

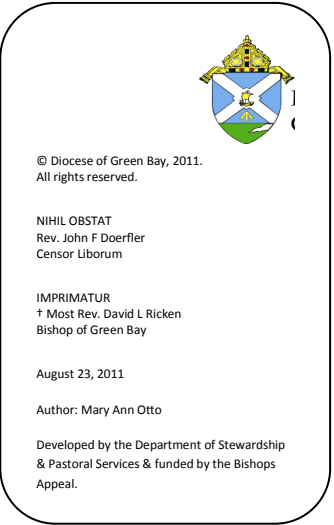
# Be Not Afraid How to Follow Christ

## A Six Session Small Group Process

The life of a Christian steward, lived in imitation of the life of Jesus Christ, is challenging even difficult in many ways; but both here and hereafter it is charged with intense joy.

*Stewardship: A Disciple's Response – The United States  
Catholic Conference of Bishops*





*Be Not Afraid: Exploring a Life of Discipleship* Small Group Process is meant to infuse the life of your parish with the stewardship message and may be reproduced.

Many blessings in your efforts!

Mary Ann Otto, Stewardship and Special Projects Director, Diocese of Green Bay is the primary author and editor of

*Be Not Afraid: Exploring a Life of Discipleship*. Contact her at [motto@gbdioc.org](mailto:motto@gbdioc.org) or (920) -272-8301

Cover Photo By Stanislav Mikuš (sculptor) - cc-by-3.0 Peter Zelizňák (photo) (Own work) [Public domain, CC BY-SA 3.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0>) or GFDL (<http://www.gnu.org/copyleft/fdl.html>)], via Wikimedia Commons

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES** For Sessions One through Five

**Session One: Joy-Filled Managers**

**By the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops:** *Stewardship a Disciple’s Response*

**By Bishop Robert F. Morneau:** *Embracing a Generous Life-The Joyful Spirituality of Stewardship*

**By Pope Francis:** *The Joy of the Gospel, Our Common Home,*

**By Tracy Earl Welliver:** *Everyday Stewardship: Reflections for the Journey*

**Session Two: Grateful Hearts-Generous Spirits**

**By Pope Francis:** *Walking in Praise with Pope Francis -30 Days on Care for Our Common Home*

**By Bishop Robert F. Morneau:** *The Color of Gratitude and Other Spiritual Surprises*

**By Brother David Steindl -Rast:** *Gratefulness-The Heart of Prayer, A Listening Heart, Deeper than Words*

**By Mary Jo Leddy:** *Radical Gratitude*

**Online Resources:** [www.gratefulness.org](http://www.gratefulness.org), Thanksgiving Prayers <http://www.americancatholic.org/features/thanksgiving/prayers.aspx>

**Session Three: Constant Communication**

**By Pope Francis:** *What Pope Francis Says About Prayer-30 Days of Reflections and Prayers,*

**By Fr. Ronald Rolheiser:** *Prayer-Our Deepest Longing*

**By Mathew Kelly:** *A Call to Joy - Living In The Presence of God, Rediscover Jesus*

**By Fr. James Martin, SJ:** *Together on Retreat (Enhanced Edition), Jesus: A Pilgrimage*

**By Bishop Robert F. Morneau:** *Living Prayer, Pathways to God*

**Online Resources:** *Praying Sunday Scriptures* [www.wordforliving.org](http://www.wordforliving.org), *Online Three Minute Retreats* [www.loyolapress.com](http://www.loyolapress.com), *Online Daily Reflections, Weekly Prayer Guides, Retreats,* [www.onlineministries.creighton.edu](http://www.onlineministries.creighton.edu)

**Diocese of Saginaw, MI:** *Little Burgundy Book: Six Minute Reflections on Stewardship*

**Session Four: Make Me a Servant**

**Pope Francis:** *What Pope Francis Says about Service-30 Days of Reflections and Prayers*

**Dr. Albert Winesman/Gallup:** *Living Your Strengths, Catholic Edition*

**Catherine of Siena Institute:** *Catholic Spiritual Gifts Program*

**Leisa Anslinger:** *Living Catholic Stewardship: A Call to Serve*

**Jim Forest:** *All is Grace: A Biography of Dorothy Day*

**Session Five: Investing in Heavenly Treasure**

**Daniel Conway:** *What Do I Own and What Owns Me? A Spirituality of Stewardship*

**Phil Lenahan:** *Seven Steps to Becoming Financially Free*

**Charles Zech:** *Why Catholics Don’t Give and What Can Be Done*

**St. Mark, Florida,** <http://www.stmarktampa.org/documents/Q&A%20-%20Sharing%20Our%20Financial%20Resources.pdf>

**Gregory S. Jeffery:** *Why Enough is Never Enough—Overcoming Worries About Money—A Catholic Perspective*

## Additional Ideas and Resources

### Marketing the Event:

- Invite small groups including parish leadership to pilot the resource
- Encourage invitation by word of mouth
- Send announcements electronically as well as the more traditional methods
- Publish a brief participant testimony in the bulletin, website or parish newsletter
- Duplicate a sample session and have it available after masses for members to preview
- Ask neighborhoods to form local groups
- Consider offering the opportunity followed by a scrapbooking session or other social
- Form small groups with couples (all ages) girlfriends, grandparents, fathers and sons, etc

### Bulletin Announcements:

*There has got to be a better way!!!!* In a busy, all consuming world, when is enough, enough? Would you like an opportunity to reflect upon your priorities in light of your Catholic faith? Have you been looking for *the pathway* to becoming a joy-filled follower of Jesus? Are you interested in joining others in this important conversation? If your answer is “yes” to any of the above, consider gathering your friends and forming a *Be Not Afraid* small group. Groups will meet for six sessions of 90 minutes each that include fellowship, prayer, information, conversation and encouragement in taking steps to becoming more authentic disciples of Jesus. For more information call \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_.

Do you get up every morning and think “I need a new perspective or attitude adjustment?” If you do, consider refocusing by forming or joining a *Be Not Afraid* small group and discover what Scripture and the Catholic Tradition have to say about gratitude, prayer, service and sharing. For more information, contact \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_.

Would you like to enter into the Easter Season with a new “way of life?” Can you make time to meet with others for conversation and encouragement in becoming authentic disciples of Jesus? If yes, consider spending some of your Lenten journey *Be Not Afraid* in small group. This six week process will explore such topics as true gratitude, faith-filled prayer, compassionate service, and generous sharing from the perspective of Scripture and the Church. If you would like to greet Easter morning with a new resolve to authentic discipleship, contact \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_ for more information.

### Prayers of the Faithful:

- For all members participating in a *Be Not Afraid* small group, that they may grow in their understanding of discipleship in order to become joy-filled managers of all God has given them. We pray to the Lord.
- For all small groups participating in *Be Not Afraid* for the next six weeks that God may bless their time together in prayer, formation, reflection and conversation and that they grow in their understanding and practice of stewardship. We pray to the Lord.



# Exploring a Life of Discipleship Facilitator's Guide

Dear Friends in Christ,

Thank you for your consideration in using *Exploring a Life of Discipleship*. The small group model is a powerful way of engaging and forming parishioners through relationship building and faith sharing. The hope in creating this resource is that participants will encounter a call to “holiness” through stewardship and that it will be a stepping stone to living as joy-filled disciples of Jesus. Many blessings as you continue to minister as a member of the Body of Christ.

Department of Stewardship and Pastoral Services  
Diocese of Green Bay

## Preparation and Strategies for Exploring a Life of Stewardship

The role of the facilitator is to:

- Make initial call to members with details of time and location of session
- Greet members as they arrive
- Make weekly materials available
- Keep time each session and the group moving (key role)
- Encourage all members as active participants in the group
- Assure room, CD player or tablet/computer for YouTube (if using for opening prayer), nametags and hospitality are ready
- Be the contact for members to call for information or in an emergency
- Contact members if there is a change in plans (weather, emergency, etc.)

**Time Frame:** This small group sharing process is meant to be done in six (preferably weekly) sessions of 90 minutes each.

**Group Size:** The ideal size would be eight members. If your group is larger, breaking into two small groups for “Questions for Reflection” will help you stay within your 90 minute time frame.

**Location:** Your small group can be held at the parish or in private homes. Providing a welcoming and “cozy” environment adds to the friendly nature of the event.

**Hospitality:** Beverages should be provided at each session. A simple treat is a nice option which could be rotated by the members if they are in agreement.

**Materials:** Reproduce materials for participants either as a complete packet or one session at a time. Though it is not necessary, encourage members to prepare for the session prior to meeting to enhance the efficiency and depth of your discussion.

*The greatest among you must be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; whoever humbles himself will be exalted.*

**Suggestions for Facilitating a Small Group Discussion:** An effective facilitator accomplishes three tasks. The first is to provide a safe and confidential environment for faith sharing, the second is to encourage participation from all members and the third is to keep the conversation moving in an efficient way so as to complete the session in its entirety. With this in mind, consider the following:

- At the first session, discuss the importance of confidentiality within the group.
- If you have eight or more participants, divide group into two small groups for discussion.
- When considering questions for reflection, go around in a circle for responses allowing members to “pass” if they choose.
- If you have extroverts who love to share, consider using a “two minute” per person option.
- If you have any introverts, invite them to share.
- Be affirming with all responses.
- Be aware of the time and gently give a two minute “moving on” warning.

