

With a Grateful Heart

A STEWARDSHIP VIDEO

Discussion Guide

Coordinates with a study of
the biblical stewardship principles in

1 CHRONICLES 29

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The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
Board of Congregational Services
Department of Stewardship Ministry

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FOR A COMPLETE STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

If your congregation desires to conduct a full six-week stewardship program with a Stewardship Sunday and a Commitment Sunday, examine "Serving the Living Lord," from Concordia Publishing House, 1-800-325-3040, item #S21818.

"Serving the Living Lord" is designed to use this video as part of a full congregational stewardship program. The video becomes a key component in a congregational dinner meeting.

"Serving the Living Lord" comes as a 144-page manual. The manual contains everything you need to mobilize your congregation for a six-week stewardship emphasis. The program introduces stewardship concepts from 1 Chronicles 29 and from examples of other key biblical stewards.

And, since you already own this video, the manual becomes an inexpensive addition at \$24.95.

The manual comes as a shrink-wrapped loose-leaf package, ready to insert into a vinyl pocket one-inch binder you purchase locally. All the forms and instructions, Bible studies and publicity are included, ready to duplicate or adapt for your local use. There are only two consumable options you may wish to purchase. Grateful Heart bookmarks (one is included in this video package) and a creative, self-contained financial worksheet and pledge form.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE VIDEO

This video models for us a family that, in some ways, seems too good to be true. Yet, if we are to be real stewards of all that God gives, our behavior will model the biblical ideal.

In 1 Chronicles 29, King David modeled for his people God's desired response. Even though he would not get to build God's temple, David did not withhold his gifts, but recalled God's blessings in his personal life and in the life of Israel and responded generously.

Some may accuse David of being too optimistic to think that his example would challenge and encourage others. But those who think this way miss the point. David's gift was not a public show to encourage other gifts, but a personal expression of thanks to God for what God had done in David's life.

In the same way, family members in the video are not trying to "covert" others to a stewardship lifestyle, but are sincerely responding personally to God's grace and generosity in their lives. Beginning with 1 Chronicles 29, they model practical, personal examples of David's stewardship response.

Likewise, your stewardship response in this congregation has nothing to do with others, but everything to do with your own personal relationship to God. If you have any desire to

respond to God with gifts of money, time and effort, then it is Christ's death and resurrection that motivates your response and empowers you to live the new life (Romans 6:3-4).

Living the stewardship lifestyle is not an obligation, but a privilege.

And, like David, your response can serve as a model of Christian stewardship.

After watching and discussing this video, you will be asked to commit to live and model the new life in Christ—a commitment you will only be able to make in relation to how you view what God has done for you.

Watch closely as the story unfolds....

Also, 1 Chronicles 21:18-26.

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SCENE ONE: THE DEVOTION GOD IS OWNER, PROVIDER, SAVIOR

Remember your last move? What kinds of stress were there? Yet, here we see a family maintaining their custom of family devotions. How could they possibly take time for devotions on such a hectic day?

- What did the devotion time accomplish?

Stewardship is defined as “managing all of life and life’s resources...”

- How does the devotion exhibit “management” in the Ward family?
- How could a daily pause like this help you manage?

Joy (mom): *Your dad was promoted. ...If all you think about is what you’re giving up, then you’ll miss out on all the Lord’s blessings.*

Blessings sometimes cause us trouble. Someone given ordinary (or extraordinary) wealth has responsibility for the use of that wealth. It is the same with talents and abilities, spiritual gifts or time.

- In what are you rich?
- Share a time when you received a blessing that you didn’t manage very well.

Stu: *God knew how to gather the resources and see that [the temple] was built right.*

God provided the Israelites with all that was needed to build the temple. Imagine what would have happened if what God provided for the temple would have been diverted for personal use by David or others! God continues to provide every congregation with all the resources it needs to fulfill its mission (Proverbs 20:24; Matthew 6:8; 1 Corinthians 1:4-7; 2 Corinthians 9:11).

- What happens if certain people choose not to provide their resources to the congregation?
- How do you think the Lord views a person who is a member of the congregation but retains resources exclusively for personal use?

See Luke 12:15-21. By Jewish custom the rich man had a responsibility to his community to share his wealth with the poor and needy. Jesus’ hearers would have been justifiably outraged at the behavior of the rich man in building new barns. He literally insulted his community by being so greedy as to lavish his wealth only on himself. He did not use his wealth for what God gave it.

- In what ways can the church community helpfully respond when it sees one of its members selfishly misusing a blessing of God?

