# Where Your Treasure Is: Called to Be the Church Stewardship Devotions

These devotions are meant for councils/boards, stewardship committees, or other small groups to use before a meeting. They take between 10 and 15 minutes each. Another option is to group several together for a longer study time.

Written by the Rev. Brenna Baker for *Called to Be the Church: The Journey Stewardship Program.*

[Session 1 | Genesis 1:26‒31: Caretakers of Creation 2](#_Toc162002537)

[Session 2 | Leviticus 19:9‒10: Leftovers 3](#_Toc162002538)

[Session 3 | Psalm 24:1‒2: Everything Is the Lord’s 4](#_Toc162002539)

[Session 4 | Proverbs 3:5‒9 Trust and Honour God 5](#_Toc162002540)

[Session 5 | Matthew 6:19‒21 Hearts and Treasures 6](#_Toc162002541)

[Session 6 | Matthew 20:1‒16: Labourers in the Vineyard 7](#_Toc162002542)

[Session 7 | Matthew 25:14‒29 Parable of the Talents 8](#_Toc162002543)

[Session 8 | 2 Corinthians 9:6‒12 Sowing Bountifully 10](#_Toc162002544)

[Session 9 | 1 Thessalonians 5:15‒18 Give Thanks Always 11](#_Toc162002545)

[Session 10 | 1 Peter 4:7‒11 Stewards of Manifold Grace 12](#_Toc162002546)



Copyright © 2024 The United Church of Canada/L’Église Unie du Canada. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution Non-commercial Share Alike Licence. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.5/ca>. Any copy must include this notice.

Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are taken from the *New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition*. Copyright © 2021 National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

CRT-48 (2024)

## Session 1 | Genesis 1:26‒31: Caretakers of Creation

Then God said, “Let us make humans in our image, according to our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over the cattle and over all the wild animals of the earthand over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

So God created humansin his image,
 in the image of God he created them;
 male and female he created them.

God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” God said, “See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the air and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

1. From the beginning, our identity as human beings has been rooted in being stewards of Creation. Yet, we’ve struggled with the concept of having “dominion” over it (other translations say “take charge” or “be responsible for”). We remember, though, that we’re created in God’s own image. What kind of a caretaker is God? If we are like God, what kind of stewards should we be?
2. In the other Creation account, we hear that God placed the man in the garden to till and keep it (Gen. 2:15). Have you ever kept a garden? What are some of the joys and challenges?
3. When you think of your community of faith, surrounding neighbourhood, and wider world, what is yours to tend together? What and who are you responsible for? How might you help these aspects of Creation to grow and flourish?

**Prayer:** Creator God, thank you for making us in your image—creative, generous, and caring. Stir in us joy and compassion as we live into our calling as stewards—nurturing your good Creation together. Amen.

## Session 2 | Leviticus 19:9‒10: Leftovers

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not strip your vineyard bare or gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the alien: I am the Lord your God.

1. Leviticus is important because it paints a picture of the kind of community God was creating through Israel. A lot of the laws are strange to us now but might have kept people safe at the time. This one about leaving some of your harvest for the poor and the foreigner is repeated in different ways in both Leviticus and Deuteronomy. What does it suggest about the kind of community God hoped the people Israel would become?
2. Depending on your context, you may have a literal harvest each year, but perhaps it’s not as easy in our modern era for those in need to glean the leftovers. How can we translate this passage to our context today? What harvest do we have to offer our neighbours? Maybe it’s financial, maybe literal food, maybe space, maybe company, maybe our time. How can we share it with them on a regular basis?
3. This would have been a challenging law for the ancient Israelites. They were a small, vulnerable group trying to keep themselves going, and now God was asking them to take care of others? Even across millennia, we might hear their sighs and grumbles. Many congregations today find survival challenging enough before looking at what they can share with others. We can identify with the vulnerability and scarcity mindset the Israelites might have experienced. What about your community of faith? Does it feel difficult or easy to share your resources?

**Prayer:** God of the harvest, help us remember today those who are going hungry. Open our eyes so that we might fully see all that we have to share. Open our hearts so that we might give it freely and generously. Amen.

## Session 3 | Psalm 24:1‒2: Everything Is the Lord’s

The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it,
 the world, and those who live in it,

for he has founded it on the seas
 and established it on the rivers.

1. What are the things that are in the earth? Take a minute to just list all the things that are a part of God’s Creation and belong to God.
2. When you were listing what belongs to God, did you include your wealth? Your homes? Your talents? Your community of faith? Scripture affirms that whatever blessings and resources we have in our life ultimately belong to God. How does that align or not with our culture’s ideas around ownership? What is challenging in the idea that nothing belongs to us but ultimately belongs to God?
3. If we believe our wealth and all that’s in the world belongs to God, how should we be using our resources?