## Components of the Process

### PRAYER

The first 30 minutes of the small group time is spent in welcome and prayer. Please be sure to use this time appropriately. When gathering any group, it is important to help them put aside the busyness and pressures of the day and to focus on the topic of the session. The call to prayer through scripture, music and reflection will help to open minds and hearts for the rest of the session.

**Prayer Environment:** A prayer area with a candle, bible, cross, or cloth of the liturgical season, is a wonderful idea. Additional symbols for the prayer area would be:

- (Session 1) a copy the Bishops’ pastoral *Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response*
- (Session 2) gratitude journal, small globe, flowers, book on the subject of gratitude
- (Session 3) calendar, iPhone, prayer book, rosary, copy of Lord’s Prayer
- (Session 4) parish ministry opportunities (booklet), articles or pictures of service
- (Session 5) coins, checkbook, debit or credit card, budget booklet, church envelope
- (Session 6) copy of a question mark (?), repeat one item from sessions 3, 4, and 5

**Songs:** The “suggested” songs are familiar to most people and are found in many parish liturgical songbooks if you have someone who is comfortable leading. An instrumental or a contemporary song on CD would also be an option. the YouTube selections have the lyrics included for better participation

**Quotation for Silent Reflection:** This component of prayer is an additional opportunity to encourage thought and conversation on the topic of stewardship. Use in a way that best suits the needs of your group.

**Scripture for Inspiration:** Be sure to have a copy of the New American Bible available so that the Word of God can be proclaimed during prayer. Perhaps assign the reading to someone at the end of the previous session so that they can prepare. All the participants can be invited to bring bibles or you can provide one for each if feasible.

## CONTENT AND FAITH SHARING QUESTIONS

### Consider This:

- The content pieces found on pages 2 and 3 of each session can be read ahead of time or at the time of the gathering
- If you are going to read aloud at the session, encourage those comfortable with reading to alternate paragraphs.
- Complete reading the pieces on both page 2 and 3 before considering the *Questions for Reflection* so that all material is covered during the appropriate time frame
- As your group goes through the *Questions for Reflection* be sure each person has an opportunity to answer each question before moving on to the next
- The last question of each *Question for Reflection* on page 3 encourages the participants to consider an action step based on what they read and their discussion. A lively sharing of ideas, if possible, would benefit the entire group

### LIVING LIKE JESUS

#### Take Action and Commitment:

- Continuing the same line of thought from the previous page, go through and discuss some of suggestions for action found on page 4
- Using ideas from this list or from the prior group discussion on page 3, ask members to prayerfully commit to an action step for the upcoming week
- Consider playing some instrumental music while people are discerning
- The participants can be invited to share their commitments aloud or write them on a slip of paper to place in a basket

### FROM THE HEART OF POPE FRANCIS

#### Take Action and Commitment:

- If time permits, reflect upon the quotations regarding the session topic

### CLOSING PRAYER AND PREPARATION FOR NEXT WEEK

#### Wrap Up:

- Set the date and time for the next session and distribute next session handouts
- Take care of any announcements and reminders
- Assign the Gospel Reading for the next session
- Point out the *Additional Scripture Passages and Resources* for each session found in the inside cover
- Affirm the good work they did during the session and express your gratitude

#### Closing Prayer:

- Be sure to take time to close each session with the provided prayer
- If there is extra time, allow members to express what they were particularly grateful for about the session

#### Following Session Six:

- Thank everyone for sharing 540 minutes of their lives with you in the past six sessions
- Encourage them to keep their materials near as an ongoing reminder and inspiration
- Ask if they would like to come together as a small group on another subject

FROM THE HEART OF POPE FRANCIS

- We can bring the Gospel to others only if it has had a deep impact in our lives. (April 10, 2015)
- My life, my attitude, the way of going through life, must really be a concrete sign of the fact that God is close to us. (tweeted March 7, 2016)
- If you know Jesus with these three languages: of mind, heart and action, than you can say that you know Jesus. (homily Sept. 26, 2013)
- We are all sinners. We are called to a conversion of heart. (tweeted Feb. 3, 2015)
- Among the poor being treated worst is our planet. We cannot pretend all is fine in the face of the great environmental crisis. (tweeted Feb. 15, 2016)
- With Jesus, there is true joy. (tweeted Dec. 25, 2014)
- Come, Holy Spirit! Help us overcome our selfishness. (tweeted May 20, 2014)
- Let's seek to live in a way that is worthy of our Christian vocation. (tweeted Nov. 20, 2014)
- In Jesus, I have met the one who is able to bring out the best in me. (tweeted Feb. 16, 2016)



Photo By Benhur Arcayan (Malacañang Photo Bureau) [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons

LIVING LIKE JESUS: (21 minutes)

Take Action

Consider how your prayer, reflection and sharing in Session 1 might have inspired you to step out in faith this week. Share ideas and reflect your personal situation or consider one of the simple ideas below.

- Read through the “Additional Scripture Passages” found below and write a personal definition of stewardship.
- Reflect upon a favorite saint or person in your life who you think is a model of stewardship. How do they live in admiration and imitation of Jesus?
- Generate a “doable” list with monthly ideas for expressing your joy-filled gratitude as a household. Follow through with these ideas.
- Identify three areas of your life where you tend God’s gift in a responsible and accountable way and three areas that you might like to improve. Select one of your “needs improvement” areas to work on this week.
- Discern areas of your life in which you share of God’s gifts in justice and love. Celebrate your efforts.

Commitment:

- In light of this, what commitment will I make for the week(s) ahead?

Wrap Up: (1 minute)

Date for Session 2 \_\_\_\_\_

Closing Prayer (Together)

Wonderful Creator, Awesome Redeemer, Energizing Advocate, you are the source of our admiration and love. You have breathed life into our beings, and saved us from a life without you. For this, we are grateful. As we work to become stewards, inspire us that we may not remain passive, but that our admiration expressed in prayer and worship will bring us to our feet as joy-filled managers of all that is put in our care. We want to be authentic disciples and ask this in the name of Jesus, our Savior. Amen.

Stewardship has the power to shape and mold our understanding of our lives and the way in which we live. (Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response, United States Catholic Conference of Bishops)



Session 1  
Exploring a Life of Discipleship  
JOY-FILLED MANAGERS

Christian stewards receive God’s gifts gratefully, cherish and tend them in a responsible and accountable manner, share them in justice and love with all, and return them with increase to the Lord.  
(Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response, United States Catholic Conference of Bishops)

GATHERING: (15 minutes)

Welcome and Greeting

- One word that describes me today is...
- What are my hopes for our small group?

PRAYING: (15 minutes)

Songs

Traditional songs to sing/play or select a contemporary personal favorite

- Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow - Old Hundreth
- Glory and Praise to Our God - Dan Schutte

YouTube selections:

- Power of Your Love – Goeff Bullock  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ga6Qtzxd6vk>
- Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone—John Newton/Chris Tomlin  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jbe70RuLk8I>

Quotation for Silent Reflection  
Consider a word or phrase for possible sharing

“In the Old Testament the prophet Ezekiel, speaking, for God makes this statement: “A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.” (Ezekiel 36:26) Our God is a promise-maker; our God is a promise-keeper. When the Holy Spirit breaks into our lives our hearts become more prayerful, our ministry joyful, and our generosity extravagant.”  
Bishop Robert F. Morneau  
(Auxiliary Bishop Emeritus, Diocese of Green Bay)

“The promotion of the practice of stewardship is important for the mission of the Church and for the spiritual well-being of each individual Christian. Everyone benefits from the sacrificial gift one makes of his time, talent and treasure.”

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (letter dated June 20, 1997)

Scripture for Inspiration  
Matthew 25:14-30

Question for Group Reflection

- Words or verses from the passage spoke to me are?



Prayer Conclusion (Together)

Lord and Master of all, we thank and praise you for all the gifts that you have placed in our care. You have entrusted us with this world and all its blessings and given us the freedom to choose how we use them. Infuse us with your Spirit that we may not be afraid in today’s world to be assertive in nurturing your many gifts and return them in abundance to you. Help us to be “holy” risk-takers as we work to imitate Jesus. We ask this in the name of the “ultimate steward,” your Son and our Savior. Amen.

**CONSIDER THIS:** (38 minutes - If participants have not read content prior to gathering, please take a moment to read aloud, rotating willing members.)

## Stewardship A Way of Life – Believing and Doing

Are you a steward? It is certainly an interesting question to be asked in our day. The word has all kinds of definitions for a variety of people. As one might anticipate, the Church approaches the term from a biblical concept and as with many things, whenever faith enters into the conversation, it becomes a challenging and life-giving opportunity. Thus, our question becomes, “Are you a Christian steward?”

In 1992, the U. S. Bishops issued the pastoral, *Stewardship a Disciple’s Response* as a way of bringing the biblical reality of stewardship to Catholics in our country. This document not only has guided us in understanding what a true Christian steward “believes” but also what he/she does.

