STEWARDSHIP[1]

When I embarked on this Sabbatical Project of writing and compiling a variety of sermon dramas, I knew that stewardship would be one topic that I would approach.

I have a passion for stewardship, and especially talking about money. Congregations I have served have heard me say, many times, "I love talking about money. I hate finances. I'm a math major, I'm good with numbers, but finances get my eyes to glaze over. But talking about money as a part of our faith? That excites me."

I'm not sure what moved me to this perspective. "Giving" as one of my primary spiritual gifts. And I had a good regional stewardship teacher when I was in my first call. But I have seen far too many congregations focusing on finances and bottom line and not faith and response, and far too many preachers who are fearful or unequipped to preach and teach about this important facet of our faith.

And so … cue the stewardship dramas.

I am hopefully that these dramas might provide a way for a congregation (and preacher) to dive into and explore these topics, and learn and grow in a faith-full way.

A couple of these dramas feature kids (whether confirmation students or older children with a parent). Youth might take those roles, or adults might play the youth roles. As mentioned earlier in this compilation, if an adult is playing a youth character, I would encourage you to have youth advise and help provide the costume for that adult. Do this in a way that doesn't mock youth, but allows the youth to have control over (and some fun with) how they are portrayed.

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- Consider making a donation (once, or each time you use one of these dramas) to a hunger relief ministry as an act of gratitude and "passing it on." We are blessed to be a blessing.
- If you benefit from the use of one or more of these dramas, consider letting me know about that. It encourages my continued writing. (You can reach me at ThePastor14@gmail.com.)

Please contact me if you'd like to receive my full collection of dramas. Pastor Mark, Advent Harleysville PA, thepastor14@gmail.com

Identity, Blessing, and Offering (Stewardship)

Deuteronomy 26:1-11 – Thanksgiving (USA), or YEAR C, Lent 1

You might use this drama as the sermon for Lent 1C, for a Thanksgiving worship or celebration, or for a Stewardship/Response theme. It might also serve as the discussion primer for an adult forum or youth gathering.

This drama explores the Deuteronomy passage about identity, blessing, and offering. Two youth enlist their pastor to help them brainstorm how to bring that account into today's world.

Characters

- Chris – confirmation student, carries a Bible
- Pat – confirmation student, the one who gets a little crazier, has her phone on her
- Pastor Janet – also has a phone which she uses early on.

The pastor role can be played by a pastor, or by someone dressed in your local pastor's attire.

There are two youth, Chris and Pat. Chris should have a Bible, and read from it (or open it as she reads the lines). In this skit, she has German great grandparents. You might adjust that to another northern European group – Norwegian, Finnish, Danish. Pat has her phone on her. Her grandmother is Vietnamese. You might change that to another group who had come as refugees sponsored by the church in more recent times.

Staging

If adults will be playing the youth roles, I would advise being wary of dressing up as stereotypical youth – it might be funny to some but might also portray a mocking or ridiculing air to others. Instead, consider having a youth prescribe the "youth" outfits for the adults. That empowers the youth, and creates the characters that everyone can have fun with.

When the Pastor makes her two "Hey Siri" reminders, make sure the phone is not an iPhone which will respond to that or you will have unwanted

feedback. And brace yourself for others phones in the gathering to respond. Or change it to "Hey, iPhone" which will give everyone the right impression without triggering actual phones.

The setting is simple. You can have three microphones and reading stands, with the pastor in the middle, or two students on one side and the pastor on the other. It's mostly a readers' theater, without any acting required beyond the vocal energy and emotions. Because there is a lot of back-and-forth, the actors/readers should rehearse.

Stewardship: Identity, Blessing, and Offering

Chris: Pastor Janet, can you help us?

Pat: We have a confirmation project – taking a Bible story and bringing it into today. We can't have someone else do it for us, but we can ask questions, and get help with ideas and guidance.

Chris: Can you help us?

Pastor: I might be able to. What are some of the projects people are doing?

Pat: Well, Billy and Tyrone said they want to do the story about Elijah and the sacrifice on Mount Chocolate.

Pastor: Mount Chocolate? … Ohhh, Mt Carmel?

Pat: Yeah, Mount Carmel. Anyway, they liked that story…I think they're thinking of ways to bring down fire from heaven to burn up the sacrifice…Billy was…

Pastor: Just a sec… "hey Siri, set reminder to talk with property chair about fire insurance." … OK, what other ideas?

Chris: Katie and Tara are thinking of telling the story of Noah's ark, but having all sorts of stuffed animals in a boat, and seeing if they can make it float, and …

Pastor: Excuse me again, please… "hey Siri, set reminder to talk with property chair about flood insurance." … OK, what are *you* thinking of doing?

Chris: We were actually thinking about that Bible reading you had last week - from Deuteronomy I think - about bringing fruit up as an offering.

Pat: My Grams has got lots of fruit we can get rid of. Right now she's overloaded with pears falling down in the yard, and bees everywhere.

Pastor: I'm not sure the point of that Bible reading is getting rid of stuff… but tell me, why did you choose that reading?

Chris: Well, the other kids were looking at how God helps us, which is cool. But this one is about us bringing something to God. I like that.

Pat: Plus, we do have lots of fruit.

Pastor: OK, how were you thinking of taking that account from Deuteronomy and making it current?

Pat: Well, we thought we could bring a fruit basket up to the altar, and present it to God.

Pastor: And?

Chris: And what?

Pastor: There might be more you can do with it. Do you have the reading?

Chris: I've got it here. Do you have time to look through it with us?

Pastor: Absolutely. This combines two of my favorite things.

Pat: What's that?

Pastor: Thinking about the Bible, and talking with others … especially youth. So let's do it.

Pat: Read on, Chris.

Chris: "When you have come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess and you possess it and settle in it, you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground…

Pat: Oh, forget pears…we're going to need ground cherries, or strawberries.

Pastor: What??

Pat: It says, "fruit of the ground." We're going to need something growing on the ground.

Chris: Do pears that already fell down count?

Pastor: Can I ask a question? …. How important are pears or strawberries to you

Chris: I love strawberry jam.

Pat: And pear jam on ice-cream is the best.

Pastor: But if I asked what was the most important things you had, would you say it was fruit?

Pat: No!

Pastor: So what would you say? What's something that's important to you?

Pat: *(thinks…)* My phone?

Chris: That's not important to you. It's part of you. I swear, you should just get it grafted into your hand.

Pastor: What about you, Chris?

Chris: *(thinks for a bit)* I guess maybe the money I get from babysitting.

Pat: Why did you ask what's important to us.

