

Being Good Stewards

Session Focus

This session on living a moral life explores the Seventh Commandment, “You shall not steal,” and the Tenth Commandment, “You shall not covet your neighbor’s goods,” and their implications for our lives as Catholics. To keep these commandments, “we need to acquire the virtues of moderation in our possessions, justice in our treatment of others, respect for their human dignity, and solidarity with all peoples” (*Catholic Catechism for Adults*, p. 419). This session explores the positive virtues of these commandments through the lens of stewardship. It engages participants in discovering how to be good stewards of their time, talent, and treasure, and how to be good stewards of God’s creation and the material goods of the world.

Learning Objectives

The session on Being Good Stewards guides learners of all ages to...

- comprehend the foundational Catholic teaching on the Seventh and Tenth Commandments and stewardship of one’s time, talents, and treasure, and of creation and the material goods of the world
- value and appreciate the significance of the Seventh and Tenth Commandments for their lives as Catholics today, and the importance of the virtues of moderation in our possessions, justice in our treatment of others, respect for their human dignity, and solidarity with all peoples
- develop and apply practices for living as good stewards of their time, talent, and treasure in all aspects of their lives: home, church, community, and world

Session Overview

Part 1. (15 minutes) Gathering & Opening Prayer Service

Part 2. (40 minutes) All Ages Learning: Images of the Good Life

Part 3. (75 minutes) In Depth Learning Experience: The Christian View of the Good Life

Whole Group Format: All participants remain in the same room. There will be a combination of large group presentations and table group activities. Participants remain in intergenerational table groups for the entire program.

Part 4. (15 minutes) Sharing Learning Experiences

Part 5. (10 minutes) Closing Prayer Service

Design Option for In-Depth Learning

Whole Group Format

This format guides the entire assembly through each of the learning experiences. You might choose this format if you have:

- a large physical space with good acoustics/sound system and furniture to comfortably accommodate the learners
- a competent large group facilitator/master of ceremonies able to provide clear directions and to manage the dynamics and energy of a large group
- a group of leaders who feel comfortable moving through the assembly offering assistance, or a large enough team of table leaders to have one leader work with each table group
- a learning topic that lends itself to everyone learning the same thing at the same time, but in different ways, in the same space

Facilitation Tips for this Format:

Guide small groups through each of the activities at the same time.

- Organize people into table groups based on age groupings: families with children (grades 1-5), middle school adolescents, high school adolescents, young adults, and adults.
- The lead facilitator guides the entire group through each of the learning experiences. All presentations and activity instructions are given to the whole group.
- The age-appropriate learning activities within each learning experience are conducted in table groups.
- Where needed, small group leaders facilitate the work of the table groups.

Materials Needed

Gathering and Prayer

- Name tags
- Community building activities
- Opening Prayer Service
- Bible

All Ages Opening Learning Experience

- Handout #1
- LCD projector and screen
- Magazines, newspapers
- Poster board or newsprint sheet for each table group
- Marking pens
- Glue stick or tape for each group

In-Depth Learning Experience

- For family learning plan (materials for each family): Handouts #2-5, pens/pencils, file card for each person
- For the adolescent learning plan: Handouts #2, #4, and #5, pens/pencils, writing paper, file card for each person

- For the adult learning plan: Handouts ##2, #4, and #5, pens/pencils, writing paper, file card for each person

Closing

- Handout #6 Stewardship Prayer Card
- Closing Prayer Service

Session Plan

Part 1. Gathering and Opening Prayer (15 minutes)

Preparation

Prepare a newsprint sheet or handout that lists the order of the activities or create a PowerPoint presentation that guides people through the session.

Registration and Hospitality

- Welcome people and ask them to sign in for the program.
- Provide name tags or invite people to make their own.
- Distribute the handouts participants will need for the session.
- Invite people to share a meal; depending on time of day, the program may end with a meal instead.

Welcome the participants to the program and introduce the theme of the session, using the words below or your own words.