There are three key truths that a person brings to the practice of stewardship. One is that Jesus is our Savior and as baptized Christians, it is our call to live in admiration, but also in imitation of him. The pastoral states “Stewardship always starts with the personal experience of the Risen Christ in our midst and in our hearts. It is a vocation to discipleship.” Ron Rolheiser, in *The Holy Longing*, suggests that admiration of Jesus is the easy part. It is living like Jesus that becomes the challenge as well as the opportunity. *Do you believe?*

The second fact is everything in the universe including ourselves, was created by God for God. The reality (perhaps harsh or maybe freeing) is that we own nothing. Like the servants in the Parable of the Talents, we are only caretakers or managers of everything around us from our environment, bodies, relationships, time, talents, financial resources, etc. And yes, someday the “Rightful Owner” will return for an accounting of everything. *Do you believe?*

The third reality is once we understand “Who” we belong to and why we are here, we have the opportunity to live joy-filled generous lives and build God’s kingdom. Our bishops in the pastoral tell us, “Whenever we accept our lives as sheer gifts, the Spirit can use us as instruments for spreading the Gospel. Wherever the Spirit works there is joy. Good stewards are always the joyful bearers of the Good News of Salvation.” Pope Francis says: *If we live faith in our daily life, then our work too becomes a chance to spread the joy of being a Christian (tweeted Jan. 21, 2014).* The testimony to this truth is a global Catholic Church of over a billion members. Our ancestors understood and believed. *Do you believe?*

Those who believe, act. The bishops in *Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response* have given us a template to how we live in imitation of Jesus as Christian Stewards. So what *do* Christian stewards do?



### Quotation for Reflection

Disciples who practice stewardship recognize God as the origin of life, the giver of freedom, the source of all they have and are and will be. . . They know themselves to be recipients and caretakers of God’s many gifts. They are grateful for what they have received.

(*Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response*,  
United States Catholic Conference of Bishops)

The Lord’s are the earth and its fullness; the world and those who dwell in it. (Psalm 24:1)

Above Photo: Creative Commons Public Domain by stokpic

## Pathway to Christian Stewardship

### Receive God’s gifts gratefully

Gratitude is foundational to the life of stewardship. (It is so important that the next session of this process is dedicated to it.) When we are authentically grateful for the many blessings God has provided, we find generosity an easy response. Conversely, ingratitude is a fertile ground for envy, greed and unhappiness. Even if we understand and believe that everything belongs to God, choosing to be grateful for what has been put in our care is intentional. As we take inventory of our own stewardship efforts, considering to heavily invest in the area of gratitude can pay joyful dividends in striving to become a generous steward.

### Cherish and tend God’s gifts in a responsible and accountable manner

Once we are able to stand in awe and express appreciation for what God has given, a Christian steward acknowledges the ***Handle with Faith and Care*** directive that comes with all that God has fashioned. The Parable of the Talents is one way of understanding this concept. Bishop Robert F. Morneau has eloquently used an additional image of gardens (such as the spiritual, economic, ecological, intellectual and talent gardens), to make this important point come to life. He asks the question: “How well have we or are we tending the gardens in our life?” With limited time and resources, there are always important choices for a Christian steward to make if we want an abundant harvest.

### Share God’s gifts in justice and love with all

Generously sharing what God has loaned us is frequently one of the biggest challenges to the Christian steward. Jesus was certainly clear about using our lives to pray and serve others. He was equally transparent about sharing our resources with those in need. Today our Church teaches about supporting the “common good.” Yet, in our current culture it is personally difficult to determine when “enough is enough” both in use of our time and our resources. The biblical tithe of 10% can serve as a guide, as the Christian steward strives to be led by the Holy Spirit in giving one’s time for prayer and service, as well as one’s income. A fruit of the Holy Spirit is generosity. Scripture encourages us not to give of what is left of our time and resources but our “first fruits.”

### Return God’s gifts with increase

Imagine one day, like the servants in the Parable of the Talents, we will be standing before the Master to provide an account of our “management” endeavors. As a grateful Christian and joyful steward, we will be able to provide a report that reveals our great care for the environment and all life, liberal amounts of time spent in faith-filled prayer and compassionate service as well as the sharing of a generous portion of material and financial resources. Our abundant return will promote and affirm God’s love for the world and give others the opportunity to know Christ more intimately. On that day, we will be invited to “Come, share the Master’s joy.”

### Questions for Reflection

**What resonates with you the most about stewardship? \* Considering the three truths, what is the easiest to believe? \* What is the most difficult? \* Currently what do you do well in the areas of Christian stewardship? \* What might be an area of weakness? \* What might you consider doing in taking a step forward in becoming a Christian steward?**

Notes:

---

---

---

---

---

FROM THE HEART OF POPE FRANCIS:

- In union with Jesus, we seek what he seeks and we love what her loves, In the end, what we are seeking is the glory of the Father; we live and act “for the praise of his glorious grace” (Eph1:6) (EG 267)
- May we learn to say “thank you” to God and to one another. We teach children to do it, and then we forget to do it ourselves! (tweeted March 20, 2014)
- For if we have received the love which restores meaning to our lives, how can we fail to share that love with others. (EG 8)
- The best incentive for sharing the Gospel comes from contemplating it with love, lingering over its pages and reading it with the heart. If we approach it in this way, its beauty will amaze and constantly excite us. (EG 264)



Photo By Benhur Arcayan (Malacañang Photo Bureau) [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons

LIVING LIKE JESUS: (21 minutes)  
Take Action

Consider how your prayer, reflection and sharing in Session 2 might have inspired you to step out in faith this week. Share ideas that reflect your personal situation or consider one of the simple ideas below.

- Ponder people in your life who you believe live a life of gratitude. Seek their wisdom.
- Prayerfully begin and end each day with a grateful heart.
- Use the Additional Scripture Passages found below for reflection.
- Create family gratitude notes and make an effort to send several out each week.
- Share with a family member, colleague or friend one thing you are grateful for each day.
- Begin a yearly gratitude calendar. Using a blank calendar, write several items in the squares at the end of the day. Take a moment to contact people to whom you are grateful.
- Reflect upon your personal history and make a list of things/people you are truly grateful for.
- As a household, create a gratitude collage or family tagline.
- Invite friends and family over for an “off-season” Thanksgiving dinner.

Commitment:

- In light of this, what commitment will I make for the week(s) ahead?

Additional Scripture Passages:

Psalms 50:23	Psalms 106:1-2	Psalms 107:1
Psalms 30:12-13	Psalms 100:1-5	Psalms 92:1-2
Psalms 118: 1-24	Hebrews 12:28	1Timothy 4:4-5
Ephesians 5:19-20	2Corinthians 9:11-15	
Colossians 3:17	Ephesians 1:16	

Wrap Up: (1 minute)

Date for Session 3 \_\_\_\_\_

Closing Prayer (Together)

Father, we thank you for this time together to share our faith and friendship. Place deep within our hearts the spirit of gratitude, one that will take our breath away whenever we consider how blessed we are. Encourage us and help us to support each other in our journey to live out our gratefulness in generosity and love as we strive to imitate our Lord and Savior. Amen.

The optimist says, the cup is half full. The pessimist says, the cup is half empty. The child of God says; My cup runneth over. Anonymous



Session 2  
Exploring a Life of Discipleship - A Foundation of Gratitude  
GRATEFUL HEARTS-GENEROUS SPIRITS

Such generosity flows from hearts grateful to God for his generosity in creating and saving us.  
(United States Catholic Catechism for Adults, p. 455)

GATHERING: (15 minutes)  
Welcome and Greeting

- Group Members Share:
- One word that describes me today is...
  - What did I commit to in Session 1?
  - How did I follow through with my commitment?

PRAYING: (15 minutes)  
Songs

- Traditional songs to sing/play or select a contemporary personal favorite
- Praise to the Lord - Lohye Den Herren
  - Holy God We Praise Thy Name - Grosser Gott

- YouTube selections:
- Thank You Lord—Don Moen  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K44trVhtZX4>
  - Give Thanks—Don Moen  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bk\\_7wUR2Wdg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bk_7wUR2Wdg)

Quotation for Silent Reflection  
Consider a word or phrase for possible sharing

To be grateful is to recognize the love of God in everything God has given us-and God has given us everything. Every breath we draw is a gift of God’s love, every moment of existence is a grace...Gratitude therefore takes nothing for granted, is never unresponsive, is constantly awakening to new wonder and to praise for the goodness of God. For the grateful person knows that God is good not by hearsay but by experience. And that is what makes all the difference.  
Thomas Merton,  
(Twentieth Century Trappist Monk)

Good stewards live with joy and gratitude for the blessings they have received-including those that have multiplied through diligence and hard work.  
(Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response, United States Catholic Conference of Bishops)

Scripture for Inspiration  
Luke 17:11-19

- Question for Group Reflection
- Words or verses that spoke to me are?



Prayer Conclusion (Together)

Good and gracious God, we are your children and the beneficiaries of your great love and generosity. We want to be imitators of your Son Jesus. Lead us to begin our personal conversion to a life of stewardship by truly understanding all you have given us and all that you have done for us through Jesus. Help us to be the ones who gratefully fall to our knees in front of the Lord each day. We ask this with hope and gratitude in the name of Jesus our brother and Savior. Amen.