Pastor: Well, in the Deuteronomy reading, they brought their "first fruits" – when they got to the harvest, they brought the first portion, up front, and presented it to God. The "fruit of the ground" wasn't ground cherries;…it was the harvest, grown from earth, from the ground. That might be grapes, or grain; those were their first fruits. But…if you bring that story into today, what are *your* first fruits?

Chris: It could be a portion of the money I get from babysitting…although when I'm babysitting the little terror down the street, any money his parents give me is more like a sin-offering for having to put up with him.

Pat: Melodrama much?

Pastor: What about you, Pat?

Pat: I guess … *(reluctant, but thinking…)* I could give up some phone time.

Pastor: I know that would be a big sacrifice, but it's kind of vague if we're talking about bringing something in.

Chris: I know. You could give up some phone time, and then use that time to volunteer. … except that's still a bit vague.

Pat: *(excited)* But I can turn that into something! Genius! I can help my grandma make pear jam. She's been wanting me to help and I haven't had the time, but… I could do that, and then see if we could donate some of the jam to church … or even sell it, and bring the money in

Pastor: I love it. That sounds like making "first fruits giving" fit for today.

Chris: Cool, but Pastor Janet, we've only talked about the first part of the reading, about giving first fruits. There's a lot more stuff about *how* to do that, and what to say. And it's kind of confusing.

Pat: Yeah, like the person declaring to God that he…

Chris: Or *she*

Pat: …that *they* have come into the land that God swore to give us. How do we apply that to today?

Pastor: Well, let's read a little further and see if that helps. After they declare the piece about giving first fruits, what happens?

Chris: Well, there's a lot more stuff you're supposed to say.

Pat: Yeah, like saying you've been hiking all around Armenia. And pretending you're from outer space…

Pastor: Hiking? Outer space?? OK, what is the actual reading?

Chris: *(looking up and reading)* "A wandering *(sounds it out)* Ar-a-mean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation."

Pastor: Ahh…Aramean… The descendants of Aram were semitic people, like Abraham and Sarah and their family. The wandering Aramean in that reading is actually Jacob, whose name got changed to Israel. The ancestor Jacob and family were nomads, wandering…and his son Joseph got them to

settle in Egypt where they grew from a big family to a nation, the people of Israel.

Pat: Oh, and then they were turned into slaves, and called out to God, and God sent Moses to rescue them.

Pastor: Except it doesn't say it like that.

Pat: What do you mean?

Pastor: *They* didn't do that. Read that part.

Chris: "When the Egyptians treated us harshly …"

Pat: *Us*? It was talking about he, back then, but now us? It was people a way long time ago, right?

Pastor: Go on.. Keep reading.

Chris: "…When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labor on us, we cried to the Lord, the God of our ancestors; the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression."

Pat: It doesn't say *they*. It says *us*. Why?

Pastor: Why do you think?

Pat: Maybe they're trying to take credit for what someone else did. Billy does that all the time. Someone else does something cool, and suddenly he starts saying "we" like he was part of it.

Pastor: No…I don't think that's what's happening here.

Chris: Suddenly it seems like I'm included.

Pastor: Go on.

Chris: It's not just them back there. It's like… this is my people… we did that.

Pastor: Yes! It might have happened to people a long time ago, but you are to tell it in a way that has to do with your identity, with who you are. OK, read a bit more.

Chris: "The Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey."

Pat: Ohhh … so it's who we are, and it's because of God. Not just God did it for our grandparents, but that includes us.

Pastor: Yes! We do that all the time, right? We talk about Jesus dying for our sins? We know he died 2,000 years ago. But it is part of our identity. And it is God's gift for us. The deliverance from slavery in Egypt was like that for the Israelite people. They told the story, including themselves. They were saying, this is God's gift for us. It's who we are, people who were delivered, who are blessed, by God.

Pat: So … how do we bring that to today?

Pastor: What are examples of past actions that have become part of your current identity? And not just actions of your ancestors, but what *God* did for them…and thus did for you.

Pat: Well…my grandma came here from Vietnam as an immigrant. She always talked about how God had blessed her, and had brought her here, and provided a community that cared.

Pastor: So…?

Pat: God brought *us* from Vietnam, and provided a home for *us*, a land flowing with milk and honey.

Pastor: Milk and honey was sort of specific for the people in the Bible reading. What's the blessing for you?

Pat: Pear trees. A land flowing with pear trees.

Chris: And my great grandpa came from Germany. I guess he was an immigrant too, right? He said it was the church here, back then German people gathering together, worshiping in German, giving them a feeling of home. He always said it felt like God welcomed them …and great grandma said God gave them a giant German hug through the church.

Pastor: So…?

Chris: *We* were immigrants from Germany, and God blessed *us* with a church and a community and a family…

Pastor: I like it. Not just your ancestors, but you. So…if God has blessed and cared for you, and that means something now, how do you respond?

Pat: We do this confirmation assignment?

Pastor: Read on

Chris: "So now *I* bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O Lord, have given me."

Pat: Wait, it just switched again. Wasn't it talking about *he* – that wandering guy from Armenia.

Pastor: A wandering Aramean. Jacob, and his nomadic family.

Pat: Yeah, then it was *we* – *we* were slaves, God saved *us*, and brought us to this land… but now it's *I*. *I* bring.

Chris: Ohhh, so because of what God did for us, *I* am now responding

Pastor: Exactly. So…how would you respond?

Pat: We already said that, right? She's bringing some of her sin-offering money

Chris: My baby-sitting money

Pat: Her baby sitting money…and I'm going to pause some of my phone time to help Grams with making some jam, and then donating some of that.

Chris: Oh, but it's not just what we do. It's why. We're bringing the money and jam because God helped our family…helped *us*.

Pat: And God keeps helping us, right? When mom was dealing with breast cancer, it was the whole church gathering around, praying for her, and bringing meals and helping out with stuff around the house. And, she got better. So it was God helping us in all sorts of ways.

Pastor: Excellent. In that Bible account, the person brings their offering, and tells the story of their own identity, and what God has done, and because of that, is bringing the offering. So, when you're bringing this story

to life in the present, you would do the same. You have your family stories, and then you have your first fruits – the things that are precious or important to you, the things that you are receiving or earning, that you will give as a thank you and to celebrate God.

Pat: Give where? I'm putting jam in the offering plate?

Pastor: Read the last part.

Chris: "You shall set it down before the Lord your God and bow down before the Lord your God. Then you, together with the Levites and the aliens who reside among you, shall celebrate with all the bounty that the Lord your God has given to you and to your house."

Pat: Wait, my ancestor was an alien, and now I'm getting together with aliens? *(hums twilight zone music…)*

Chris: *(tries to do deep announcer voice…)* "Space…the final frontier…"

Pastor: Not that sort of alien. Actually, I think this is the most awesome part, and usually the one we miss.