This session on living the moral life explores the Seventh Commandment, “You shall not steal,” and the Tenth Commandment, “You shall not covet your neighbor’s goods,” and their implications for our lives as Catholics. To keep these commandments, “we need to acquire the virtues of moderation in our possessions, justice in our treatment of others, respect for their human dignity, and solidarity with all peoples” (*Catholic Catechism for Adults*, p. 419). This session explores the positive virtues of these commandments through the lens of stewardship. It engages everyone in discovering how to be good stewards of their time, talent, and treasure, and how to be good stewards of God’s creation and the material goods of the world.

1. Group Formation

Organize people into intergenerational small groups of approximately eight people for the entire intergenerational program. Try to include the following people in each group: a family (parents, children, teens), young adults, adults without children, and older adults. If members of the same family include multiple generations—children, teens, parents, and grandparents—keep them together in one group. Try to include at least two teens (middle school or high school) in each group.

2. Opening Prayer Service

Preparation

Have a variety of things made from clay on the prayer table, such as sculptures, statues, plates, cups, and flowerpots.

Set-up a prayer table with white tablecloth, Bible, ten candles, and two “tablets” representing the Ten Commandments. Light the candles before the prayer service.

Select readers for the Scripture readings.

Gather

Choose a song about helping those in need.

Listen

In our Gospel reading from Luke 4:18-19 we hear about how Jesus was called by God to his mission.

‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.’

Respond

Leader: We are sent to bring good news to the poor and to families and communities everywhere:

Response: The Spirit of the Lord is upon us.

Leader: We are sent to proclaim release to captives, to those whose lives are threatened and whose rights are denied:

Response: The Spirit of the Lord is upon us.

Leader: We are sent to recover sight for the blind and to see the beauty of God’s creation:

Response: The Spirit of the Lord is upon us.

Leader: We are sent to let oppressed people go free and to defend the rights of the poor and vulnerable:

Response: The Spirit of the Lord is upon us.

Leader: We are sent to proclaim jubilee: God’s reign of justice, peace, and equality for all peoples.

Response: The Spirit of the Lord is upon us.

Gracious God, you have sent your Spirit upon us so that we might be your presence in the world.
May your Spirit send us forth to use our time, talent, and treasure for the good of all peoples. We ask
this through Christ, our Lord.

Amen.

Go Forth

We believe that we are part of God’s dream for the Church and the world,
and that God is shaping us, as the potter shapes the clay,
into the kind of human and faith community
that is the dream in God’s heart.

We believe that God has called and chosen us
as the potter carefully chooses a lump of clay
to make what the potter has in mind.

We believe that when God sees that the Church and world
are not coming out right, not according to the divine dream,

God does not discard the clay and take another piece,
but reworks the same clay, shaping and molding it
with firm but gentle hands, on the wheel of life.

We commit ourselves to shaping with gentle hands
the fragile and vulnerable clay, each precious person given to us.
We will treat them with the same loving patience we ourselves feel
in the hands of the divine potter.
We will open our ears to listen like disciples
as God leads us forward on the next part of the journey,
the journey we are on together.
And we will join hands as we continue along the way,
the way of salvation.

(Prayer without Borders. CRS)

Part 2. All Ages Learning Experience: Images of the Good Life (40 minutes)

Preparation

Create a PowerPoint presentation or newsprint sheet with the instructions.

Prepare a commercials/advertisements presentation on the “good life” as seen today.

Ask families to bring copies of newspapers and magazines with lots of advertisements. To make sure you have plenty magazines ask all the participants to bring them to the session.

Be sure people are organized into intergenerational table groups. Ask one person from the table group to serve as recorder.

Materials

- Magazines, newspapers
- Poster board or newsprint sheet for each table group
- Pens or pencils for participants
- Marking pens
- Glue stick or tape for each group

Using Handout #1, guide the table groups through the following process. Begin by explaining the concept of the good life, using the text below and your own examples:

The seventh and tenth commandments help us form the right attitude about material possessions. The seventh commandment tell us: “You shall not steal.” The tenth commandment tell us: “You shall not covet your neighbor’s goods.” We all know that we should not steal from others. We also know that we should not be greedy, which is our desire to possess material goods without concern for what is reasonable or right.