**CONSIDER THIS:** (38 minutes - If participants have not read content prior to gathering, please take a moment to read aloud, rotating willing members.)

## Jesus, His World and Gratitude

“It is good to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praise to your name, Most High” (Ps 92:2).

The thankful voices of the Hebrew Psalmists flowed easily into Jesus’ world. The Holy Spirit embraced most noticeably those who were intimately involved in his birth. Mary, Jesus’ mother, offered her own psalm of overwhelming gratitude about her pregnancy during her encounter with Elizabeth: “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior” (Lk 1:68). Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, shares his gladness in a savior from the house of David: “Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, for he has visited and brought redemption to his people” (Lk 1:46-47). The shepherds, after encountering Jesus in the manger proclaimed: “Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen” (Lk 2:20). The Prophetess Anna, at the presentation of Jesus, expresses her delight in the realization of who Jesus truly is: “she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were awaiting the redemption of Jerusalem” (Lk 2:38). There was no doubt, when people could clearly see the presence of God, their fear left them and their hearts were filled with gratitude and joy. In essence, like many of the disciples to come, they were transformed.

During his public ministry, the Gospels disclose not only Jesus’ intimate relationship with his Father but also his gratitude for all that was being accomplished. As he prepares to feed the four thousand, Jesus “took the seven loaves and the fish, gave thanks...” (Mt 15:36). On another occasion, Jesus thankfully praises God for allowing the pure of heart to “see” him. He states: “I give praise to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth for although you have hidden these things from the learned, you have revealed them to the childlike” (Mt 11:25). In another profound instance, a saddened Jesus raises his dear friend Lazarus from the dead and lifts his eyes and says: “Father, I thank you for hearing me” (Jn 11: 41).

Jesus, our model of “holiness,” acknowledged the presence of his Father in his life, demonstrated trust in doing his will, and did both with profound gratitude. As Jesus’ disciples heard his words and witnessed his actions, they were being formed in a way that would help them to carry on the message of the Psalmists as they spread the Good News. In this generation, however, the joy and gratitude will be for a promised Savior who *has* redeemed us. Christ has died! Christ has risen! Christ will come again!



### Quotation for Reflection

“Gratitude...goes beyond the “mine” and “thine” and claims the truth that all of life is a pure gift. In the past I always thought of gratitude as a spontaneous response to the awareness of gifts received, but now I realize that gratitude can also be lived as discipline. The discipline of gratitude is the explicit effort to acknowledge that all I am and have is given to me as a gift of love, a gift to be celebrated with joy.”

*Henri J. M. Nouwen  
(Priest and Spiritual Guide)*

“Let nothing trouble you/Let nothing frighten you/Everything passes/God never changes/Patience/Obtains all/Whoever has God/Wants for nothing/God alone is enough.”

*(St. Teresa of Avila quoted in the Catechism of the Catholic Church no, 227)*

## Authentic Gratitude - True Joy - Unending Generosity

Following the ascension of Jesus, his followers “did him homage and then returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and they were continually in the temple praising God” (Lk 24:52-53). The early disciples, through fearless trust and unyielding acceptance, (often in very difficult circumstances) understood all that God had given and were able to express their jubilant appreciation. After Pentecost, they unceasingly shared their joy that sprang from grateful hearts and were able to evangelize and build the early Christian community. They became great stewards of all that was given to them because they acted out of authentic gratitude. Paul was especially consistent in framing many letters in gratitude. Consider the sampling below:

- “What thanksgiving, then can we render to God for you for all the joy we feel on your account before our God?” (1Thes 3:9).
- “...but be filled with the Spirit” addressing one another [in] psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and playing to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks always and for everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father” (Eph 5:19-20).

Paul’s conversion to Christ blessed him with an understanding that all good things come from God and also with a “grateful energy” that we are called to imitate.

Today, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tells us that having faith in God “means living in thanksgiving” (CCC, no 224). Similarly, the U.S. Catechism for Adults in discussing the Sunday Eucharist, states “Every human person, having been created by God, owes him worship and thanksgiving for what the Lord has done and what he continues to do” (U.S. Catholic Catechism for Adults, p. 363). Pope Francis states: *The salvation which God offers us is the work of his mercy. No human efforts, however good they may be, can enable us to merit so great a gift. God by his sheer grace, draws us to himself and makes us one with him* (EG 112).

The message for us today is if we are to be generous stewards of our relationship with God in prayer, of our talents in service and of our treasure in sharing, we need to be grateful for the *lasting* gifts that God has given us. Living in a culture that often places a value on how happy we should be by our material possessions and our accomplishments, makes it difficult to trust in God and experience authentic gratitude. Many times we are chasing things which lead to envy or greed. True gratefulness brings true joy and out of that joy a generosity flows that assists us in living in imitation of the “Master.”

**Questions for Reflection:**  
**What are the things that you are most grateful for in your life? \* What has been the source of your most joyful moments? \* What has been your action or reaction in those moments? \* How are people today like the Ten Lepers in scripture? \* Why is it difficult to place our lives in God’s hands? \* What role do you think trust plays in your effort to be a good steward of prayer, service and sharing? \* What might be some ways or opportunities for you to become a more grateful, joyful person?**

Notes:

---

---

---

---

---

“Sanctity has to do with gratitude. To be a saint is to be fueled by gratitude, nothing more and nothing less.”

*(Fr. Ronald Rolheiser in The Holy Longing)*

FROM THE HEART OF POPE FRANCIS: (optional)

- The first task in life is this: prayer. But not the prayer of words like a parrot but of the heart; gazing on the lord, hearing the Lord, asking the Lord. (Oct. 8, 2013 homily)
- When we pray courageously the Lord not only gives us grace; he gives us his very self in the grace, for the Lord never sends or gives his grace by post: he brings it himself, he is grace! ( Oct 10, 2013 homily)
- Good theologians do theology on their knees. Study without prayer is useless. (April 10, 2014 Gregorian University)
- In our Christian life too, dear brothers and sisters, may prayer and action always be deeply united. A prayer that does not lead you to practical action for your brother - the poor, the sick, those in need of help, a brother in difficulty - is a sterile and incomplete prayer. (July 21, 2013 Angelus)
- This is how it is: there is a battle to be waged each day, but God is our ally, faith in him is our strength and prayer is the expression of this faith. (Oct 20, 2013 Angelus)
- To listen to the Lord , we must learn to contemplate, feel his constant presence in our lives and we must stop and converse with him, give him space in prayer. (May 1, 2013 Audience)



Photo By Benhur Arcayan (Malacañang Photo Bureau) [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons

LIVING LIKE JESUS: (21 minutes)

Take Action

Consider how your prayer, reflection and sharing in Session 3 might have inspired you to step out in faith this week. Share ideas that reflect your personal situation or consider one of the simple ideas below.

- Spend some time with your calendar reflecting on your priorities. Consider how you might be a better steward of your relationship with God by increasing your prayer time. Make a commitment using some of the ideas below or ideas that might touch your heart and place it on your calendar.
- Begin and end each day with five minutes of spontaneous conversation with God.
- Attend weekday Mass and or Eucharistic Adoration, one or more times a week.
- Pray the rosary several times a week.
- Consider a retreat at one of our local retreat centers.
- Ponder an online daily quotation, reflection or mini-retreat.

Commitment:

- In light of this, what commitment will I make for the week(s) ahead?

WRAP UP: (1 minute)

Date for Session 4\_\_\_\_\_

Closing Prayer (Together)

God, you are the source of our hope and wellbeing. We belong to you and draw strength and encouragement from you through prayer and reflection. Just as the early disciples recognized the gift that prayer is by watching your Son in conversation with you, help us to be good stewards of our time by making prayer a priority. Assist your children in making strides to imitate Jesus through increased prayer. We ask this in the name of your Son and our Savior. Amen

“Food for the body is not enough. There must be food for the soul. When we have spiritual reading at meals, when we have the rosary at night, when we have study groups...Christ is there with us.” Dorothy Day



Session 3

Exploring a Life of Discipleship - Faith Filled Prayer

CONSTANT COMMUNICATION

“Stewards nurture their relationship with God by having a prayer life. Whether that is two minutes or two hours a day, listening and responding to God is at the core of the disciple’s life.”

Bishop Robert F. Morneau,  
(Auxiliary Bishop, Diocese of Green Bay)

GATHERING: (15 minutes)

Welcome and Greeting

Group Members Share:

- One word that describes me today is...
- What did I commit to in Session 2?
- How did I follow through with my commitment?

PRAYING: (15 minutes)

Songs

Traditional songs to sing/play or select a contemporary personal favorite

- Open My Eyes – Jesse Manibusan
- You Are Near – Dan Schutte

YouTube selections:

- Awesome God-Rich Mullens  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wx3st6YjQB8>
- Lord I Lift Your Name on High - Rick Founds  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J3iB30gCqAc>

Quotation for Silent Reflection

Consider a word or phrase for possible sharing

“For me, prayer is an uplifting of the heart, a glance toward heaven, a cry of gratitude and love in times of sorrow as well as joy. It is noble, something supernatural, that expands the soul and unites it to God.”

St. Therese of Lisieux

Scripture for Inspiration

Luke 11:1-13

Question for Group Reflection

- Words or verses that spoke to me are?