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GOD IS OWNER

Joy: *Look at all these boxes. They're really filled with the blessings we have from the Lord. ...Think of all the riches we have right at our fingertips.*

The steward's life is the Christian life. We are new people in Christ, Spirit-driven. We look at life with spiritual eyes and see God's grace and blessing everywhere (1 Corinthians 2:14-15; Philippians 1:9-10).

- The world looks at us as "commonly wealthy." How can our riches cloud our spiritual vision when it comes to recognizing God's blessings all around us?

Stu: *Instead of focusing on what you're giving up, focus on what God is giving you.*

God is "able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine" (Ephesians 3:20). In the feeding of the 5,000, the food was multiplied as it was given away (Mark 6:41-44).

- Comment on this statement: "Giving does not deplete what you have, it gives God the opportunity to give more."

Stu: *[1 Chronicles 29:14] But who am I...to be able to give as generously as this?*

Solicit members of the congregation who can give a personal witness and testimony to how God's generosity to them has allowed them to be especially generous in support of the church.

Soon after the famous and wealthy John D. Rockefeller died, a newspaper reporter asked one of the lawyers handling the estate, "How much did he leave behind?" "All of it," was the lawyer's reply.

A similar expression can be found in Ecclesiastes 2:4-11, 18-19. Everything we have is left behind at death, even our bodies. Nothing speaks louder of God's ownership. God claims even the ground we walk on and, as such, He forbid its permanent sale in early Israel (Leviticus 25:23).

Short stories in tract form are available to illustrate this concept. Tracts such as "Just a Rake" (S11820), "Whose Is This?" (S11978), "Honeybee" (S21806) or "As Bad as New" (S21810) can be ordered from Concordia Publishing House, 1-800-325-3040. A sample of each tract has been included with this guide.

- If God owns *everything*, where does that leave us as we take pride in our health, wealth, success in life, our possessions...and so on?
- We can be forced to give it all back to God at our death (as a result of the Law and sin) or we can choose to freely share what God provides while we live (motivated by the Gospel). Why is sharing it while we live better?

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GOD IS PROVIDER

The most well-known passage on this theme is probably Matthew 6:25-34. Many who hear this promise of God do not take the words seriously.

- How is verse 33 the key to fulfillment of this promise?
- What does 6:21 have to do with where we place our trust?

Read Acts 4:34-35; 2:44-45; Romans 12:13; 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, 25-26; 2 Corinthians 8:13-15; 1 Timothy 5:3-4, 8.

- What is the role of the individual believer and the congregation together in fulfilling God's promise?

If possible, locate a copy of the poem "Footprints" to read. Then read Psalm 23:4.

- Give examples of how being on a personal journey with the Lord includes both the "peaks" and the "valleys."

GOD IS SAVIOR

Locate and sing (or read the lyrics of) the song by Christian song-writer Don Wharton, "Two Times You're Mine." It's a ballad about a boat built and sailed by a little boy. The boat drifts away in a creek and is lost. Another person finds the boat and places it in a store window. The boy sees his boat and works to save the money to buy it back. The chorus

says: "Mine, you're mine, two times you're mine—once because I made you, once because I bought you."

Joy: *God paid for our sins with the blood of Jesus. He bought us. He owns us twice over.*
Stu: *He owns us, first, because he made us. Then he bought us with the death of Jesus. He's twice our owner.*

Read Romans 6:3-4; 8:32; Ephesians 2:8-10.

- Why should we trust God? How do we know we can freely give anything we have into His service and not suffer the loss? What arguments are there that justify holding back anything we have from God?

Read John 10:10. A life of abundant blessing is ours both here on earth and in eternity through Christ.

- If this is God's plan, then why do we experience personal shortages? (See Romans 7:21-23)

Stu: *Our lives are going to change. So how do we respond?*

The answers given:

- Keep on trusting Him.
- Keep on serving Him.

And we do both with a grateful heart!

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SCENE TWO: WE RESPOND

(The Stewardship Committee meeting)

Often race horses that break a leg are destroyed. It seems that the new church the Wards have joined has more than a leg broken. One might ask, why is this congregation even in existence? Just look at the stewardship committee meeting again:

Earl: *Let's get this over with.*

- What is causing Earl to consider the Lord's work drudgery?