Pat: With aliens?

Pastor: Back then, once the people settled in the land, they were in danger of forgetting that God had provided all that they had, and had blessed them. They might start giving themselves all the credit, and forgetting about God. So… they were to bring the first and best to God, and tell the story, to REMEMBER who they were, and remember how God had blessed them and continued to bless them …but then …they were to have a party.

Pat: A party?

Pastor: Well, a celebration feast, celebrating the bounty, the harvest, the blessing…but not alone. And not just giving it to the church. They presented it to God, but they were to share it with the Levites – the priestly people who didn't own land and didn't have their own harvest. And share it with the aliens – that's another word for immigrants, the outsiders living in the land who didn't have their own land yet. By giving to God, they also provided for those two groups.

Chris: Wait, so if we're doing this for today, can we make some of that baby-sitting money and jam go to staff? That's sort of like those Levites,

right? Their job is here at church. Our regular offerings pay their salaries right? So it fits?

Pat: And include aliens…*(hums twilight zone music)*

Chris: Be serious. …And include the people who don't have land? Can it be immigrants *and* those who don't have jobs, or those in need?

Pastor: I think that's *perfect*.

Pat: You said "party," right?

Pastor: A celebration. Not just giving to them, but celebrating God's gifts *with* them.

Chris: Celebrating *with* them … When our church hosts the Interfaith Hospitality Network stuff, and homeless families with kids sleep here for a week, we don't just give them meals. We make meals and sit with them and eat with them. *With* them…right?

Pastor: I think that's *even more perfect*.

Chris: Maybe some of my offering can go to staff salaries, and some can go to help those homeless families.

Pat: And I'll bet they'd like some fresh pear jam…on ice-cream!

Pastor: You know, I think you two have just figured out a wonderful way to take that account from Deuteronomy and bring it into today … for *you*

Chris: And our families

Pat: And our church

Pastor: And a response to God for God's amazing blessings.

Pat: And with ice-cream.

Pastor: *(chuckling)* And with ice-cream. I can't wait for your presentation.

Pat: Thanks Pastor Janet.

Chris: *(pausing…and looking up)* And thank you God. Help us remember why we're doing this.

Pat: Amen

Reasons to Give (Stewardship)

Genesis 26:1-11, 2 Cor 8:8-15 and/or 2 Cor 9:7-12

This drama is designed more for a general stewardship focus than to be the sermon for a specific text, but three texts cited in the skit are provided as possible texts if you want that connection.

I address a frequent mistake (cited by numerous church stewardship consultants) of congregations seeing a need (e.g. we need $10k) and advertising that "if everyone gives $x, we'll make our goal." Make sure you don't present this skit as leaders are preparing or delivering that sort of appeal. Perhaps let leaders read this skit if they are considering such an appeal.

Characters

- Dad (Mr. Beasley) – member of community civic group, active in church
- Dorothy – daughter, nicknamed "Professor Wisdom" as she teaches.
- Travis – son, just joined the community civic group, demographically represents younger church members
- Lindsey – youngest in household, delights in initiating side-skit illustrations with Travis.

Because the conversation jumps around, but the characters each have a "style" and a particular part they play, you may want to dress them distinctively. Dad/Mr. Beasley as a stereotypical older dad outfit, Travis as young adult, Dorothy as young adult and perhaps scholarly (but let her still represent regular people) and Lindsey as youth or young adult, smart but also a smart aleck.

Staging

This skit does not require any significant acting. Four readers can be stationed at reading stands (pulpit, lectern, music stands…) with microphones. They should read dramatically, and you'll want to rehearse to be able to keep the conversations and thoughts moving quickly but clearly. You can set up in whatever order you wish, but I imagine it as Dorothy – Dad – Travis - Lyndsey

There are numerous times when Lyndsey jumps into a melodramatic illustration or overrepresentation of a point, with Travis joining her. Have fun

with those. Play them up. They provide comic relief even as they illustrate the point.

For the civic organization Dad and Travis are members of, simply replace "Harleysville" with your town/community name.

Stewardship: Reasons to Give

Travis: Dad, you just got a letter from the Harleysville Service Club. Wanna guess what it says?

Dad (Mr. Beasley): Did you open my mail?

Travis: I didn't need to. I'm a member too, remember? I joined this last summer … *(regretfully)* before you told me about dues and stuff.

Dad: OK, what does it say? Please don't tell me they're asking for money again.

Travis: Dear Mr. Beasley, as a member of the Harleysville Service Club, we know you are proud of our reputation, and committed to our club. Because of that, we are confident that you will want to help us close our budget shortfall from this last year. We are projecting a deficit of about $5,000. With 25 members in our club, if each person will give just $200 above their regular dues, we will close that gap and finish the year strong. Sincerely, Jason White, club president.

Dorothy: That's a horrible letter.

Dad: *(resigned…)* It's a needed letter. We have to get our finances up, and this is how we do it.

Dorothy: I think it's a horrible letter. For two reasons.

Lindsey: There goes "Professor Wisdom" with her lists. First thing is … the second point is … Like she's giving a lecture.

Dorothy: *(glares at Lindsey, then continues)* Two points. I don't think it's a good reason for giving. And I think it makes a big mistake in the appeal.

Dad: So you're an expert on bad reasons for giving?

Dorothy: Maybe not an expert, but I could teach a thing or two about reasons for giving.

Dad: OK, go ahead "Professor Wisdom."

Dorothy: You too, Dad? … Alright, you want to know a bad reason for giving. Guilt.

Dad: Guilt?

Dorothy: Yeah, guilt. Remember when little Sarah came to the door selling girl scout cookies?

Lindsey: *(going into a melodramatic side skit with Travis, playing out the scene, overacting the part of a sweet little girl) …* Hello Mr. Beasley, would you like to buy some girl scout cookies?

Travis: *(joining the act, playing his reluctant dad) …* Well, I …

Lindsey: If I don't sell ten boxes today, I'll be the worst in my club. Everyone will look down on me.

Travis: I don't really …

Lindsey: Pleeaasse Mr. Beasley, Mrs. Pritchard next door bought 2 boxes. And you're nicer than she is. *(looks up with manipulative smile)*

Travis: OK, I'll take two boxes

Lindsey: *(stares, smiling, expecting more)*

Travis: OK …I'll take three.

Dorothy: *(laughing)* Now that is guilt.

Dad: You're making fun of girl scout cookies?

Dorothy: No, but there's a difference between having the option to buy them, and being guilted into it. Guilt is a lousy reason to give.

Lindsey: It's effective.

Dorothy: But negative.

Travis: I've seen that used at church.