Prayer Conclusion (Together)

Ever present God, we offer you our gratitude for your patience as we work to build and strengthen our relationship with you. May your Spirit fill our lives as we strive to be good stewards of each day. Assist us in offering you the day’s first fruits so we may grow closer to you through prayer and live more authentically like Jesus. We ask this in the name of your Son. Amen

In a busy society like ours, time is one of the most precious possessions we have. How we spend our time is perhaps the clearest indication of our progress in the life of Christian discipleship.

(Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response, United States Catholic Conference of Bishops)

**CONSIDER THIS:** (38 minutes - If participants have not read content prior to gathering, please take a moment to read aloud, rotating willing members.)

# Jesus and Prayer - the Testimony of Luke

If the objective of every Christian is to live in imitation of Jesus, unearthing examples of him in “constant conversation” with his Father is effortless. The Gospel of Luke is especially filled with examples of how Jesus prayed in all circumstances, at all times of the day and in a variety of locations. He prayed that he would accomplish his Father’s will and he prayed for others. His disciples were witnessing a unique and powerful relationship between the Father and the Son and prayer was the catalyst. There is no doubt that if we were eye witnesses to the Master, we would have asked Jesus to teach *us* to pray.

Jesus prayed at all the momentous times of his life. His official ministry in the Gospel of Luke begins with Jesus praying as he is baptized by John (*Lk 3:21*). Soon thereafter, following the performing of many miracles, he “withdrew to deserted places to pray.” (*Lk 5:16*) The importance of selecting “the twelve” who would be living witnesses to the Redeemer was prefaced in prayer (*Lk 6:12-13*). Likewise, prayer was evident prior to the first prediction of his death (*Lk 9:18-22*), at the time of the transfiguration (*Lk 9:28*), following the return of the seventy disciples (*Lk 10:21*), and prior to teaching the crowd how to pray (*Lk 11:1*). Of course, two of the most memorable accounts of Jesus in prayer took place in the Garden of Gethsemane where he asked for the “cup” to be taken if it was his Father’s will (*Lk 22:30-49*), and during his death on the cross when he prayed that his perpetrators be forgiven (*Lk 23:24*).

If you were to read the above mentioned passages in Luke, you would encounter the praying Jesus in the desert, on the mountain, in the morning, during the evening at times of great joy and in his darkest hours. There were prayers of petition as well as praise and thanksgiving. It is all there. How can we follow Jesus’ lead?



## Quotation for Reflection

Let us not be consumed with haste, as if time dedicated to Christ in silent prayer were time wasted. On the contrary, it is precisely then that the most wonderful fruits . . . Come to birth. There is no need to be discouraged on account of the fact that prayer requires effort, or because of the impression that Jesus remains silent. He is indeed silent, but he is at work.

Pope Benedict XVI  
Meeting with clergy in  
Poland May 25, 2006

Silence of our eyes. Silence of our ears. Silence of our minds. In the silence of the heart God will speak.

Mother Teresa

Above Photo: Josef Untersberger [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons

# Stewardship of Prayer in a Busy World

Since the death and resurrection of Jesus 2000 years ago, the leaders of the Christian community expressed the importance of prayer in their teachings. Consider Paul’s encouragement to the Thessalonians, to “Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing” (*1Thes 5:16-18*), to Pope Benedict who states “True prayer consists precisely in uniting our will with that of God” (*Angelus, 2007*). The significance of being in relationship with God as a steward of prayer is undeniable in the Catholic Tradition yet, today we often find it difficult to make prayer a priority.

In a world where our calendars define our lives, there is a way to evaluate our own commitment to being in “constant communication” with the One who created and redeemed us. Of the 168 hours that each of us has been blessed with each week, where do we place our “first fruits?” How much time do we spend working, watching T.V., using current technology, involved in sports, meetings, shopping, child rearing, sleeping, eating, cleaning, etc. How much time do we gratefully return to God in prayer? Recalling the Parable of the Talents (*Mt 25:14-30*), in Session 1, the Master will return one day and ask us what we have done with the precious gift of time. How will we respond?

The long tradition of prayer in our Church offers a variety of ways to build a relationship with God. Pope Francis says, “*Praying together unites us in so many ways. We can hold each other up as brothers and sisters.*” (*World Meeting of Families* ) The source and summit of prayer is the Eucharist, the communal prayer in which we share the Word of God and the Body and Blood of Jesus. There are opportunities for private and group reflection using the scriptures, retreats, short course bible studies, praying with the saints as well as the rosary and Eucharistic Adoration. Pope Francis also reminds us: “*Through prayer, charity and humility before God, people receive a heart ‘which is firm and merciful, attentive and generous’.*” (*Lenten Message , Feb., 2015*). The question is: if we want to live in imitation of Jesus, what are we willing to “make time” for?

**Questions for Reflection:**  
**How does Jesus’ prayer life parallel your own? \* Without time and prayer, how do we know our lives reflect God’s will? \* What does it mean to you to be in relationship with Jesus?**  
**What is the most joyful aspect of your current calendar? \* What is the most frustrating? \* What are some of the obstacles to a solid relationship with God in prayer? \* Where in your calendar might you see an opportunity to increase your prayer life even by a small step? \***

Notes:

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

The desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God.  
*(Catechism of the Catholic Church no. 27)*

**FROM THE HEART OF POPE FRANCIS** (optional)

- Jesus washes the feet of the Apostles. Are we ready to serve like this? *(tweeted April 2, 2015)*
- Practicing charity is the best way to evangelize. *(tweeted Jan. 24, 2015)*
- Love is the measure of faith. *(tweeted Nov. 27, 2014)*
- Christians know how to give. Their lives filled with generous acts-often towards their neighbor. *(tweeted Aug. 23, 2014)*
- To change the world we must be good to those who cannot repay us. *(tweeted Oct. 18, 2014)*
- Indifference towards those in need is not acceptable for a Christian. *(tweeted Nov. 6, 2014)*
- At times we can be so self-absorbed. Lord, help us to open our hearts to others and to serve those who are most vulnerable. *(tweeted June 2, 2014)*
- Like the Good Samaritan, may we not be ashamed of touching the wounds of those who suffer. But try to heal them with concrete acts of love. *(tweeted June 2, 2014)*



Photo By Benhur Arcayan (Malacañang Photo Bureau) [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons

**LIVING LIKE JESUS:** (21 minutes)  
**Take Action**

Consider how your prayer, reflection and sharing in Session 4 might have inspired you to step out in faith this week. Share ideas that reflect your personal situation or consider one of the simple ideas below.

- Reflect upon the gifts God has given you (those things that you are passionate about and give you life). Make a list of the ways in which you can or are using your gifts to serve your Church or community.
- Prayerfully review your calendar and the hours you currently give to serving others. Consider increasing your gift of service.
- Purchase a copy of *Living Your Strengths (Catholic Edition)* from Gallup and take the online survey which determines your strength-themes. Locate in the text ideas for using your specific themes to serve your parish.
- Contact your parish office to explore what opportunities there are to serve.
- Ponder initiating a life-giving, relevant new ministry in your parish.
- Contact your local St. Vincent De Paul, Homeless Shelter, etc. for opportunities to serve.

**Commitment:**

- In light of this, what commitment will I make for the week(s) ahead?

**Wrap Up:** (1 minute)

Date for Session 5 \_\_\_\_\_

**Closing Prayer** (Together)

Closing Prayer  
Father, we thank you and praise you for the gift of your Son. Help us to become Jesus imitators as we work to wash the feet of others. Assist us in identifying our gifts that we can truly be the “salt of the earth” and the light of the world.” Give us the heart of Mary and the saints and fill us with courage and wisdom to make serving a priority that comes from the “first fruits” of our calendar. Walk with us as we discern ways to become a more committed steward of service so that we can give you glory and build up your Church.  
In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.



**Session 4**  
**Exploring a Life of Discipleship - Compassionate Service**  
**MAKE ME A SERVANT**

Jesus not only calls people to him but also forms them and sends them out in his service. Being sent on a mission is a consequence of being a disciple. Whoever wants to follow Christ will have much work to do on his behalf-announcing the Good News and serving others as Jesus did.

*(Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response, United States Catholic Conference of Bishops)*

**GATHERING:** (15 minutes)  
**Welcome and Greeting**

- Group Members Share:
- One word that describes me today is...
  - What did I commit to in Session 3?
  - How did I follow through with my commitment?

**PRAYING:** (15 minutes)  
**Songs**

Traditional songs to sing/play or select a contemporary personal favorite:

- The Summons – Kelvin Grove
- Go Make of All Disciples - Ella Combe

YouTube selections:

- Servant Song – Donna Marie Mc Gargill, OSM  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uSG1gm5KT1c>
- Here I Am Lord - Dan Schutte  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GINNh15cT08>

**Quotation for Silent Reflection**  
Consider a word or phrase for possible sharing

**Serving**

Teach us, good Lord, to serve you as you deserve:  
to give, and not count the cost,  
to fight, and not heed the wounds,  
to toil and not to seek for rest,  
to labor, and not to ask for any rewards,  
save that of knowing that we do your will.  
*Ignatius of Loyola*

**Scripture for Inspiration**  
**John 13: 1-15**

- Question for Group Reflection
- Words or verses that spoke to me are?