But, stated positively the 7th and 10th commandments direct us to develop a spirit of generosity and service, to give thanks to God for all that we have, and to be less attached to material goods as a way to obtain happiness. The 7th and 10th commandments also direct us to share our possessions with others, especially those who do not have food, shelter, or decent clothing.

Let's begin by looking at our attitudes toward living the good life. What does it mean for each us to have and live the good life?

Invite participants to look at Handout #1. Tell them to use the ideas on the handout to identify what the "good life" means to them personally or for their families. Have them check off the items that represent their current view of the good life—what they actually believe and practice, not what they should believe! They can also add their own descriptions of the good life that are important to them or their family using the blank spaces. (Young children can draw a picture describing the good life for them.)

Ask table group members to share their lists with each other, and then take one or two of the most important items and explain to the group why they are important. Begin with the family, then teens, adults, and older adults. Ask them to note similarities and differences in the lists as they go around the group.

Point out to participants that the handout has \$500 worth of coupons to allow them to purchase whatever they wish, as long as it's for the "good life." In your own words, or using the words below, say the following:

If you, as an individual, had \$500 to spend today, or your family had \$1000 to spend today on the good life, what would you purchase? Use the coupons from Handout #1 to register your choices. Use as many \$50 dollar coupons as necessary for each item you would purchase, but you cannot spend more than your allotment.

After the participants have finished, ask them to reflect on what their choice(s) are telling them about their vision of the good life. After several minutes of reflection ask them to share their insights with their table group.

Introduce the images of the good life in the next activity by saying:

What does our popular culture and society tell us about good life? In this next activity we will explore what we can learn about the good life from advertisements and TV commercials. First we are going to examine commercials and the messages that they send to us.

Present the TV commercials to the group. Pause after each commercial to give the participants time to write the name of the commercial. After all of the commercials ask table groups to identify two or three central messages about the good life in each commercial. Conclude by telling the table groups to share what they have learned by discussing the following questions:

- How do the commercials present a picture of the good life? How do you feel about what you have seen?
- If you had these products, what difference would it make in your life? What do these commercials try to convince you that you personally need in order to have the good life? Do you really need it?

Give each table group a pile of current magazines and newspapers. The magazines can be from a variety of sources. Make sure there are plenty of ads in the magazines. Ask table group members to review the magazines and newspapers and identify images they think are especially good at portraying images of the good life. Then as a table group discuss the images and select five or six of the best ads. Remove these ads from the magazine or newspaper. Write the name of each ad on the worksheet and together, as a table group, identify the key message it is teaching about the Good Life.

Ask each table group to create one poster presentation of their images of the good life. They should organize their poster into four equal sections (quadrants) and summarize their learning by including the following information on the poster. Label each section as indicated below.

- Quadrant 1: Our Thoughts on the Good Life. Include at least one item from each individual/family assessment of the good life on the poster (Part 1 on Handout #1).
- Quadrant 2: Messages from TV. Write the two or three central messages about the good life in the TV commercials on the poster.
- Quadrant 3: Images from Advertisements. Attach the five or six ads from the magazines on the poster.
- Quadrant 4: Scriptural Images (leave this section blank for now)

Part 3. In Depth Learning Experience (75 minutes)

Learning Experience One: The Bible and the Good Life

Preparation

Select a team of people to create and dramatize the seven Scripture passages. Select someone to read the passage as it is acted out. Assign roles to the main characters in the story. Identify speaking parts where applicable. Use symbols, images, pictures, photographs, and actual items (coins, grain) to convey the meaning of the story.

Materials Needed:

- Handout #2
- Props for Scripture stories

Guide the table groups through the following process. Create a PowerPoint presentation or newsprint sheet with the instructions.

In your own words, or using the words below, introduce the images of the good life in our Catholic faith tradition by saying:

The seventh and tenth commandments direct us to develop a spirit of generosity and service, to give thanks to God for all that we have, and to be less attached to material goods as a way to obtain happiness. The seventh and tenth commandments require us to be generous with others, giving more than is necessary. These commandments also direct us to share our possessions with others, especially those who do not have food, shelter, or decent clothing.