Dad: When?

Travis: When Ms. Sampson asked you, right in front of council, if you would contribute to the new carpet fund.

Dad: I think we have more important things than a new carpet.

Dorothy: But you gave.

Lindsey: Guilt is effective.

Travis: And God can use it.

Dorothy: What?

Travis: I'm not disagreeing with you. Guilt is not a ***good*** reason … and I'm not saying God wants us to get people to give through guilt, but God can still use it. It still helps ministry.

Dorothy: True, but there are better reasons to give.

Lindsey: Wait, what about dad's letter? You said it was bad for two reasons? What reasons?

Dorothy: Well first, it assumes everyone is able and willing to give the same amount, and that they all will do that.

Travis: You mean asking all 25 members to give $200 each?

Dorothy: Yes. That's like what they did at church with that carpet campaign. We have 100 giving units. They said if everyone gave just $100 we'd make the $10,000 goal.

Dad: That's accurate.

Dorothy: But faulty. First off, about 20 of those giving units don't even attend, and another 20 didn't want to give anything towards new carpet

Dad: I was one … until the guilt.

Travis: Ohh…So now only 60 people are giving. That means only $6000 if everyone gives that share.

Dorothy: And that's the problem with it. Some people, like dad, can easily give a lot more than $100 … but what did Dad give?

Dad: $100 … because of guilt!

Dorothy: Exactly. So Dad could have given more, but because it was $100 per person, he didn't step up. Meanwhile, Mrs. Russel, who's on food stamps, and sacrifices to give $20 a week in offering, feels pressured to give the same as Dad. Instead of being happy with a gift that's within her means, she's pressured by guilt. That's messed up … and it ends up falling short because it creates hardship for some, lets others off the hook, and doesn't take seriously that some people just aren't going to give.

Dad: But shouldn't everyone give their share?

Dorothy: What's their share? Is Mrs. Russel's share the same as yours? "It is a question of equality between your present abundance and her need."

Dad: That sounds like communism.

Dorothy: It's actually from St. Paul in Second Corinthians chapter 8. Your share depends on your finances, your ability. But there's a bigger problem

and the reason why that letter is a bad reason to give.

Lindsey: Point one – everyone's share is not the same. Point two is … Listen up everyone, give it up for Professor Wisdom.

Dorothy: *(ignoring)* If guilt is a bad reason to give, so is obligation.

Dad: Obligation?

Dorothy: *(pretending to quote, to illustrate)* "As a member of the club, it is your responsibility to give to close our deficit."

Lindsey: *(along with Travis, getting into a side-skit overacting to make the point)* As a member of our church, it is your responsibility to help us reach our budget.

Travis: You're a member. You have to give.

Lindsey: It's your *duty*

Travis: You *must* do it

Dad: *(ignoring them)* You said obligation, but I see it as civic duty. If I'm a club member, I need to do my part.

Dorothy: Why?

Dad: Because I'm a club member.

Dorothy: Travis, are you going to give extra to the club?

Travis: Nope.

Dorothy: But you're a member. It's your civic duty. You need to do your part.

Travis: Then I'll quit. I don't need to be a member.

Dorothy: *(trying to push dad beyond budget, to the mission/purpose of the donation)* Dad, what are you giving *to*?

Dad: The budget. To close the shortfall.

Dorothy: Why?

Day: Because I'm a member, and we have a shortfall!

Dorothy: And nothing more?

Dad: What more do you need?

Travis: *(realizing what Dorothy is asking, joining in)* Why do they need the money?

Dad: There's a shortfall.

Travis: No, what's the money going for?

Lindsey: OK, I think I see where Dorothy is going with this. Dad, you see it as civic duty. You're part of the organization, so you're going to give.

Dad: Exactly.

Lindsey: But Travis, you see it as some disconnected demand, and that doesn't work for you.

Travis: Exactly.

Lindsey: Well Professor Wisdom, what do you do with that?

Dorothy: I'll still say that obligation is not a good reason for giving. It's true that for dad's generation …

Lindsey: … for old people … *(Dad gives the evil eye)*

Dorothy: … for Boomers and Busters, there's an institutional loyalty. If you're part of the organization, you should do your part. So… it sort of works, but it has limits. But … there's a better reason to give, and it's one that will work for Dad and for Travis.

Lindsey: What's that?

Dorothy: It's stories. People give to stories.

Lindsey: *(eyes light up as she launches into a side-skit again, with Travis, overacting the start of stories)* Once upon a time … there was a Harleysville Service Club and …

Dorothy: No!

Travis: It was a dark and stormy night, when …

Dorothy: Stop it!

Lindsey: I've got it … In the beginning … there was a church, and it needed some money …

Dorothy: Not that sort of stories. I mean impact stories. Like at church. People don't get excited about giving to a general budget, and they certainly don't get excited about utilities, but … this past summer Michael was part of VBS, and then we found out his family was struggling with some car problems and some members helped them with the car, and invited them to church, and he just did acolyte for the first time, and you should have seen his face.

Dad: I didn't know that.

Dorothy: A lot of people didn't. But that's a story we can share. With their permission. But sharing how people supporting our budget – paying for the A/C that made VBS survivable for volunteers and inviting for new people – ended up helping us impact not just Michael, but his whole family … and it's now blessing all of us.

Lindsey: I'll say! The cookies that Michael's mom made for coffee hour were awesome.

Dorothy: Travis – you said you're not giving $200 more to your club out of obligation, but would you give it to help ministries like what we had for Michael?

Travis: That I will gladly give to.

Lindsey: "God loves a cheerful giver." Second Corinthians chapter 9.

Dorothy: Dad, you didn't want to give to the carpet, but what if you found out that after they renovated that room, some new people joined the AA group that started meeting there, and one of them moved from having her family falling apart to getting help for herself and her partner, and they want to help others in the same situation.

Dad: I didn't know that.

Dorothy: AND … that Mr. Janson agreed to serve on council because they now meet in this newly renovated space with new carpet, but also better lighting and a hybrid online setup and outside groups using it. He said it shows the church cares and is trying to get involved in the community, and he's using his connections to help us do that. He went from only attending on Sundays to being our church's representative at the community council, and he's organizing people to help out.

Dad: I had no idea.

Dorothy: Because we haven't been telling the stories. It's not about giving to budget, to A/C, or carpet … but it's about giving to ministry, partnering with God to reach children, welcome households, to create a safe space for lives to be transformed, to make a welcoming environment and to reach out.

Travis: So that's a *good* reason to give? Giving to stories.

Dorothy: Giving to ministry and mission. To what God is doing here. And we tell the stories so people know.