**Prayer Conclusion** (Together)

Lord God, we are the work of your hands created for your joy and your service. Send your Spirit upon us that we may imitate the lesson taught by Jesus when he washed the feet of the first disciples. Give us a generous heart that we may be energetic and joy-filled servants not only out of obligation but out of faith and love. May the world know that we are your disciples by our passion for service. We ask this in the name of our primary Servant Leader and our Savior. Amen.

“Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.

*(Mary, Mother of God, Lk 1:38)*

**CONSIDER THIS:** (38 minutes - If participants have not read content prior to gathering, please take a moment to read aloud, rotating willing members.)

## Jesus and Service— His Life Was a Template

The pertinent question for this fourth stewardship session is this: Why is service so fundamental to the Catholic Church?” The answer is simple: “We are disciples of a God who served.”

Prior to Jesus’ final and ultimate act of service on the cross, we observe him washing the feet of his disciples in the Gospel of John (*Jn13:1-15*). Each time we encounter this episode we are witnesses to one of Jesus’ most profoundly “teachable and demonstrative moments” with his followers. In this passage we also are invited to recall what he said and did during his three years of ministry on earth. The word ministry means service and as Jesus steps into full view following his baptism in each of the Gospels, it is clear that he is on a mission to serve.

How did Jesus serve? He served by teaching in the synagogues, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and curing every disease and illness among the people (*Mt 4:23*). Jesus instructed others about the kingdom through his Sermon on the Mount and Plain (*Mt 5:1-12, Lk 6:20-49*); and stories like the Parables of the Talents and Lost Son (*Mk 12:1-12, Lk 15:13-32*). He served through encouragement and providing for people’s basic needs. We have insight into Jesus’ compassion as he is about to feed four thousand people: “My heart is moved with pity for the crowd.” (*Mk 8: 2*); or as he is about to raise the widow’s son “when the Lord saw her, he was moved with pity” (*Lk 7:13*).

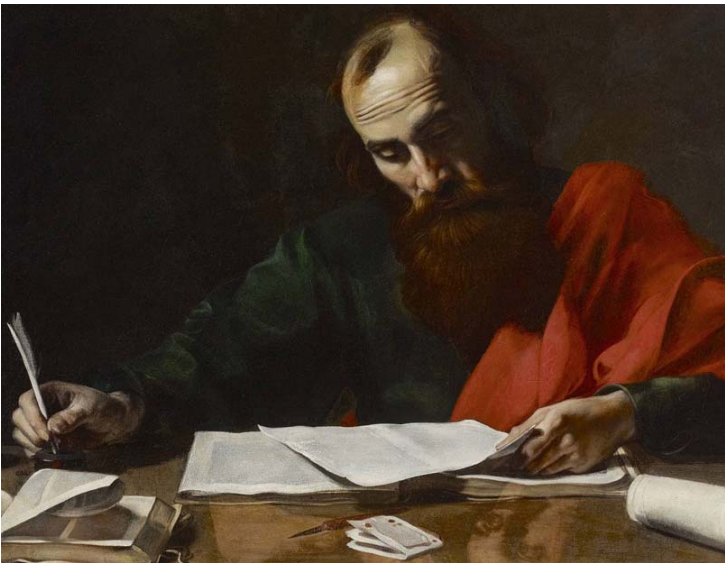
Who did Jesus serve? He came to serve the “House of Israel” but tirelessly offered himself to anyone who would listen, hear and believe. Jesus served the rich by encouraging them to make God central in their lives and challenged them to act with justice (*Mt 19:16-22*). He tended to the poor, considering those who were sick and racked with pain, those who were possessed, as well as lunatics and paralytics (*Mt 4:24*). Jesus responded to the marginalized such as the Syrophoenician woman (*Mk 7:24-30*); and the woman caught in adultery (*Jn 8:1-11*). He served all that they might be great recipients of God’s love and mercy.

Powerfully, in the end and on the cross, Jesus makes his earlier testimony to service a reality “For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for the many” (*Mk 10: 45*).

### Quotation for Reflection

“The theology of ministry and service emphasizes that it is not so much that we do things for others but rather Jesus is doing something for others through us. Being aware of the difference between “for” and “through” changes our whole manner of service. That is why prayer is so important: it keeps reminding us that all stewardship is ultimately the work of the Lord taking place through the actions of faithful disciples.”

*Bishop Robert F. Morneau  
(Auxiliary Bishop Emeritus, Diocese of Green Bay)*



St. Paul Writing His Epistles

Artwork Attributed to Valentin de Boulogne - AHBpCifHgxB7g at Google Cultural Institute

## Stewardship of Service - Called Out of Our Giftedness

Prior to Jesus’ death and resurrection, the disciples had the opportunity to intern with the Master in the area of service (*Mt 10:7-8, Mk 6:7-13, Lk 9:1-6*). He empowered and coached them into imitating what they had witnessed. We know today that once the Messiah had risen and sent his Spirit that his ministry would need to be duplicated and expanded.

With the help of the Holy Spirit, the disciples formed the early Church into a community of Christ’s servants (*1Cor 4:1*). People knew they were Christians by their great love and became effective evangelizers through their compassionate service.

As the Church grew, Paul for example, brought a new dimension to serving others. He reminded members in places such as Rome and Corinth to consider how uniquely they had been created and called them to bless the Church with their gifts. Consider: “Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us exercise them” (*Romans 12:6*). “Indeed, I wish everyone to be as I am, but each has a particular gift from God, one of one kind and one of another” (*1Cor 7:7*). When you consider the lives of saints, many heard and acted upon Paul’s message.

As members of the Church in the third millennium, the call is the same for us. The United States Bishops quote Pope John Paul II in *Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response*: “Participation takes different forms according to people’s different gifts and offices, but there is a fundamental obligation arising from the sacrament of Baptism that people place their gifts, their resources-their-selves at God’s service in and through the Church.”

Pope Francis expresses it very simply when he states: “*We who are Christians, members of God’s family, are called to go out to the needy and serve them*” (*tweeted Jan. 17, 2015*). Though the message is clear, the challenge for us today is identifying our gifts and then making service a priority in our busy lives. Our free will always makes commitment to discipleship a choice, but our “yes” promises a life of joy for us and for our Church.

**Questions for Reflection:**  
**Next to his death on the cross, what element of Jesus’ life as servant speaks most powerfully to you?**  
**\* Consider a saint and describe how he/she served as Jesus did using his/her specific gifts.\* What special gifts have you been given that provide you with joy? \* How might you use these gifts to serve the Church and/or the world. \* What are some of the challenges to becoming a good steward of your gifts in service? \* What would you be willing to do to increase the amount of time you spend serving others?**

Notes:

---

---

---

---

---

“There is a light in this world, a healing spirit more powerful than any darkness we may encounter. We sometimes lose sight of this force when there is so much suffering and pain. Then suddenly, the spirit will emerge through the lives of ordinary people who hear a call and answer in extraordinary ways.”

*Mother Teresa*

FROM THE HEART OF POPE FRANCIS (Optional)

- Lord Help us to live the virtue of generosity, to love without limits. (tweeted April 6, 2015)
- The Lord put it clearly; you cannot serve to masters. You have to choose between God and money. (tweeted Dec. 18, 2014)
- The martyrs teach us that wealth, prestige and honor have little importance: Christ is the only true treasure, (tweeted Aug. 15, 2014)
- The Lord loves a cheerful giver. May we learn to be generous in giving, free from the love of material possessions. (tweeted July 19, 2014)
- Christian love is loving without counting the cost. This is the lesson of the Good Samaritan, this is the lesson of Jesus. (tweeted March 18, 2014)
- The time has come for new messengers of Christ to be even more generous, more joyful, more holy. (tweeted Nov. 30, 2015)
- A Christian who is too attached to riches has lost his way. (tweeted Aug. 25, 2015)



Photo By Benhur Arcayan (Malacañang Photo Bureau) [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons

LIVING LIKE JESUS: (21 minutes)

Take Action

Consider how your prayer, reflection and sharing in Session 5 might have inspired you to step out in faith this week. Share ideas that reflect your personal situation or consider one of the simple ideas below.

- Be aware of your finances by prayerfully reflecting where your treasure is being spent each month.
- Calculate what your charitable giving actually is. Contemplate increasing your charitable giving.
- Reflect upon those things that you keep in storage. Could someone else benefit from them?
- Make a list of what you think might keep you from being more generous.
- If you need help in becoming a better steward of your finances, seek help with a local agency.
- Go on line and view *The Story of Stuff* ([www.thestoryofstuff.com](http://www.thestoryofstuff.com)) Discuss with family/friends.

Commitment:

- In light of this, what commitment will I make for the week(s) ahead?

Wrap Up: (1 minute)

Date for Session 6 \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Scripture Passages:

Leviticus 27:30-32	Mark 12:41-44
Deuteronomy 14:22,29	Acts 20:35
Deuteronomy 16:16-17	1 Timothy 6:7-10
Malachi 3:8-10	1 John 3:17-18

Closing Prayer (Together)

Creator God and Generous Master, you have blessed your people with resources needed for our survival and happiness. Your generosity is beyond our imagination and we are grateful. Creator God, you sent your Son to model stewardship and to guide us in sharing the many material gifts placed in our care. Help us to stay close to Him and his message of generous sharing as we strive to reject a culture of consumerism and abundantly return what you have given us. Lord, we want to be your disciples. We ask this not only this day, but each day of our lives. Amen.