God created the world for all creatures and called humans to stewardship. As stewards, or caretakers, we are called to use natural resources well and protect the environment for everyone

now and in the future; to respect all life as a gift from God; and to share time, money, and talent to help others.

Part 1. Jesus and the Good Life

Present the seven Scripture passages from Handout #2 to the whole group by dramatizing each reading as you prepared them.

Readings:

- *Do Not Store-Up Treasures on Earth*—The Parable of the Rich Fool (Luke 12:16-21)
- *Sell All That You Own and Give to the Poor*—The Rich Ruler (Luke 18:18-23)
- *Give from Your Heart*—The Widow's Contribution (Mark 12:41-44)
- *Share Your Wealth*—Jesus and Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10)
- *See the Lord Where People Are in Need and Act*—Parable of the Last Judgment (Matthew 25:31-40)
- *Do Not Worry about Your Life*—Luke 12:22-34
- *Share Your Possessions*—The Story of the First Christians (Acts 4:32-37)

Participants can follow the stories by using Handout #2.

After the dramatic presentations are completed, ask table groups to work together to identify the main message they heard in the seven Scripture passages. They can refer to Handout #2 to review the passages.

In Quadrant 4 on their poster of images of the good life, ask table groups to summarize what they have learned from the scripture passages by completing the following sentence: *The Bible's view of the good life is. . .*

Have groups compare and contrast their view of the good life, the culture's view of the good life, and the Bible's view of the good life. Suggest questions such as:

- What do you think Jesus would think about the group's view of the good life?
- What do you think Jesus would think about the images of the good life in TV commercials and advertisements?
- If Jesus were here today in our gathering, what would he say to us about the good life?

Part 2. Reflections on the 7th and 10th Commandments

Make a brief presentation to the entire group on the connection between the seventh and tenth commandments and the good life. For many people this will be a new interpretation of the two commandments. Use the following teachings from the *Catholic Catechism for Adults* as the substance of your presentation.

To keep these commandments, "we need to acquire the virtues of moderation in our possessions, justice in our treatment of others, respect for their human dignity, and solidarity with all peoples. Moderation curbs our attachment to worldly goods and restrains our appetite for consumerism. Justice helps us respect our neighbors' rights and be interested in their human wellbeing. Solidarity

opens our hearts to identifying with the whole human family, reminding us of our common humanity (*Catholic Catechism for Adults*, p. 419).

In creating the universe, God entrusted the resources of the earth to the stewardship of all people. The Church, applying this truth, upholds the principle that the universal destination of the goods of the earth is meant for the common good of all people. At the same time, the Church stands by the right of private property.

The Church teaches that human dignity can be protected and a healthy community can be achieved only if human rights are protected and responsibilities are met. Therefore, every person has a fundamental right to life and a right to those things required for human decency. Corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities—to one another, to our families, and to the larger society.

We show our respect for the Creator by our stewardship of creation. Care for the earth is a requirement of our faith. We are called to protect people and the planet, living our faith in relationship with all of God’s creation. This environmental challenge has fundamental moral and ethical dimensions that cannot be ignored.

It can never be stated often enough that love and care for the poor are a major priority for every Christian. “Giving alms to the poor is a witness to fraternal charity: it is also a work of justice pleasing to God” (CCC, no. 2462).

The central interest of the Church’s social teaching is justice for all, but especially for the helpless and the poor. It involves the removal of the symptoms and causes of poverty and injustice. (*Catholic Catechism for Adults*, p. 426-27).

The “Tenth commandment calls us to practice poverty of spirit and generosity of heart. These virtues liberate us from being slaves to money and possessions. They enable us to have a preferential love for the poor and to be witnesses of justice and peace in the world. They also enable us to adopt a simplicity of life that frees us from consumerism and helps us to preserve God’s creation.” (*Catholic Catechism for Adults*, p. 449-50).