Lindsey: Professor Wisdom's list. Guilt – bad. Obligation – bad. Mission and ministry – good. Stories – good.

Dad: Any other brilliant teaching, Professor Wisdom?

Dorothy: Another *good* reason to give. Token.

Travis: We should give tokens?

Lindsey: Free subway passes?

Dorothy: No, giving as a token. It's a personal reason, with a deeper connection to God and faith.

Lindsey: Giving a pittance? *(overacts, mimicking a wealthy patron, perhaps a British accent, like a Dickens character)* Here's a token gift for you, my boy.

Dorothy: No, to give a token is to give a representation of yourself. I give this gift, this offering, to God as a way to remind God, and to remind myself! "God – this all belongs to you. What I have belongs to you. I belong to you. And so I give a portion back – a significant portion – as a way to publicly acknowledge that, and to humble myself and remember."

Lindsey: Like when the Israelites were coming into the promised land, they were told to give the first fruits of their harvests to God and remember their history, remember what God had done for them.

Dorothy: YES! Giving an offering, a significant offering, a token that represents me … to declare to God, and to remind myself, that I know it all belongs to God, entrusted to me.

Lindsey: Just like those Israelites.

Dorothy: Just like with those Israelites, when I'm tempted to get caught up in myself and my agendas, I remember. I give this token, this representation, to remember. Not my stuff. I'm a steward of what belongs to God.

Travis: So…that's not about budget and ministry?

Dorothy: It helps budget and ministry, but when we give, it also helps us. It deepens our faith. It grows that relationship with God. And, there's one more, maybe the best reason to give.

Lindsey: Because mom said so.

Dorothy: No, that's obligation.

Dad: Because people will think badly of you if you don't.

Dorothy: Nope. That's guilt

Travis: What?

Dorothy: A loving attitude of gratitude.

Dad: You mean as a thankyou?

Dorothy: Yes. A thankyou. And an act of love.

Lindsey: *(eagerly jumping into another side-skit, overacting with Travis, pretending to hold and present flowers to him. They may use alternate voices or accents to overdo it)* These flowers are for you. Thanks so much for being my special someone.

Travis: *(with mock passion)* Those must be expensive.

Lindsey: Pff. Doesn't matter. They're for you.

Travis: Such extravagance. They'll be gone in a couple days.

Lindsey: But they're here today. It's about love. Thank you.

Dorothy: Exactly! Love, and thanks. A loving attitude of gratitude. We WANT to give, to say thanks, to express love.

Dad: So another good reason to give that's not about the ministry but is about relationship and faith.

Dorothy: Indeed. But it still provides for ministry and mission.

Lindsey: So…Professor Wisdom's points in review. Giving out of guilt. Bad.

Travis: But God can use it

Lindsey: Giving because of obligation. Also bad.

Dad: Some of us still see it as civic duty…but it has limits.

Lindsey: Giving to mission and ministry, especially when we tell the stories about the impacts, about lives changed and God at work – good.

Dorothy: Very good.

Lindsey: Giving a token

Travis: Not a pittance

Lindsey: Giving a token, a significant portion, as a reminder and declaration that it all belongs to God

Travis: That we belong to God

Lindsey: That's good … And don't forget the attitude of gratitude.

Dorothy: The *loving* attitude of gratitude.

Dad: Got it. *(looks upward)* Thanks God, for loving us. Help us love you back, and be wise stewards of your amazing blessings. For your sake.

ALL: Amen

Investment Strategies for your Heart (Stewardship)

Matthew 6:19-21 (Ash Wednesday, Epiphany YEAR A: Sermon on the Mount)

This drama might be used around Ash Wednesday, but would probably be better served as a general stewardship message, either as part of a congregation's stewardship/generosity focus, or as a reminder at another time of year.

Characters

- Emma – volleyball team member, away the last few weeks
- Sheila – makes the connection with the text
- Duane – his dad joined a service group at church
- Jason – makes the application to their lives

There are a couple times when Emma jumps into a melodramatic parody and Duane joins her. Have fun with those. Play them up. They provide comic relief even as they create a counter-point for the dialog.

Staging

This skit does not require any significant acting. You can set up four reading stands (pulpit, lectern, music stands…) with microphones. Emma and Duane start at a pair of mics, talking with each other, and Jason and Sheila walk in and set up at the other two mics. All should read dramatically, and you'll want to rehearse to be able to keep the conversations and thoughts moving quickly but clearly.

Stewardship: Investment Strategies for your Heart

Emma and Duane are talking, Jason and Sheila walk up to them.

Jason: Emma – what is up? I haven't seen you for a while

Emma: Hi Jason, I haven't been around for a while. It's been crazy.

Jason: Where were you?

Emma: Well, last weekend we were in Harrisburg[2] for a big tournament, the week before that, we had one in Williamsburg, and the week before that, a volleyball clinic at State College.

Jason: Wait, you got into that dink and dunk sport?

Emma: First off, there's no dunking. That's basketball. And technically there's "dinking," but there's also jump serves and monster blocks and …

Jason: Ok, I get it. It's not some backyard powderpuff activity.

Emma: It's brutal sometimes. We had someone get a concussion because she got hit so hard by the ball.

Sheila: I thought volleyballs were soft?

Emma: Not real volleyballs. They're hard. The sport is hard. And grueling. But I love it.

Sheila: Wow, I knew you were trying out volleyball, but you're really into it.

Emma: I know, Sheila. It sort of just happened. I didn't care that much at first, but my parents wanted me to give it a shot. They got me into a club, and paid the dues and bought the equipment and started going to parent meetings … and then they started scheduling me for stuff.

Sheila: Sounds like they got into it first.

Emma: Yeah, sort of. It was, like, as soon as they started putting some money into it, and going to the meetings, and talking with the coach and the other parents, well, yeah. They got hooked.

Duane: That's like what happened to my dad. Not with an activity for me, but with his own time.

Jason: I heard he got laid off a couple months ago. I'm sorry man.

Duane: Thanks. He's hoping to get a job soon, but he's not one to just sit around.

Sheila: I'll say. Duane, every time I go to church, I see him working on something.

Duane: That's the thing. We used to just go to church a couple times a month, and just for worship. But then he had some time, and he joined the Amigos.

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[2] Replace with locations in your own state

Jason: What's the Amigos?

Duane: It's a cool men's group … well, they've had a couple women join too … they meet up on Thursday mornings and have some coffee and donuts

Emma: Sugar and Caffeine. America runs on Duncan.

Duane: Well, whatever energy it gives them, they then use it to do work around the church. They divide up a list of things to do, and go out and do them. And then most of them end up going out to lunch.

Emma: So it's a social group?