**Prayer:** God to whom everything belongs, when we are tempted to think all we have is of our own doing, call us back and help us to see that everything is yours. Let our worship, service, prayer, and giving reveal the sacred interconnectedness of all things. Amen.

## Session 4 | Proverbs 3:5‒9 Trust and Honour God

Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
 and do not rely on your own insight.
In all your ways acknowledge him,
 and he will make straight your paths.
Do not be wise in your own eyes;
 fear the Lord and turn away from evil.
It will be a healing for your flesh
 and a refreshment for your body.

Honor the Lord with your substance
 and with the first fruits of all your produce….

1. How does your community of faith demonstrate that it trusts in God? When is trust difficult? When can trust be healing as Proverbs suggests?
2. The notion of giving our “first fruits” as a means of honouring God is the spiritual challenge to give back to God first—rather than waiting to make an offering until we see what we have left at the end of the month or year. Traditionally, this idea formed the basis for the practice of tithing or consistently giving a sacrificial amount to the ministries of the church. Think about your own giving practice. Do you give your first (and maybe best) to God? How have your giving practices changed over time, and why?
3. Many folks who are new to our communities of faith ask, “How much should I give?” Based on this text, what might be a faithful response?

**Prayer:** Wise and healing God, move us to see your guidance in all we do—both personally and as a community of faith. Stir in us generosity and gratitude that allows us to give our first and best to your holy purpose in the world. Amen.

## Session 5 | Matthew 6:19‒21 Hearts and Treasures

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

1. Why do you think we store up our treasures on earth, either collectively or individually? Can this be harmful to others or ourselves?
2. Jesus seems to imply that our hearts *follow* our treasures, meaning that if we want to be transformed or care more deeply about something, we should invest in it. Outward actions lead to internal change. If you looked at your community of faith’s budget, what values would emerge? Are these the values you wish to live out? If not, what might you do to invest more in ministries and issues that matter most to you?
3. We know that generosity begets more generosity. Folks are more motivated to give if they perceive the church as generous. In what ways is your community of faith generous? How can you tell that story of generosity? How could giving away your treasure instead of storing it up change the world?

**Prayer:** God, we are your treasure. When we’re tempted to believe in scarcity rather than your abundant love, open our hands to find the freedom in letting go. We pray that we might be clear about the things we truly value and find ways to invest in them. Amen.

## Session 6 | Matthew 20:1‒16: Labourers in the Vineyard

For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius for the day, he sent them into his vineyard. When he went out about nine o’clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and he said to them, “You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.” So they went. When he went out again about noon and about three o’clock, he did the same. And about five o’clock he went out and found others standing around, and he said to them, “Why are you standing here idle all day?” They said to him, “Because no one has hired us.” He said to them, “You also go into the vineyard.” When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, “Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.” When those hired about five o’clock came, each of them received a denarius. Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received a denarius. And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, saying, “These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.” But he replied to one of them, “Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous? So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

1. This parable reminds us that God is very often *un*fair, meaning we don’t get what we deserve or what we’ve worked for, but we get so much more. God also gives the same to those we think are undeserving, the people who annoy us, even our enemies. How does this make you feel? How would you feel if you were one of the early workers?
2. Can you recall a time when you were like the workers hired last? A time when someone was generous to you and perhaps gave you more than you were “owed”? How did that feel?
3. How might your community of faith take on the role of the landowner? How can you share generously with your neighbours—not based on merit or who is deserving—but simply out of love?

**Prayer:** Dear God of surprising and unfair grace, thank you for always giving us so much more than we deserve or could earn. Help us build communities where love is freely shared and given, not out of merit but because we all belong to you. Amen.

## Session 7 | Matthew 25:14‒29 Parable of the Talents

For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. At once the one who had received the five talents went off and traded with them and made five more talents. In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.

After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, “Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.” His master said to him, “Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things; I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.” And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, “Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.” His master said to him, “Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things; I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.” Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, “Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you did not scatter,so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.”

But his master replied, “You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I did not scatter? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance, but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away.”

1. What surprises you about this parable that Jesus tells? When you think of your personal approach to finances, is there a character in the story with whom you most identify? What about your community of faith? How does your collective approach to finances mirror the parable or not?
2. Kennon L. Callahan, in *Giving and Stewardship in an Effective Church,* says this parable points to how “Stewardship is growing, developing, advancing, and building the gifts with which God has blessed us. Stewardship is not conserving, holding, protecting and preserving.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

With respect to stewardship and resources at your community of faith, where do you see conserving, holding, protecting, and preserving? Where do you see developing, advancing, and building your gifts? Be specific.

1. The grace in this passage is that the Master, who we commonly understand to be a representation of God, doesn’t keep all the money earned for him, but he gives even more back to the slaves who worked hard and took risks to develop and grow those resources. This means even more resources will be going out into the world rather than staying buried in the ground. God will always continue pouring out divine love, and our calling is to keep growing it and sharing it.