Norma: *I brought brownies and napkins.*

- How is Norma "majoring in minors?" (Recall Jesus' statement in Luke 10:41-42)

Recall Earl's prayer:

Earl: *It's that time of year again when people need to figure out what they can afford to give...to meet our budget, even though we've failed six years in a row....*

- How is serving the Lord leftovers a sign of disrespect?
- (See Genesis 4:3-5; Hebrews 11:4; 1 John 3:12) What happened when Cain brought "leftovers without faith" to God?
- What was the purpose for giving according to Earl? What is the purpose of giving in our congregation?

Recall the committee's motivational technique:

Earl: *You think you could twist a few arms?*

- List what you would consider some "arm twisting" techniques.
- Why was Stu shocked by the Stewardship Committee's discussion? In what ways was Stu's motivation completely different from the committee's?
- How would you describe the motivation for giving in the past in your congregation? How would you like to see it change?

Earl and the committee are still skeptical. They don't believe Stu can really design a properly motivated stewardship emphasis—at least not in their congregation!

Read 2 Corinthians 9:7, the basis for Stu's parting comment:

Stu: *If we can help people grow in their understanding of God's grace, they'll be motivated by gratitude... [I believe that] with all my grateful heart.*

God's grace... What does that mean? To the Jews of Jesus' time grace was understood as "an unexpected gift from the king, free with no strings attached."

- What "unexpected gifts" have you received from God?
- How have you expressed your gratefulness?

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SCENE THREE: WE SERVE

(Stu and Bob on the car lot)

Stu: *I was wondering if you could help spread the message that...good stewardship...means serving the Lord as much as it means giving money.*

The business phrase “time is money” works in the church, too. Time invested in the work of the church means the church may not have to hire people to do certain jobs. Volunteer hours are and always will be necessary in many areas for the church to carry out its mission. The children’s song “We Are the Church” says “The church is not a building...the church is the people.” The church, by description in the Bible, is participation-oriented.

But the concept goes much deeper than just “volunteering.” It has to do with the understanding of exactly who you are in the church.

Read Romans 12:5-8 (echoed and amplified also in 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-16)

- How many parts of the human body can shut down before the body is in trouble? How many parts of the Body of Christ that is our congregation can shut down before we’re in trouble?

A Christian young person, pondering the world’s difficulties of sickness, war and famine, among other things, observed, “Maybe the person God sent to solve all these problems was aborted.”

- Consider that God has graced you with a chosen gift, talent or ability to be a functioning part of Christ’s body. What happens if you choose not to function?

Stu: *Time spent at the church has tremendous value.*

Bob: *Been there—done that. It’s a waste of time.* Some have been taken advantage of in the church. It’s like moving burned out light bulbs from one fixture to another. People who are tired of serving move from one leadership position to another, from membership on one board or committee to another, from one congregational office to another. Recall the meeting of the stewardship committee when they planned to elect the same stewardship drive chairman for the fifteenth year in a row!

Just as in the body, overworked parts can’t substitute for non-functioning parts for very long.

- What can we change in our congregation so that those who serve don’t get overworked and burned out?

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Bob: *[Responds with a nervous look at Stu because he's one of those who "hasn't given a dime in years."]*

Stu: *Every time you volunteer to help with communion or sing in the choir you're doing stewardship.*

- Is Stu "letting Bob off easy" and dismissing the money issue? Does Stu give Bob a false sense of being a "good steward?" What's wrong with this picture? What's right?
- Does "good stewardship" cover only one or two aspects of managing God's gifts, or must it include all?

Read Ephesians 4:22-24.

- What does this passage say about being patient as people grow in Christ? What "measures" does it set?

SCENE FOUR: WE RESPOND JOYFULLY

(The girls get paid for their work)

Amber: *First I fill my church envelope, then I put some in the bank, and the rest is for spring break.*

- How was Amber's response to what she would do with her money very different from the answers her friends gave?

Mrs. Michaels: *[Wondering about her joyful attitude] Do you really like to divide your money like that?*

Amber: *The more I think about what the Lord has done for me, the more I want to give something back.*

Read 1 Corinthians 2:13-15.

- What spiritual insight does Amber have that allows her to make a decision that seems foolish to the other girls?
- How do 1 John 3:16-18 and 4:10-12 further explain Amber's decision?
- How does Amber's example speak to you?

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SCENE FIVE: WE RESPOND WILLINGLY

(At the batting cages)

Auggie: *This is for church.*

Skip: *It's still your money....*

Auggie: *No.*

In both the Old and New Testament the words "sanctified" and "holy" mean "set apart for God's use." Auggie's act of setting aside the three dollars is exactly what defines "holy." His commitment of that money for God could not be compromised.