Duane: It's social, and service, and ministry. But the thing is, he just went by to volunteer one day. Mom really made him do it, to get him away from of doing projects in the house. He was driving her crazy. So he goes, and gives up some time, and lends a hand, and next thing he's like addicted to it, looking for projects, writing down lists when we go to church.

Jason: Addicted to work?

Duane: It's not work. He loves it. Honestly, when he gets a job, I'm thinking he's going to try to schedule it so he still has Thursday mornings open for Amigos. … And it's gotten him more involved in church in general. Now we go pretty well every Sunday. And he's thinking of going to a Bible study with some of the guys.

Jason: That's like what happened to Jeremy, with the drama club.

Duane: Jeremy is in the drama club?

Emma: *(jumping into mock Shakespearian acting and accent/voice, with Duane joining her in deliberately gender-reversed roles)* To be or not to be…

Duane: *(overact, melodramatic)* Romeo, Romea, wherefor art thou, Romeo

Emma: *(keep the melodrama going)* I'm over here, fair maiden

Jason: Maybe you two should join the drama club. … But seriously, yes, Jeremy joined the club. At first he did it to make his parents mad, because his dad wanted him to go out for baseball. And actually, I think it got him out of detention time with Mr. Pritchard. But it ended up … well … consuming him. He said he was just trying it out for a couple days, then the next week, then he started going early to help out with set design, and now he's staying late to help with the construction and painting. And he's really good at it, and he loves it.

Sheila: This is what Jesus was talking about.

Jason: What?

Emma: *(Starting another melodramatic overacting parody)* Matthew chapter 35 verse 85 – For verily, Jeremy did unto the drama club go, with haste, and there did he join in creating the world. With wood and paint did he create it…

Duane: *(again, continuing the parody)* Matthew chapter 93 verse 127. Do unto others as Shakespeare would do unto you.

Sheila: No, I'm serious. Remember how we were talking in Sunday School about the sermon on the mount and what Jesus said about hearts and treasure?

Emma: I wasn't there on Sunday. I was in Harrisburg, remember?

Jason: Oh yeah. Knocking people out with volleyballs.

Emma: One concussion, and it wasn't from me.

Sheila: *(Claps hands a couple times, trying to get them back on track)* Hearts and treasure. Focus, people.

Jason: Right. Jesus said something about, "Where your treasure is, there shall your heart be also."

Duane: Yeah, and in the church service they said that we love Jesus, so we should be giving more, putting our treasure where our heart is.

Sheila: Exactly. That's what someone said. But that's not what Jesus said.

Jason: What? Yes he did. I have it here. "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

Sheila: Exactly. Not "put your treasure where your heart already is." Rather, "where you put your treasure, your heart will end up."

Duane: Wait, what?

Sheila: Don't you see? It's like Jeremy. He started putting some time in drama club, then adding some of his skills. Next thing you know, his heart is there.

Jason: Ohh. He didn't invest in what he liked. He ended up liking what he invested in.

Sheila: He put his treasure there, and his heart followed.

Emma: *(amused)* Followed? His heart took a nosedive into that club..

Sheila: But you see what I'm talking about, right? Jesus wasn't telling us *where* we *have to* give. He was talking about how to move our hearts.

Duane: That's like my dad. He started investing some time in that Amigos group, and he got some relationships out of it, and a feeling of doing something worthwhile, and ba-da-bing, ba-do-boom, his heart is stuck at church … in a good way.

Jason: And that's Emma with volleyball … and maybe her parents with it. They invest some money, commit some time, start putting their treasure there, and next thing you know, their hearts are there.

Emma: And they dragged my heart along.

Jason: They got you to spend some time, to invest in it, right?

Emma: Yeah … *(with more conviction)* Yes! I invested in it, and my heart followed.

Jason: And your brain.

Emma: All of me. Because my treasure was there.

Sheila: So that's the point, right? Jesus isn't telling us that if we say we love Jesus, we'd better give offerings.

Duane: Oh oh, don't let the stewardship committee hear you talking like that. They'll kick you out of church.

Sheila: Actually, this is good for them. He didn't say we'd better give offerings if we love Jesus. Instead, he was telling us HOW to love Jesus more, how to grow in that relationship, how to get more involved.

Emma: Go on.

Sheila: Invest your treasure. Like Jeremy, like your dad, like Emma. Don't give offerings because you *have t*o because you say you care about Jesus. Instead, give offerings so that you are investing, you are giving your treasure. And your heart will follow.

Duane: Same with time right? Start investing your time, give some time, put that treasure into serving God, into church ministry … and your heart will follow.

Jason: And talents. Invest your talents – whether it is fixing things at church, or helping out as a worship volunteer, or serving on a committee, or whatever. But invest your talent, give that treasure, put that treasure into God's work, and voila. There's your heart, following.

Sheila: That makes our fall stewardship campaign sound better too. Not,

> "If your heart's there, put your treasure there. You gotta give, because you say you love Jesus."
>
> Instead it's,
>
> "Where your treasure is, there your heart will follow. Invest where you want your heart."

Jason: Soo… would that work for us too?

Sheila: What do you mean?

Jason: Tell me, do you want your heart more open to God?

Emma: God loves us no matter what.

Jason: I know. And God is at work helping us. We know that. But we often take that for granted, or disregard it. So … do you want your heart more open to God?

Emma: *(hesitantly)* Yeah.

Duane: For sure.

Sheila: Yes, I would like my heart more open to God. I'd like to grow in that relationship.

Jason: OK, so if we're not just writing some stewardship script, but we're talking about our own lives and faith, one way to do that is to invest, right? To put our treasure there first.

Emma: Agreed.

Duane: Sooo…how should we do that?

Jason: Time – what if we each volunteer for something at church …

Sheila: Every month

Duane: We could be ushers.

Emma: I'm going to help out with coffee hour.

Jason: And Talents – well, we're sort of planning that already.

Duane: I've got some time this summer. I can come to Amigos with my dad and help out.

Sheila: I'm going to see if my mom will volunteer with me to do the altar care.

Jason: And Treasure.

Emma: All of this is our treasure, right?

Jason: OK, Money.

Sheila: Remember Pastor Karen talking about tithing, giving 10%

Duane: Ten percent?

Sheila: Experiment. I'm going to give 10% of what I make in baby sitting to church in offering, for the whole summer. And see what happens to my heart.

Duane: Fine, I'll do that with my lawn mowing money.

Emma: Not a very cheerful giver.

Duane: *(pauses to reflect…)* I guess cause I was thinking about *losing* the money. But it's an *investment*, right? To lead my heart. … OK, I'll invest that mowing money, a tithe for the summer. And remember why I'm doing it.

Jason: I'm in.

Emma: Me too.

