S STEWARDS ARE GOD'S STEWARDS.**
God's stewards are stewards by virtue of creation and their re-creation in Holy Baptism; therefore, they belong to the Lord.
- II. GOD'S STEWARDS ARE MANAGERS, NOT OWNERS.**
God's stewards have been entrusted by God with life and life's resources and given the privilege of responsibly and joyfully managing them for Him.
- III. GOD'S STEWARDS ARE SAINTS AND SINNERS.**
God's stewards rejoice in and live out what God has declared them to be through the cross. At the same time His stewards recognize they are sinners who fight sin and its consequences each day.
- IV. GOD'S STEWARDS ARE UNIQUELY SINGULAR, YET PROFOUNDLY PLURAL.**
God's stewards recognize that their lives are not solo performances but are personal responses to God, lived out within the community of faith to benefit the whole world.
- V. GOD'S STEWARDS ARE *IN* THE WORLD, BUT NOT *OF* THE WORLD.**
God's stewards recognize that the Lord sets them apart from the world and by the transforming power of the Gospel sends them into the world to live out the Gospel.
- VI. GOD'S STEWARDS ARE LOVED AND LOVING.**
God's stewards recognize that their stewardship flows out of God's act of love for them in Christ which empowers them, in turn, to love others in acts of Christ-like love.
- VII. GOD'S STEWARDS ARE SERVED AND SERVING.**
God's stewards recognize that their stewardship involves a Gospel-powered style of life which is demonstrated in servanthood within all the arenas of life.
- VIII. GOD'S STEWARDS LIVE WITH AN AWARENESS OF THE PRESENT AND FUTURE, OF TIME AND ETERNITY.**
God's stewards live intentionally in the light of God's eternal purpose while being firmly committed to His rule in the here and now.

I. GOD'S STEWARDS ARE GOD'S STEWARDS

What does this mean?

God's stewards are stewards by virtue of creation and their re-creation in Holy Baptism; therefore, they belong to the Lord.

What does God's Word say about this?

Gen. 1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Is. 43:1 But now, this is what the Lord says--he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: fear not, for I have redeemed you. I have summoned you by name; you are mine. (cf. 43:1-3a)

Rom. 6:4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. (cf. 6:1-11)

2 Cor. 5:16-17 So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! (cf. 5:14-17)

Eph. 2:8-10 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

How is this done?

As children of God through faith in Jesus Christ, and with the Holy Spirit's help, we will:

- Recognize that we are made stewards by God's activity;
- Respect Christian stewards for Whose they are; and,
- Remind stewards that they are God's new creation each day.

As children of God through faith in Jesus Christ, and with the Holy Spirit's help, we will not:

- Use short-cut methods that consider stewards to be merely "donors," "clients" or "customers" or means to an end;
- Neglect to name the name of the Lord who is the Source of all stewardship; or,
- Present stewardship as limited to a single area of life, such as money.

II. GOD'S STEWARDS ARE MANAGERS, NOT OWNERS.

What does this mean?

God's stewards have been entrusted with life and life's resources and given the privilege of responsibly and joyfully managing them for Him.

What does God's Word say about this?

- Gen. 2:15 The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.
- Ps. 24:1 The earth is the LORD'S, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it. (cf. Ps. 89:11)
- 1 Chron. 29:14 But whom am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand. (cf. 29:1-20)
- 2 Cor. 8:5 And they [Macedonian Christians] did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will. (cf. 8:1-7)
- Luke 12:48b From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked. (cf. 12:41-48)
- 1 Tim. 6:17-19 Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

How is this done?

As children of God through faith in Jesus Christ, and with the Holy Spirit's help, we will:

- Encourage proper management of all of life and life's resources for God's purposes;
- Promote materials and approaches to stewards that are firmly grounded in the Owner/manager understanding of stewardship;
- Encourage cheerful, firstfruit, proportionate (including but not limited to tithing) living and giving in all areas of life by Christian stewards; and,
- Receive and use God's gifts with thanksgiving.

As children of God through faith in Jesus Christ, and with the Holy Spirit's help, we will not:

- Approach the steward as if he or she is the Owner;
- Neglect to remind the steward of Who the Owner is;
- Forget the Owner for the sake of the interests of the entity being represented; or,
- Fail to remind Christian stewards that greater blessings call for greater responsibility to manage them according to God's purposes.

III. GOD'S STEWARDS ARE SAINTS AND SINNERS.

What does this mean?

God's stewards rejoice in and live out what the Lord has declared them to be through the cross. At the same time His stewards recognize they are sinners who fight sin and its consequences each day.

What does God's Word say about this?

- Eph. 4:22-24 You were taught, which regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. (cf. Col. 3:5-17)
- Rom. 7:21-25 So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God--through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.
- 1 John 3:1-2 How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.
- 1 Peter 2:9-10 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

How is this done?

As children of God through faith in Jesus Christ, and with the Holy Spirit's help, we will:

- Recognize that the potential for great good, or great evil, lies in the way stewardship is presented and received;
- Evaluate carefully all communication, oral or written, according to the proper distinction between Law and Gospel, and in keeping with the biblical truth that each steward is at the same time saint and sinner; and,
- Offer varying opportunities for Christian stewards to grow, recognizing that they are at different points of spiritual maturity.

As children of God through faith in Jesus Christ, and with the Holy Spirit's help, we will not:

- Assume that, because we are dealing with Christians, we can set aside the proper application of Law and Gospel in serving God's stewards;
- See all Christians as being at the same maturity level; or,
- Use any approach to stewards that appeals to the sinful nature, selfish interest, or something other than faith active in love.

IV. GOD'S STEWARDS ARE UNIQUELY SINGULAR, YET PROFOUNDLY PLURAL.

What does this mean?