The tenth commandment forbids greed...it requires that envy be banished from the human heart.  
(Catechism of the Catholic Church, nos. 2536 and 2538)



Session 5  
Exploring a Life of Discipleship - Generous Sharing  
INVESTING IN HEAVENLY TREASURES

“How we earn and spend our money is both a highly personal issue as well as a social concern. Having access to someone’s checkbook is also having access to that person’s value system. ‘For where your treasure is, there also will be your heart.’” (Mt 6:21)

Bishop Robert F. Morneau,  
(Auxiliary Bishop Emeritus, Diocese of Green Bay)

GATHERING: (15 minutes)  
Welcome and Greeting

- Group Members Share:
- One word that describes me today is...
  - What did I commit to in Session 4?
  - How did I follow through on my commitment?

PRAYING: (15 minutes)  
Songs

- Traditional songs to sing/play or select a contemporary personal favorite.
- Only a Shadow - Carey Landry
  - Seek Ye First - Karen Lafferty

- YouTube selections:
- I Offer you My Life—Don Moen  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FTLGBfv4xaM>
  - The Gift of Generosity - Ministry Spotlight  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yhmmeFuzGRk>

Quotation for Silent Reflection  
Consider a word or phrase for possible sharing

Desire for true happiness frees man from his immoderate attachment to the goods of this world so that he can find his fulfillment in the vision and beatitude (happiness) of God. “The promise of seeing God surpasses all beatitude . . . In Scripture to see is to possess . . . Whoever sees God has obtained all the goods of which he can conceive.”  
(CCC, no.2548 citing St. Gregory of Nyssa)

Let us master this great and simple truth”, Cardinal Newman once said, “that all rich materials and productions of this world, being God’s property, are intended for God’s service; . . .  
(Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response, United States Catholic Conference of Bishops)

Scripture for Inspiration  
Matthew 19:16-22

- Question for Group Reflection
- Words or verses that spoke to me are?



Prayer Conclusion (Together)

God of life, we praise you and thank you for the ongoing inspiration found in your Holy Word. Jesus, help us to hear and be transformed by the message in the Parable of the Rich Young Man as if we were present in your first telling. Spirit, infuse us with the truth that we should not look for security and happiness in our money and possessions but first and foremost in our relationship with you and others. We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

**CONSIDER THIS:** (38 minutes - If participants have not read content prior to gathering, please take a moment to read aloud, rotating willing members.)

## Jesus on Money and Possessions: Direct & to the Point

Jesus’ very life speaks volumes to the value of wealth and prestige in relationship to the kingdom and salvation. The King of Kings was born into a family of meager means and throughout his short life, acquired no known possessions except the very garments which were divided at his crucifixion (*Mt. 27:35*). Needless to say, it was an unexpected setting and lifestyle for the anticipated Messiah.

Jesus is the perfect model of stewardship. His mission was to restore the broken relationship between his Father and humankind. He gave his life to accomplish it. During his three year ministry, his teachings on money were very direct and to the point. Jesus’ concern for peoples’ attachment to wealth and his responses are some of our most quotable and challenging scripture passages. Consider the following: “No one can serve two masters...You cannot serve God and mammon” (*Mt 6:24*). “Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give” (*Mt 10:8*). “It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of God” (*Mk 10:25*). “Much will be required of the person entrusted with much, and still more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more” (*Lk12:48*). “There is still one thing left for you: sell all you have and distribute it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven” (*Lk18:22*). Though Jesus stressed his Father’s promise of love and care for them (*Mt 6:25-34*), the previous words, no doubt were difficult to hear. Many people of Jesus’ day, especially those of financial means, were saddened and confused by his instructions because they understood wealth as a sign of God’s favor.

Jesus approached the issue of money from a variety of perspectives and in many instances pointed to the joy of “heavenly treasures.” The Parable of the Rich Fool (*Lk 12:16-21*), challenged their need to *hoard wealth* and put their *primary trust* in earthly things. The story of the Poor Woman’s Contribution (*Mk 12: 41-44*), in the temple shook their conscience on the very *motivation* for and *level of their generosity*. Jesus’ parables on the “treasure buried in the field” or the “pearl of great price” (*Mt 13:44-49*), reinforced his teachings that the kingdom is the *most important investment* for humankind. Jesus’ wisdom on *generosity and accountability* for the poor is reflected in the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (*Lk 16:19-31*), and his warning against *greed* in the story of a brother *sharing* his inheritance (*Lk 12:13-15*). Wrapped around all these important statements is Jesus’ stewardship message in The Parable of the Ten Gold Coins (*Lk19:11-26*), and The Parable of the Talents (*Mt 25:45-51*). Everything they have belongs to God. One day the Master will return and ask each individual for an accounting of the use of what has been on loan to them. What will they have done with the treasure in their care?

## Quotation for Reflection

“Stewards are generous people. They feel an obligation to return a portion to the Church and other charities. They refuse to be co-opted by a culture of greed and live a life of hoarding. A tough question has to be asked: Can a person claim to be a disciple of the Lord if they are not sharing generously of their financial resources?

*Bishop Robert F. Morneau,  
(Auxiliary Bishop Emeritus, Diocese of Green Bay)*



By Edmund Leighton, Charity of St. Elizabeth of Hungary, 1895, [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons

## Stewardship of Sharing in a Culture of Consumerism

Jesus’ hope and direction for his followers became a reality following the Pentecost event. With the help of the Holy Spirit, the early disciples were identified by their commitment to and trust in Jesus and each other. They placed a priority on the breaking of bread, prayers, teachings of the apostles and sharing of material wealth. Out of their joy and generosity came an increase in membership (*Acts 2:44-47*). As the Church grew, the early disciples continually warned of an extraordinary attachment to money and the effect it had on discipleship. We remember Paul’s famous words to Timothy: “For we brought nothing into the world, just as we will not be able to take anything out of it. For the love of money is the root of all evils, and some people in desire of it have strayed from the faith . . .”(1*Tim 6:7-10*).

Our world certainly has changed over the past 2000 years. We are bombarded with messages of materialism and consumerism that point to “things” being the source of our joy. Yet, the voice of Jesus continues to be heard through scripture and our Church Teachings. In our generation, we hear from the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops: “The life of a Christian steward, lived in imitation of the life of Christ, is challenging, even difficult in many ways; but both here and hereafter it is charged with intense joy.” Our Bishops challenge and encourage sharing with needy individuals, families, the Church and charitable organizations as a way of expressing our joyful gratitude to God and tending to our souls. (*Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response*)

In a time and culture where we are often defined by our possessions and overall net worth, it is especially challenging to place our full trust in God when considering generous sharing. Pope Francis states: *May the Lord help us overcome the temptations of wealth, vanity and pride which seek to destroy the truth of the Gospel, (tweeted Feb. 14, 2016)*. How is it possible for disciples of Jesus not to be swept away in this current climate of consumerism? How can we dare to give the first 3%, 5%, 10% or even more of our income back to God?

Not unlike the early followers, the answer is an intentional decision that chooses Christ as the source of our contentment and happiness. It is joyful generosity that reflects an understanding that our material wealth is temporarily on loan to us and is to be used in service to God. The answer is bountiful sharing calculated by understanding our blessings not in comparison with others, but by overwhelming humility and appreciation. We are indebted and grateful for life, for salvation through Jesus, and for others. Working to integrate the answers into our lives is important. For in the end, the question will be the same for us. What will we have done with the treasures placed in our care?

**Questions for Reflection:**  
**What was a key ingredient leading to the generosity of the early disciples? \* How might our stewardship of sharing reflect our relationship with God? \* What are some human traits that hinder us from being generous stewards. . . offering first fruits back to God? \* What is the joy that could come from being financially generous? \* What would be one thing you would be willing to do to become a better steward of your material wealth?**

Notes:

---

---

---

---

I would never have been able to tithe the first million dollars I ever made if I had not tithed my first salary which was \$1.50 per week.

*John D. Rockefeller, Sr. (1839-1937)  
(American Industrialist and Philanthropist)*

# Stewardship – A Lifestyle Change

Growing closer to living as a Christian Steward is a journey. Our lives lived with open eyes and open hearts provide us the opportunity to grow in faith and wisdom. This is both God’s gift and God’s challenge. This six week small group opportunity on stewardship is a wonderful avenue where the Holy Spirit can certainly light the flame and lay a foundation. However, a true change of heart calls for a lifestyle change. Lifestyle changes are intentional and progress can be measured by ongoing review and reflection.

It is not unlike many other areas of our lives. Today, we are called to be good stewards of our bodies by managing our weight through diet and exercise. This is a lifestyle change for most of us that will call us to be attentive to our relationship with food, basic nutrition and our time given to exercise. We monitor our progress by weighing ourselves and routine check-ups with our physicians. Similarly it will be necessary, just as we tally the time we dedicate to prayer and service and amount of our treasure we share, we know the numbers are real and tell our story.