Jason: *(pause, then look upward in prayer)* OK God, we're investing. Help us put that treasure, the money, the talents, and our time – help us put that into your work, into a relationship with you … and then bring our hearts along. Because we want our hearts with you.

ALL: Amen

Emma: *(motions to congregation)* Hey, what about *them*?

Jason: What about them?

Emma: Are they going to try that, to invest where they want their hearts?

Jason: I guess we'll find out.

VIGNETTES[3]

Temple Talks can be very effective when speakers share their experiences, and their faith. In my own Lutheran tradition, we don't do very well with that.

There are good resources to help a person develop a temple talk, or help a preacher/leader equip a lay member to share in that way. I will not attempt to do that here. But, I am providing a couple sets of vignettes. Those could be presented as is, as a skit to illustrate some dimensions of stewardship, or of healing. Or, they could provide a framework within which a member might insert their own experiences and faith story. You could use my format, but have your speaker share their own testimony.

The vignettes in the stewardship series are fictional, serving as illustrations and explanations. The vignettes in the healing series also serve as illustrations and explanations, but are based on real people and real experiences. Feel free to share that detail if you feel it is helpful.

Because these vignettes are presented as first person shares, they might be misunderstood by some as being actual testimonials by the speaker. And so, you might provide a note in your bulletin or program or projected slide during the vignette. Here is an example of what that might look like:

> "Do you know what stewardship is? It might be bigger than you realize. We are sharing a series of vignettes, one each week, as a character speaks to us about an aspect of stewardship. This week's character is *Thomas*, who will speak to us about *Stewardship of Abilities and Passions*."

Although these vignettes might be presented together as a sermon, I think they might be better spread out. The healing vignettes might independently serve as a sermon illustration, or might be a series of shorter meditations for

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a congregational healing service or evening prayer time. The stewardship vignettes would work well as temple talks or announcements during a stewardship focus, as part of a traditional fall stewardship drive, or as a reminder some other time.

Vignettes about Stewardship

Theme and Purpose

Although this portfolio of four vignettes might be presented as one sermon on stewardship, with characters appearing in sequence, I have written it so that the vignettes might be presented one-at-a-time on successive Sundays, as a temple talk or part of some four-week stewardship focus.

The word "stewardship" has become a loaded and misunderstood word in the church even as it has been used regularly (and often more correctly) in secular media. This series seeks to reclaim this aspect of faith.

Stewardship is not fundraising. It is not a synonym for finances. It can inform those, but at its heart, it is about a relationship … and faith. Not owner, but steward. Not mine, but God's, which I get to manage.

Characters

- 1 – Thomas, Stewardship of abilities and passions
- 2 – Jennifer, Stewardship of money
- 3 – Betty, Stewardship of time
- 4 – Donny, Stewardship of environment

Each person can read the vignette as an actor sharing an illustration. Or, they might take a vignette that works for their own interests and experience, and make it more of a testimonial, following the flow I have provided and using some of the script, but substituting their own experiences and character to make the "Temple Talk" their own.

If the vignettes will be read as written, you might have the following note in your bulletin or program:

"Do you know what stewardship is? It might be bigger than you realize. We are sharing a series of vignettes, one each week, as a character speaks to us about an aspect of stewardship. This week's character is *Thomas*, who will speak to us about *Stewardship of Abilities and Passions*."

Staging

Whether you do all four in one service, or have four separate events, each speaker can simply come to a microphone and talk. To make them more real and approachable, you may want to use a music stand and mic rather than have them speaking from the more formal pulpit or lectern.

Vignette 1 – Abilities and Passions

Hi, my name is Thomas. I may not be a star on Top Chef, but I am somewhat of a star in my community. But more than that, I'm a good steward.

You see, stewardship is about managing something that belongs to another. I believe that what I have is gifted, entrusted, to me from God. And I steward it, on God's behalf.

So many people think about stewardship as just about money. It's so much more.

Then again … others make it seem like an either-or.

> "If you don't want to give money, donate your time instead."

But … ***all*** that I have, all of me, belongs to God. My sister makes a lot more money than me, and is a major giver to our budget, but I get to give also. Not as much as her, but it's still important to me, and to the church.

Stewardship ***is*** about money, but so much more. And God has given me more. Abilities, and passions, blessed to be a blessing.

I'm a good cook. I started by helping my mom, and learning from her. Then I started helping to organize and cook for family dinners, and parties for my nieces and nephews. Then I started doing more, helping with congregational dinners and joining with some others who have that gift of hospitality. And then … (when God entrusts gifts to you, you're supposed to share them) … and then we started doing community dinners.

We cook up and serve a community meal once a week, and we've talked about expanding that. We try to make it special, not just a hand-out but a dinner experience. There are a bunch of people who come because they need the food. But it's nice to also have community, where people gather and converse, and I think some of the people are coming just for that.

You know, Jesus provided food. When he fed the people in the wilderness, he didn't check about who was qualified, who deserved it, or needed it. He shared God's gifts. That's what I get to do. Share God's gifts.

And so … I am a steward. Well, I guess we're all stewards. But what kind of steward? I want to be a *good* steward. God has blessed me. I have abilities and passions that God has given to me, entrusted to me … and I am doing my best to use them on God's behalf, as a wise manager. That's Christian stewardship.

How has God blessed you? What has God entrusted to you? I guarantee there are abilities, and passions, which God has entrusted to you which can be used to bless others. How will you manage that, how will you practice good stewardship? It's actually kind of fun … to be part of God's team … to use what we have for God's glory.

So join me, in this adventure of stewardship.

Vignette 2 – Money

Hi, my name is Jennifer. And, in the eyes of the world around us, I've been pretty successful. I've got a good job, my family lives in a nice house, my children are getting a great education. Hashtag BLESSED. Which is why it's so important for me to be a good steward.

Being a steward is about managing something on behalf of someone else. Christian stewardship is about managing what belongs to God. Managing my time, my abilities and passions, my relationships, and yes, my finances.

Being a good steward, especially with my money, is important to me for a couple reasons.

First, for my sake. It's so easy for my "success" to go to my head. For me to start congratulating myself, and trying to build up my empire. I need a bigger house, a nicer car, a better role in my church. To build up my immune system against that attitude, I give, significantly, to keep reminding myself, to remember my place, to back off from my big deal, to keep putting God first.

So, I'm also being a good steward for God's sake. God has blessed me, with financial talents, and abilities in my job. Recognizing God as the giver helps me use what I have on God's behalf. I get to be part of what God is doing. I get to help support God's work. And much of that is through my church.

And so, I'm also being a good steward for my church's sake. Or rather, for the sake of God's mission in and through our church.

It's weird how that has developed.