“Christian discipleship means, among other things, working to ensure that all people have access to what makes them fully human and fosters their human dignity: faith, education, health care, housing, employment, and leisure. Members of the Church are called to build up the resources of the Church herself and of civil society in making possible the sharing of God’s blessings and social good with others. This they do by their own generosity in the use of their time, talents, and treasures with others. Such generosity flows from hearts grateful to God for his generosity in creating and saving us.” (*Catholic Catechism for Adults*, p. 454-55)

Learning Experience Two. The Practice of Stewardship

Preparation

Create a “Stewardship Opportunities Booklet” to distribute to families, teens, and adults with a variety of projects and programs that provide people with a way to use their time, talent, and treasure. Your booklet should include parish, community, national, and international projects. Research stewardship opportunities in your community which involve direct service to those in need and organizations working to alleviate the causes of injustice. Check with your diocesan social justice or social ministry office, and Catholic Charities for ideas. Among the international projects you offer to people be sure to research the following organizations through their web sites: Catholic Relief Services, Habitat for Humanity, UNICEF, and Heifer Project.

Decide if you will organize a “Stewardship Display” or a “Stewardship Panel.”

Display: You can organize displays of ideas for stewardship similar to a parish ministries fair. Staff the displays with people from the respective ministries or organizations. Set up displays for stewardship ideas in the parish and through parish ministries; for community organizations serving people in need, protecting the environment, working for justice, and so on; and for national and international organizations. You can access national and international organizations via their web sites. Check out organizations such as Catholic Relief Services, Catholic Campaign for Human Development, Habitat for Humanity, and Heifer Project to download project ideas, pictures, and descriptions.

Panel: You can organize a panel of presenters, representing parish ministries, community organizations, and national/international projects. Each will speak briefly about the ways people can practice stewardship through their project or organization. Instead of using organization representatives, you can invite parishioners who are involved with the ministry or organization to share their firsthand experience of sharing their time, talent, and treasure. Select parishioners who are involved in a variety of ministries, serve in the community, and sponsor people or projects connected with international organizations such as Catholic Campaign for Human Development, Habitat for Humanity, and Heifer Project.

Select a team of people to create and present the dramatic presentation of the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30). Select someone to read the passage as it is being acted out. Assign roles to the main characters in the story. Identify speaking parts where applicable. Use play money or coins to represent the talents.

Create a PowerPoint presentation or newsprint sheet with the instructions.

Materials Needed

- Handout #2
- Handouts #3, #4, and #5 for families with children
- Handouts #4 and #5 for teens and adults
- Play money or coins
- File card for each person

Guide the table groups through the following process.

1. The Parable of the Talents

Dramatize the parable of the talents from Matthew 25:14-30 using actors you have prepared. The Scripture text can be found on Handout #2.

In your own words, or the words below, present the meaning of the parable using the following reflection by the U.S. Catholic Bishops from their pastoral letter, *Stewardship—A Disciples Response*.

Jesus sometimes describes a disciple's life in terms of stewardship (cf. Mt 25:14-30; Lk 12:42-48), not because being a steward is the whole of it but because this role sheds a certain light on it. An *oikonomos* or steward is one to whom the owner of a household turns over responsibility for caring for the property, managing affairs, making resources yield as much as possible, and sharing the resources with others. The position involves trust and accountability.

A parable near the end of Matthew's Gospel (cf. Mt 25:14-30) gives insight into Jesus' thinking about stewards and stewardship. It is the story of "a man who was going on a journey," and who left his wealth in silver pieces to be tended by three servants.

Two of them respond wisely by investing the money and making a handsome profit. Upon returning, the master commends them warmly and rewards them richly. But the third behaves foolishly, with anxious pettiness, squirreling away the master's wealth and earning nothing; he is rebuked and punished.

The silver pieces of this story stand for a great deal besides money. All temporal and spiritual goods are created by and come from God. That is true of everything human beings have: spiritual gifts like faith, hope, and love; talents of body and brain; cherished relationships with family and friends; material goods; the achievements of human genius and skill; the world itself. One day God will require an accounting of the use each person has made of the particular portion of these goods entrusted to him or her.

Each will be measured by the standard of his or her individual vocation. Each has received a different "sum"—a unique mix of talents, opportunities, challenges, weaknesses and strengths, potential modes of service and response—on which the Master expects a return. He will judge individuals according to what they have done with what they were given (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. *Stewardship—A Disciples Response*. Tenth Anniversary Edition. Washington, DC: USCCB, 2002, p. 19-20).