Conversion to a life of Christian stewardship is not a one month, one year or five year commitment. It truly is like striving for or maintaining our physical well-being. There is not a fad or an easy fix. It is a life-long commitment that calls us to review our progress to avoid becoming stagnant or hitting a plateau in a culture that often pulls us from lives of holiness. Difficult as it may appear, we know the benefits to managing our physical or spiritual well-being is happiness, plus there is “Good News!”

Our model and mentor is Jesus and our “support group” is those members of our Church who are striving to be his true disciples (like those in this small group). We can gather often as “Companions on the Journey” for strength and guidance in Eucharist and the Sacramental life of our Church. We can use the liturgical seasons of Advent, Lent, Easter and Pentecost to seriously assess our progress and strive to attain the next level of faith-filled prayer, compassionate service and generous sharing. We can look to our parish for ways to build the kingdom in our day and secure hope for the next generation. Indeed, we are truly blessed and the possibilities are endless and now that we have “explored a life of stewardship,” the choice is ours.

## Take Action

- Mark your calendar to retake the assessment on page 3 in four or six months to check on your progress.
- Periodically reread the first five sessions for review.
- Set a date to meet as a small group in six or eight months for sharing and support in your stewardship efforts.

## Closing Blessing: (Together)

All Knowing Creator, we are grateful for all you have given us especially the gift of each other and time together in prayer and discussion. You have blessed our friendship and strengthened our lives. Awesome Redeemer, it is by your example that we can know and believe in the importance of doing God’s will. We owe our lives to you. Holy Inspiration, we feel your ongoing presence as we strive not to *do* stewardship but to *become* stewards. It is with your help that our journey to true discipleship will be fruitful. Continue to surround us with your love and encouragement. We ask this in the name of our brother and Savior, Jesus. Amen.

His master said to him, ‘Well done, my good and faithful servant. Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you great responsibilities. Come share your master’s joy.’

Matthew 25:23



Copyright © Diocese of Green Bay, 2011.  
Revised 2016. All rights reserved

## Session 6

### Exploring a Life of Discipleship - What Now?

# THE WORK OF A LIFETIME

Following Jesus is the work of a lifetime. At every step forward, one is challenged to go further in accepting and loving God’s will. Being a disciple is not just something else to do, alongside many other things suitable for Christians; it is a total way of life and requires continuing conversion.

*(Stewardship: A Disciple's Response-The United States Catholic Conference of Bishops)*

## GATHERING: (15 minutes)

### Welcome and Greeting

Group Members Share:

- One word that describes me today is...
- What did I commit to in Session 5?
- How did I follow through with my commitment?

## PRAYING: (15 minutes)

### Songs

Traditional songs to sing/play or select a contemporary personal favorite.

- Companions on the Journey – Carey Landry
- We are Many Parts – Marty Haugen

YouTube selections:

- They’ll Know We are Christians – Peter Scholtes  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zoENAD70CiI>
- In Christ Alone—Stuart Townsend  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ENTL\\_li4GbE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ENTL_li4GbE)

## Scripture for Inspiration

Acts 1:6-11

Question for Group Reflection

- Words or verses that spoke to me are?



## Prayer Conclusion (Together)

God of hope, we can only imagine the thoughts and feelings in the minds and hearts of the first disciples at the ascension of your Son. Were they in awe of all they learned from him? Did they fully understand? Did they ask what now? Lord, sometimes the same questions encompass us even two thousand years later. We have spent the last five weeks encountering you as a small group in prayer, in study and in conversation on the topic of stewardship. You have challenged us to make stewardship *our* way of life. Embrace us with your Spirit that we may make an ongoing commitment to be your true disciples through stewardship. We ask this in your Son’s name. Amen.

CONSIDER THIS:

(38 minutes - If participants have not read content prior to gathering, please take a moment to read aloud, rotating willing members.)

Stewardship: An Urgent Call both Yesterday and Today

In the ascension passage (*Acts 1:6-11*), the witnesses were not given much time to stare at the sky in amazement. Two special guests in white garments arrived to shake them from their intent gaze toward heaven. Jesus had a special mission for his beloved disciples which was to spread the “Good News” locally as well as to “the ends of the earth.” As eye witnesses to the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus, they possessed a very special gift and a short life-span in which to honor God and do their part to build the Kingdom. One can only wonder if they wanted to take time to evaluate their lives and reflect upon their choices prior to selecting a path. Did they see their call as urgent? What about their work and their families? How difficult was it to “make time” in their lives to take this important “News” on the road? Did anyone choose not to make the commitment?

Though we do not know the details, we do know that Jesus sent his Advocate to strengthen and guide those who chose to be a disciple and the early Christian Church was born. Was it easy? We know that for many it was not, they lost their lives. Were they ever frustrated or disillusioned? Most likely, they were human. Were they called to live in a way that they had never lived before? Yes. As stated in an earlier session, life in the Christian Community is described as believers having one heart and sharing possessions in common (*Acts 4:32-35*). They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles, the breaking of the bread and to the prayers (*Acts 2:42*). It was no longer every man, woman, child, widow, etc “for themselves.” In the end, their commitment was both personal and communal.

Much of the same could be said of the generations of faithful followers, many whose names are found on the roll of the Communion of Saints. Men and women in the past 2000 years have chosen to bloom where they were planted as disciples of their Savior. As the Body of Christ, they became the hands and feet of Jesus demonstrating what true love meant and building a Church that would be Christ’s beacon of hope and salvation. Not all heard the Good News of Jesus early on in their lives, but once they truly “heard” it, they made a commitment to live in a way that honored it.

For us it might seem impossible to imagine the lives of our Christian forefathers and foremothers. Living in a highly technical and global world, the lives of those who were first called to discipleship through stewardship may seem primitive. What could we possibly have in common with the people of two thousand years ago? Are we not more self-sufficient and independent? The answer is simple, it is Jesus. Pope Francis states: *Our deepest joy comes from Christ: remaining with him, walking with him, being his disciples (March 7, 2014)*. Perhaps we only need to regain the wonderment of our salvation to ignite our passion and begin the process of self evaluation and reflection that will lead us to a life of Christian stewardship. Is today that day of wonderment for me?

Questions for Reflection:  
What in the above passage resonates with you the most? \* Take five minutes to fill out the *Assessment on the following page*. When everyone is complete, consider the following questions: What is your overall impression of your self-assessment? \* What do you think are your areas of strength? \* What areas would you like to improve? \* What other ways might you find guidance on your path to a life of stewardship through faith-filled prayer, compassionate service and generous sharing?

In some ways it may be harder to be a Christian steward today than at times in the past. Although religious faith is a strong force in the lives of many Americans, our country’s dominant secular culture often contradicts the values of the Judaeo-Christian tradition.  
*(Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response*-The United States Catholic Conference of Bishops)

Assess Your “Life as a Christian Steward” Journey

Prayerfully circle the words that best describe you.

1.

I *trust* that God loves me and will provide for my needs. I do not worry, needlessly.

Always

Most Times

Sometimes

Just Beginning

Not Yet
2.

I understand that *God* is the *rightful owner* of all things.

Always

Most Times

Sometimes

Just Beginning

Not Yet
3.

I have a *hospitable attitude* and understand that *God’s gifts* are to be *shared* with all people.

Always

Most Times

Sometimes

Just Beginning

Not Yet
4.

I live my life and make my decisions out a *grateful heart*.

Always

Most Times

Sometimes

Just Beginning

Not Yet
5.

I believe that to be an *authentic disciple* of Jesus, I need to be a *good steward*.

Always

Most Times

Sometimes

Just Beginning

Not Yet
6.

I *carefully manage* what God has placed in my care i.e. the environment, my body, mind, relationships, etc.

Always

Most Times

Sometimes

Just Beginning

Not Yet
7.

I give the *first fruits* of my time in prayer, my talent in service and my treasure in sharing to God as opposed to what is left.

Always

Most Times

Sometimes

Just Beginning

Not Yet
8.

I *intentionally manage* my *calendar* to reflect what God asks of me.

Always

Most Times

Sometimes

Just Beginning

Not Yet
9.

Considering the 24 hours in each day, I am generous with my time in *prayer*.

Always

Most Times

Sometimes

Just Beginning

Not Yet
10.

I return to *God* time in both *personal and communal prayer*.

Always

Most Times

Sometimes

Just Beginning

Not Yet
11.

I know what *unique talents* God has gifted me with.

Always

Most Times

Sometimes

Just Beginning

Not Yet
12.

I can name ways in which I have *enjoyed serving* in my parish and community using my unique gifts.

Always

Most Times

Sometimes

Just Beginning

Not Yet
13.

I know my *personal budget* is a “moral document” and make *prayerful decisions* to avoid excessive consumerism.

Always

Most Times

Sometimes

Just Beginning

Not Yet
14.

I am a *steward* with my *material and financial resources* and give to support the mission of my Church and assist those in need through the charitable giving of a *generous percentage* of my income.

Always

Most Times

Sometimes

Just Beginning

Not Yet
15.

I am pleased with my progress and feel confident upon the Master’s return, I will have an *abundant return* on the investment made in me.

Always

Most Times

Sometimes

Just Beginning

Not Yet