

Zebedee Commitment: A study for Personal Stewardship Growth

Lesson Two: Stewardship of Relationships

All that we have is a gift of God! That is the basic assertion of this series of Bible Studies. James and John, the sons of Zebedee, were called into relationship with Jesus as they left their nets and their father to become disciples. They modeled a willingness to change and to grow as a part of our call to faith. Therefore faithful stewardship is a call to reach towards faithful change/growth in our lives and in our relationships.

Is Change a four letter word?

Change is an experience common to all living things. In some instances, we may seek change by adopting new attitudes and behaviors, or by making decisions that lead us in new directions. Choosing to make positive changes in our lives can be an empowering experience.

But we don't always have a choice about change, and this can be a scary prospect. When we are satisfied with things as they are, we're not sure that we want any change, even if it helps us to grow. We may resist change, especially when it affects our personal relationships. (1)

But nothing in life stands still. To live is to be in the process of change. To manage that change in a way that seeks positive and faithful results is a part of caring for the gifts that God has given us. As Christians we are called to continue to grow in our relationship to God. This is growth is change. To grow in our relationship to God is to open and give ourselves more fully to God in much the same way that James and John gave themselves to Jesus.

Share with a partner a change in your life that seemed at first negative but turned out to be a positive, life-giving opportunity. How did you feel about the change at the time? Afterward?

The following is a quote from Ronald E. Vallet:

Sometimes a Christian may rejoice in an experience with God that took place in the past, perhaps years or even decades before. That is good, if the rejoicing does not prevent that person from anticipating and seeking new experiences with God. One of the necessary marks of a Christian Steward and of a church that is a faithful steward is a willingness to grow and to change. Our faith is to be dynamic, not static, because the journey of a Christian steward never reaches an end.....inevitably, the church will include people who are at different steps in their journey. This diversity is part of the rich texture of the church. (2)

How would you describe your present stage of the journey? Can you see growth from where you were five years ago? Where would you like to be five or ten years from now?

Possibilities and Images

Very often to grow in our relationship to God is to change our understanding of God or of ourselves as a part of God's world.

Genesis 1:26 says that human beings were created in the image of God. The theological concept for this is "*Imago Dei*" –Image of God. The meaning of this phrase has been explored over many centuries. The following definitions have been offered.

We are in the image of God because we:

- ...look like God.
- ...have a consciousness to be able to think and perceive ourselves in and of the world.
- ...have a conscience to know right from wrong.
- ...have been given dominion—have care-taking responsibility over creation
- ...are called into relationship with God and with one another. (3)

Which of the above definitions seem best to you? Which of them offer insight into our understanding of faithful stewardship?

Family Systems Theory says that to be human *IS* to be in relationship. It is not possible to be human on one's own because the human condition is one in which we know ourselves in relationship to others. There are many different types of relationships: With God, with a spouse, with our families (parents, siblings, offspring, etc.), and with friends and neighbors. To care for our relationships is an important part of caring for the gifts that God has given us. That means to reach towards God and to grow in our ability to connect with others in a life-giving and positive way.

How does this concept of humanity speak to our need for healthy connection with others as a part of our faith walk?

Our relationship with God allows us to consider who we are. Compare **Psalm 8: 3-5** with **1 Peter 2: 9-10**. These passages describe two different ways that we see our relationship with God. Each contributes to our self-understanding as God's stewards. This way of thinking about who we are in our relationship to God is reflected in Marjorie Thompson's question "*Is God a lover blinded by grief, calling out through the ache of our hunger—calling us to come home and be nourished with real life once again?*" (4)

The scriptures and Thompson's question asks us to consider ourselves as important relational partners with God. This assertion says that we have something very important and needful to contribute to the relationship. We are not simply the benefactors of God's love. We also contribute to the relationship! How does that change our way of thinking about our relationship with our God?

How does it affect the following statement: **“I am a steward. Ultimately, God owns me, and all that I am. God needs me. I am accountable to God for how I use my being and my life. As I grow in my ability to walk with God, I also grow in happiness and joy.”**

How does this change how we live? How would it change our world if all Christians lived this attitude?