- Share a time when you willingly set aside something for God. When it was finally used in service to God, how did you feel?
- What can you point to within the congregation and say "This is a result of something I set aside for the Lord's work"?

Skip: *But it's a lousy three bucks!*

Auggie: *It isn't what we give but why we give.*

Read Exodus 35:29. This was at the occasion of the gathering of gifts for the *tabernacle*, which preceded the temple. Then read 2 Corinthians 8:12.

- What do these two passages tell us about our giving attitude over against the amount of the gift?

Recall the discussion previously of Cain and Able. This, too had to do with attitude, or the spirit in which the gift is given. (See also Matthew 5:23-24)

- In what ways can people give for the wrong reasons?
- How can the church, by its actions, give the impression that quantity is more important than attitude when it comes to giving? What can be done about that?

Skip: *[Your dad] wants you to throw away your last three bucks.*

Auggie: *It's not my last three bucks, it's my first three bucks.*

Skip is having a hard time following Auggie's logic. He's not understanding because he isn't one who is led by the Spirit.

- What is Auggie trying to tell Skip?

Read Exodus 23:16, 19; Leviticus 23:10; Deuteronomy 18:4; Proverbs 3:9.

- Explain what is meant by "first fruit giving."
- What does setting aside God's portion first indicate? (See Deuteronomy 26:17)

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SCENE SIX: CHALLENGED TO CHANGE AND GROW

(Joy and Norma meet while shopping)

The Ward family has stood firm in their witness to church members, friends and neighbors about how they manage the gifts God gives them. Whether a household is traditional, single, a couple, blended, multi-generational, divorced mother or father with children, or whatever, God calls us to be managers of all His blessings inside and outside of the church. To do less makes life a struggle and give a poor witness to the joy of Christian living.

Making just *one change* in the way you manage life for God's purposes can open up new avenues of blessing (God uses the phrase "floodgates of heaven" in Malachi 3:10) in your life.

A tourist crossing over into Mexico for the first time saw dozens of begging children asking for only a nickel. "You give one of them a nickel and you'll have dozens following you all day," said someone who had been across the border many times. The tourist gave no coins to any children. But when he returned home he heard a report on the annual per family income in Mexico. He realized that the day he had crossed the border he had as much in his pocket for a one day shopping spree as the typical family earned in a year.

- What change in the way he managed his resources might the tourist have made after this realization?

Norma: *Next month is my annual cruise to the Bahamas. ...I'm rethinking what's important in my life and what I do with God's blessings. God's money could be put to better use this year.*

Read 1 Timothy 6:17-19 and Luke 12:21.

- Whether Norma had read these passages or not, how was she beginning to live out their directives?
- Comment on whether or not you think making this change was hard for Norma.
- How hard would it be for you to make a significant increase in your financial and/or time commitment to the church?

Break into household groups and challenge one another privately (or consider individually) how much more you might be *able* to commit to the Lord's work over the next year, or two, or three. Consider the relationship of what you are *able* to commit to what you are *willing* to commit. Write nothing down—make no final decisions. Then re-assemble as a group.

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SCENE SEVEN: CHANGED HEARTS

In a model prison in Central America there is a life-size crucifix standing in the middle of what was called the “hell cell” where, in times past, prisoners were tortured. When you ask any one of the now-Christian prisoners about that cell they will say “That crucifix reminds me that He’s doing my time.”

Be of good cheer—God is not a tither. That’s good news. Salvation is yours because of a 100% commitment of Christ to go to the cross for you. He “did your time.”

Earl: *[Stewardship] starts by understanding who we are in God’s eyes.*

Read Galatians 3:26-29.

- List who you are in God’s eyes.

Bob: *We can’t just tell the congregation to be good stewards, we need to show people...and encourage one another.*

- What demonstration of managing life for God’s purposes can you give?
- How do you make sure that what you do encourages others?
- How is this exactly what King David did in 1 Chronicles 29?

Earl: *I’ve been praying about this....*

David also prayed publicly (1 Chronicles 29:10-19)

- For what do you think Earl is praying now?
- List the things for which David prayed.

Just as David’s collection for the temple was to have far-reaching results, so our stewardship response is not confined to the present. Every current response we make translates into proclaiming the Gospel message within our congregation and outside of our congregation in community. It is possible that if some farmer had not given part of his potato crop to his congregation in 1654 that you would not be a Christian today. Who can say what eternal consequences our gifts of today will have?

We do know what Scripture says, however, in 2 Corinthians 9:12-15—

This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God’s people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

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