Conclude your reflections with these thoughts from the U.S. Bishops on the meaning of being a Christian steward.

"What identifies a steward? Safeguarding material and human resources and using them responsibly are one answer; so is generous giving of time, talent, and treasure. But being a Christian steward means more. As Christian stewards, we receive God's gifts gratefully, cultivate them responsibly, share them lovingly in justice with others, and return them with increase to the Lord" (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. *Stewardship—A Disciples Response*. Tenth Anniversary Edition. Washington, DC: USCCB, 2002, p. 42)

2. Time, Talent, and Treasure

Explain that the heart of stewardship is about how we wisely use our time, talents, and treasure to give thanks to God for all he has done for us, and to serve the needs of our parish, community, and world.

Ask people at table groups to share with each other practical ways they share their time, talents, and treasure. Use the following questions to focus their sharing.

- How do you already use your treasure, your wealth, for the benefit of others, especially those in need?
- How do you currently use your time to serve the needs of others as a good steward?
- What are some of your gifts and talents? What gifts and talents do you have because of your education, job, activities, hobbies, and interests?

Offer participants either the Stewardship Displays or the Stewardship Panel that you have prepared for this session. Be sure to include the review of the stewardship ideas found in Handouts #3 and #4, and the “Stewardship Opportunities Booklet” you have prepared.

3. A Stewardship Commitment

In your own words, or the words below, invite people to make a stewardship commitment as a practical way to live the seventh and tenth commandments. Introduce the activity by saying:

Take a look at Handout #5. Identify specific ways you will practice stewardship. Commit to at least one specific practice for time, talent, and treasure. For families, commit to at least one practice of time, talent, and treasure as a whole family, as well as for each family member. Write your commitment in each of the boxes on Handout #5 and then post your commitments on the refrigerator or wall at home to remind you of how you will practice stewardship.

Remind them to review the ideas on Handout #4 and the “Stewardship Opportunities Booklet.” Parents can review the ideas for children on Handout #3. Then give them several minutes to complete the activity. Close this activity by distributing file cards to each person. Ask them to write one stewardship commitment they are going to offer God in the closing prayer service.

Part 4. Sharing Learning Reflections (15 minutes)

The whole group sharing experience provides an opportunity for each age group to share something they have learned with the entire group.

Present the following information using the words below or your own words:

Think of everything we have done in this session to explore the seventh and tenth commandments and their application to life today. Please share your reflections on the following questions.

- What is the most important lesson you have learned?
- Why do you think the message of the Bible and the Church on living as a good steward is important for us as Catholics and for our world today?

Part 5. Closing Prayer Service: Living Stewardship (10 minutes)

Preparation

Print a “Stewardship Prayer Card” (Handout #6) for each person. Consider printing this on parchment or bond paper.

Select one person to proclaim the reading from 1 Corinthians.

Materials Needed

- One or more baskets for the stewardship offering
- Stewardship Prayer Cards, one per participant

Gather

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding and my entire will, all I have and call my own. You have given all to me. To you, Lord, I return it. Everything is yours; do with it what you will. Give me only your love and your grace; that is enough for me (Prayer of St. Ignatius Loyola).

Listen

“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” (1 Corinthians 12:4-7)

Respond

Place all of the commitment cards on the prayer table. Play reflective music as this is done.

Go Forth

Close by reciting the Stewardship Prayer together while lifting the baskets of stewardship commitments so all can see.

Generous God,
thank you for all the gifts you have given me—
 my life, my family, my friends,
 my time, talents, and treasure.
I know that all I have received is from your hand.
Gracious and loving God, you call us to be
 stewards of your abundance,
the caretakers of all you have entrusted to us.
Help us to always use your gifts wisely
 and teach us to share them generously.
Send the Holy Spirit to work through us,
 bringing your message of love to those we serve.
May our faithful stewardship bear witness
 to the love of Jesus Christ in our lives.
We pray with grateful hearts, in Jesus’ name.
Amen.