God's stewards recognize that their lives are not solo performances but are personal responses to God, lived out within the community of faith to benefit the whole world.

What does God's Word say about this?

Rom. 12:4-5 Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

1 Cor. 12:12-13 The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free--and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

1 Pet. 4:10 Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.

2 Cor. 8:13-14 Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality.

Gal. 6:10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. (cf. 6:7-10)

How is this done?

As children of God through faith in Jesus Christ, and with the Holy Spirit's help, we will:

- Emphasize the privilege and the accountability this privilege entails of being unique children of God with specific gifts that honor the Lord and bless others;
- Recognize the personal and sensitive nature of the steward's response; and yet emphasize the truth that Christian stewards are members of the Body of Christ and are in kingdom work together with fellow Christians; and,
- Remind Christian stewards that God showers blessings upon those who manage them wisely and well for the common good.

As children of God through faith in Jesus Christ, and with the Holy Spirit's help, we will not:

- Emphasize one aspect or area of church work to the exclusion or detriment of others;
- Teach or influence in ways which minimize the steward's connection to and need for the rest of the Body of Christ; or,
- Equate stewardship with merely meeting an organization's budget or financial goal.

**V. GOD'S STEWARDS ARE *IN* THE WORLD,
BUT NOT *OF* THE WORLD.**

What does this mean?

God's stewards recognize that the Lord sets them apart from the world and by the transforming power of the Gospel sends them into the world to live out the Gospel.

What does God's Word say about this?

Rom. 12:2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.

John 17:15-18 My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into this world, I have sent them into the world. (cf. John 20:21-23)

Gen. 12:1-3 The LORD said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

John 16:33 I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.

How is this done?

As children of God through faith in Jesus Christ, and with the Holy Spirit's help, we will:

- Emphasize how the Gospel transforms stewards' attitudes in, about and toward the world;
- Emphasize the Christian witness of stewards in the decisions that are made; and,
- Encourage the support of appropriate projects and activities both within and outside the church.

As children of God through faith in Jesus Christ, and with the Holy Spirit's help, we will not:

- Limit the scope of Christian stewardship only to "church-related" projects and activities;
- Use spiritually defective approaches and motivations from the world that are based mainly and primarily on the criterion that they "work;" or,
- Forget the daily tensions and struggles of being God's stewards *in* but not *of* the world.

VI. GOD'S STEWARDS ARE LOVED AND LOVING.

What does this mean?

God's stewards recognize that their stewardship flows out of God's act of love for them in Christ which empowers them, in turn, to love others in acts of Christ-like love.

What does God's Word say about this?

1 John 4:19 We love because he first loved us. (cf. 1 John 4:11)

1 John 3:16-18 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

John 13:34-35 A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know you are my disciples, if you love one another.

2 Cor. 5:14-15 For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all have died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

Gal. 5:6b That only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

How is this done?

As children of God through faith in Jesus Christ, and with the Holy Spirit's help, we will:

- Emphasize that all activities of Christian stewards done in faith and love are properly Christian stewardship.
- Honor the choices God's people make as they exercise Christ-like love; and,
- Use only those approaches, strategies and methods that reflect the Gospel and build up the stewards' faith active in love.

As children of God through faith in Jesus Christ, and with the Holy Spirit's help, we will not:

- Employ techniques and fundraising methods that fail to emphasize God's love in Christ as the basis and motivation for Christian stewardship;
- Minimize the bringing of regular offerings as a part of worship and a loving response to God's love for us; or,
- De-emphasize or set aside God's love and our response in order to meet budgets, quotas and goals.

VII. GOD'S STEWARDS ARE SERVED AND SERVING.

What does this mean?

God's stewards recognize that their stewardship involves a Gospel-powered style of life which is demonstrated in servanthood within all the arenas of life.

What does God's Word say about this?

Phil. 2:5-8 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus, who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death--death on a cross.

Matt. 20:26b-28 Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave--just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. (cf. Matt. 25:31-46)

John 13:3-5 Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

John 13:15-17 I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

How is this done?

As children of God through faith in Jesus Christ, and with the Holy Spirit's help, we will:

- Recognize that service done for the benefit of the community and world is also part of Christian stewardship;
- Emphasize that just as Jesus came to serve, stewards are privileged to serve others through their abilities and resources; and,
- Adopt the attitude of a servant in all our relationships with others.

As children of God through faith in Jesus Christ, and with the Holy Spirit's help, we will not:

- Set aside servanthood for the sake of merely reaching an organizational goal;
- Fail to encourage stewards to be God's servants in any decision or action; or,
- Fail to challenge stewards to serve the Lord with personal acts of compassion and service as well as financial gifts.

VIII. GOD'S STEWARDS LIVE WITH AN AWARENESS OF THE PRESENT AND FUTURE, OF TIME AND ETERNITY.

What does this mean?

God's stewards live intentionally in the light of the Lord's eternal purpose while being firmly committed to the here and now.

What does God's Word say about this?

Matt. 6:19-21 Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

1 Tim. 6:17-19 Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

Phil. 3:12-14,20 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Pet. 3:11-12a Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.

Rev. 14:13 Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow [with] them."

How is this done?

As children of God through faith in Jesus Christ, and with the Holy Spirit's help, we will:

- Point out the eternal dimensions inherent in all that stewards decide to do or not to do;
- Pursue good planning for the present and future as part of stewardship education; and,
- Rejoice in knowing what God's stewards do now can have lasting benefits.

As children of God through faith in Jesus Christ, and with the Holy Spirit's help, we will not:

- Be so intent on the here and now that the possibilities for extending the kingdom after death are neglected; or,
- Be so intent on plans for the future that the possibilities for extending the kingdom here and now are neglected.