Think about the way that you participate in your relationship with God. Relationships take time and intention. James and John spent many hours with Jesus, as well as time in prayer. How do you do that? What changes might be appropriate to live out your faithful stewardship? Share with a partner how you participate in your relationship with God.

Toward a Devotional Life in Relationship with God

In earlier centuries, Christians prized contemplation. Tradition has it that Martin Luther once commented, “I have a very busy day. I must allow an extra hour for prayer.” (5) Time alone with God in prayer and other devotional disciplines under gird and empower our active daily lives of relationship with God. Many Christians seek an essential balance between their devotional life and their active ministry in the world.

1. Tell about your richest experience with prayer.
2. Recall that moment when you felt closest to God. Where was it? What made it special?
3. Tell about a time when a passage from scripture gave you particular insight or comfort.

Making Changes to Care for our Physical and Emotional Spiritual Health

Part of being a faithful steward of what God has given us is to care for our own bodies as the “temple of the Holy Spirit within us” (1 Cor. 6:19). To be about the business of entering into relationships (with God or others) and taking on the tasks to which God calls us, we must care for our physical, emotional and spiritual health. We are a connection of all three dimensions. It is almost impossible to be ill in one dimension and perfectly OK in the others. To feel overwhelming sadness affects our body’s ability to eat, sleep and fight off infections. To be physically ill affects our outlook on the world. To lose connection with God is to lose the ability to see things positively.

Below are several words that describe mental and spiritual wellness. Which words best describe your ideal state?

Peaceful

Hopeful

Serene

Lively

Outgoing

Content

Anticipating	Accepting	Loving
Honest	Realistic	Questioning
Dreaming	Desiring	Searching
Striving	Sacrificing	Joyful (6)

What other words could be added to represent a desired way of being? Do you believe that God desires these things for you?

If caring for our health is an issue of faithful stewardship, then it is a part of our commitment to God to do our best to live in healthful ways. Look over the following list. Give yourself a rating on a scale of 1-5 according to how you are doing in these areas. (5 means this is a significant problem and 1 means No problem at all.)

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| _____ Eat a diet rich in vegetables & fruit. | _____ Eat a diet low in fats and sugar. |
| _____ Eat moderate portions. | _____ Quit smoking |
| _____ Do not use alcohol excessively | _____ Get sufficient sleep |
| _____ Exercise regularly | _____ Spend time with family |
| _____ Get regular physical Exams | _____ Keep Stress in check |
| _____ Develop a more positive attitude | _____ Allow “quality time for self |
| _____ Spend quiet or meditative time with God | |

A Covenant

Growth in stewardship means change, change in habits and in the way we open ourselves to a relationship with God. That change can feel awkward or risky. God walks with us, though, and helps us along the way. You are invited to commit to one or two behaviors that will help you to be a healthier person in your relationships with God and others. Some of your options might be to eat breakfast, walk each day, cut out sugary drinks or spend more time with your children or spouse.

In addition you are invited to take seriously the stewardship of your spiritual life by opening yourself to the relationship with God that is God's call to you. You might decide to spend time each day with the Bible, to sit quietly for 10 minutes each day in prayer, to sing a hymn as you drive to work, to take multiple breaks in your day to consider where God is in your world right at that moment.

Share with a partner your commitment in these two areas. Discuss how you will assist one another to follow through as you work on your relationship as disciples of Jesus together.

Pray: Dear God. Thank you for giving to me my body and my mind and most of all my relationship with you and with others. Help me to take good care of these important gifts and to lift myself to you in order to be the person you call me to be. Amen.

End Notes – Lesson Two: Stewardship of Health and Relationships

1. Stewardship Education: Congregational Ministries Division of the Presbyterian Church, USA. "Covenants of Stewardship," Session Two. Page 7.
2. Ronald E. Vallet. Stepping Stones of the Steward. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), Pages 154-155.
3. Daniel L. Migliore. Faith Seeking Understanding. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), Pages 121-122.
4. Marjorie J. Thompson. Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995) Page 12.
5. Stewardship Education: Congregational Ministries Division of the Presbyterian Church, USA. "Covenants of Stewardship," Session Two. Page 10.
6. Ibid, Page 9.