At first, I saw offerings as some participation fee, and pledging as some membership fee. And, if you're like me, you look for discounts. What's the cheapest deal? What do I gotta give?

As I started getting involved in what the church was doing, and seeing how those offerings paid for programs, funded our facilities, provided for staffing, and allowed us to reach into our community, well, I started seeing it differently. I get to be part of that.

I'm a steward of time, volunteering monthly with a worship leadership role.

I'm a steward of my abilities and passions, helping to lead a financial planning workshop for my church and community each year.

And I'm a steward of my money … or rather, God's money. I'm caring for my family – it would be irresponsible not to do that. But I'm finding more and more ways to help out my church, with pledged giving (not a membership fee, but planning for God's mission) and also supporting some of those special appeals which help out people in need.

And as I've grown in giving, I've adjusted around that, and … this might sound silly but … the more I give, the more excited I get about being part of what God is doing through us.

And so … I am a steward. Well, I guess we're all stewards. But what kind of steward? I want to be a ***good*** steward. God has blessed me, God has entrusted what I have to me … and I am doing my best to use that on God's behalf, as a wise manager. That's Christian stewardship.

How has God blessed you? What has God entrusted to you? You might not have my income, or you might have more, but just like me, you have an ability to give. How will you manage that, how will you practice good stewardship? It's actually kind of fun … to be part of God's team … to use what we have for God's glory.

So join me, in this adventure of stewardship.

Vignette 3 – Time

Hi, my name is Betty. I'm involved in a number of the ministries at our church. I may not be leading them, but I make a difference. I'm a good steward.

Being a steward is about managing something on behalf of someone else. Christian stewardship is about managing what belongs to God.

People always think about money, and yes, that's part of it. I'm intentional about my offerings. I plan ahead, so I can do what my church calls "first fruits giving," giving from the top rather than just giving what I have left over at the end of the month.

But, it turns out I have a lot more time to give than money. And in a world where time is so important, that's a pretty cool thing to be able to share.

I've been retired for a couple years now. But even before that, I found ways to share my time.

As a young parent, I was kind of overwhelmed with caring for my kids. It seemed like I had no time to spare. But, we had a guest preacher at our church who talked about stewardship, about managing what God has provided. And she talked about time, and relationships. And I decided that I was going to try to use my time, and my relationships, for God.

When we'd have a program for parents and kids at church, I tried to volunteer, and to be involved. A couple of us parents got together and did that – we'd take turns with one watching the kids while the others worked on setting up, or serving. And as our kids got older, they started helping. And we reminded them why we were doing it – we are doing this as stewards. Christian stewards. We taught our kids about using the time and relationships God has given us, using them for God.

As I got older, the kids went off to school and to their own careers. Once we got through celebrating and then repurposing their rooms … ok, we did cry a couple times and miss them … and then celebrated and repurposed their rooms … after that, we had a bit more time. Some of us were pretty busy at work, but we took some of that time we'd used for our children and we *repurposed* that. We helped younger parents, and our kids' ministries. We helped with some fellowship projects. We got involved in community outreach. We knew the value of time, and we started using it in more ways … using it on behalf of God. Using it as a good steward.

As some of us retired, we discovered we had more to give. Not tons more. It's only right for us to use some time for family, for visits and organizing vacations and things like that. We use time for recreation – not WRECK-reation, but RE-creation, to stay sharp. That's being a good steward, providing for family, caring for selves. That's God's work. But … we also get

to use some of that time at church, to help out our members, and our ministries, and to help reach out to others. I get to be part of that.

And so … I am a steward. Well, I guess we're all stewards. But what kind of steward? I want to be a *good* steward. God has blessed me, God has entrusted me with time, and with relationships, … and I am doing my best to use those on God's behalf, as a wise manager. That's Christian stewardship.

How has God blessed you? What has God entrusted to you? You might be tight on time, like I was as a young parent, or have more of it like I do now, but you do have time to share. How will you manage that, how will you practice good stewardship? It's actually kind of fun … to be part of God's team … to use what we have for God's glory.

So join me, in this adventure of stewardship.

Vignette 4 – Environment

Hi, my name is Danny. I'm pretty new to my church, but I've found a place here. And I found out something else. I'm being a good steward. And growing in that.

You see, I got pretty concerned about our environment in high school and college. I had a science major, but you didn't have to work in the sciences to know that the climate has been changing, and there are things we humans are doing that are making that a lot worse. Forget the political stuff. I'm concerned about the science, which is really clear, and the impacts, which are getting scary. More inconsistent weather, with extreme dry, or extreme wet, causing flooding or worse fires. More impact on crops. Bigger danger for hurricanes. Rising sea levels. And add to that countries where the farming ground is starting to dry up, creating climate refugees.

That may not be a big deal for someone 70 or 80, but for someone who is 20 or 30, our world is going to change. Big time.

So, I've been trying to see what I can do, to care for the environment for myself, and for the people who come after me.

I remember when I was a kid, I was out with my grandfather as he was planting some apple trees. He was old, really old, and I asked him, "Grandpa, why would you want to plant a tree?" I didn't realize it was a bit

rude, but he knew what I was asking. He said, "You mean, I might not be around to eat the fruit?" I nodded. He answered, "See those old apple trees over there. My grandpa planted them, so we could have apples. Those trees are about done. And see those pear trees over there? My mom, your great grandma, planted those. She didn't get to eat any pears, but she knew we would. We don't just care for ourselves. We care for the next generation. None of us is here alone."

That made sense to me. And then my church helped me see how all of this is part of my faith, and a way to respond to God. God gave us this awesome world, the whole creation, not for me, or for you, but for all of us … to enjoy, and to care for so the next generation gets it too. If we just waste or pollute it, we're being selfish, and we're not being good stewards – good managers – of what God has given us.

Most people think of stewardship as just about money. But it's about all that God has entrusted to us. My finances … and I'm starting to give in an intentional way to our church mission. My time … and I'm finding ways to use that with our church ministry, and with my work for the environment. My abilities and passions … I think I'm wired for using those to help others. And my world … and I want to be a good steward of creation, and to help others to do that.

I'm doing some advocacy. I'm looking at my own habits and energy use, and trying to be more responsible. I'm volunteering with a group that works on the local trails – that's a way to be a good steward, and help others get out and enjoy God's amazing creation. Stewardship is actually fun.

How are you being a steward? Not just for yourself. How have others been part of God's blessing to you, and how can you be a steward in a way that provides for the next generation? … that keeps the wonders and beauty and health of God's world awesome for those who will follow us?

It's actually kind of fun … to be part of God's team … to celebrate God's blessings and manage them for the future.

So join me, in this adventure of stewardship.