What are some risks—big or small—your community of faith might take to grow your resources? How might these risks benefit both you and your neighbours?

**Prayer:** God who takes the risk of investing in us, sometimes the fear of the unknown and the fear of loss makes us bury our talents so that we won’t lose them. In these times, remind us of your calling to be creative and bold with what you’ve given us so that even more people might experience your generosity. Amen.

## Session 8 | 2 Corinthians 9:6‒12 Sowing Bountifully

The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not regretfully or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. As it is written,

“He scatters abroad; he gives to the poor;
his righteousness endures forever.”

He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us, for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God.

1. Paul tells us that God supplies our needs. Verses 10 and 11 might also make us think we will get rich by being generous. However, it's important to note that the “you” in these verses is plural. Paul is saying, “You *all, as a community,* will be enriched....” Can you recall a time when your community of faith experienced God's generosity or enrichment? How is being *en*riched different than getting rich?
2. Following (or creating) best practices of stewardship, Paul *inspires* by telling the Corinthians they will be blessed through their giving as will others (“the saints”). He *invites,* saying, “Each of you must give,” and in other verses he *thanks* (see 2 Cor. 8:24 and following, where Paul describes boasting about the Corinthians). It’s clear that part of being in Christian community is having open conversations about money. Only by doing so can we begin to address issues of inequality and create unity through our sharing. But why is it so hard? How does your community of faith talk about money? How might you inspire, invite, and thank?
3. Mission and Service is a way we in The United Church of Canada live out these ideals. We pool our wealth, trusting God will do more with it than we can do alone, and we share these resources with partner agencies in Canada and around the world as a means of balancing the resources God has generously shared with the world. In alleviating hunger, working for reconciliation, and aiding education, we point to our belief that we are not alone. How does your community of faith participate in Mission and Service? Do you support other initiatives beyond your community? How does this giving bless you and enrich your lives?

**Prayer:** God of inspiration, thank you for calling us to be a part of this church that is so much bigger than our one community of faith. May our offerings and our lives reflect the ways in which we belong together and the impact we can make together. Amen.

## Session 9 | 1 Thessalonians 5:15‒18 Give Thanks Always

See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

1. These verses form part of Paul’s farewell to the church in Thessalonica, one of the earliest Christian churches. He reiterates that gratitude is at the centre of Christian community even when things might be challenging. Can you think of a time—either in your personal life or the life of your community of faith—when it was hard to be thankful? Looking back, is there something you *can* be thankful for in that situation?
2. Paul encourages the community to “do good” to one another and to all. What are some ways you do good to and for one another? How do you practise gratitude in your community of faith?
3. How are our offerings or donations connected to gratitude? How might increasing gratitude in your community of faith move people to donate?

**Prayer:** God of gratitude, sometimes it’s easier to focus on all that’s missing, all that’s going wrong. Instead, we pray to be people who easily give thanks, and whose identity is rooted in doing good to and for one another. Amen.

## Session 10 | 1 Peter 4:7‒11 Stewards of Manifold Grace

The end of all things is near; therefore be serious and discipline yourselves for the sake of your prayers. Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaining. Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

1. In this series, we’ve gone from the beginning to the end—from the Garden of Eden to Peter’s vision of the end times. Yet, our identity and calling throughout has remained the same—to be stewards and caretakers.

Most of us don’t live with a sense that the world will end right away, but we can take from Peter’s words a sense of urgency. God’s work of love and grace is needed right now—today, at this very moment—not when we feel ready or think we have enough resources. Reflect on your community of faith’s response to the needs of your neighbours. Are you able to act quickly to feed, to shelter, to care for others? If not, what barriers exist? What is something you can do right away to live into the calling to be stewards of God’s grace?

1. Mission and Service is how we, collectively as a denomination, serve others and glorify God. Our model is one of partnership—supporting local organizations in Canada and around the world as they embody Christ’s love. Is there a Mission and Service partner whose work you’re aware of? Talk together about how they are responding urgently to the needs of their neighbours with love and grace. Consider highlighting their work in worship as an example of faithful stewardship. If you need some help, check out the [Mission and Service stories](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service/mission-and-service-stories).
2. Peter reminds us that stewardship is so much more than money and budgets. It’s about how we live our entire lives and how we, as communities of faith, reveal God’s love in our midst. How has your understanding of what it means to be a steward evolved as you’ve studied these passages? What would you most like others to know?

**Prayer:** God of Grace, thank you for calling us yours, for calling us to be stewards of your grace. Help us to respond urgently to the needs of the world without worrying about whether we’ll have enough for ourselves tomorrow. In all we do, may you be glorified and revealed in our midst. Amen.

1. *Giving and Stewardship in an Effective Church: A Guide for Every Member* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1992), 115. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)