

## INTRODUCTION



Imagine that your parents have asked you to care for their garden while they take a long-anticipated vacation. You know that they have planted the garden with care and look forward to many meals with the fresh vegetables that are just beginning to sprout. Weeding, watering, and pruning the garden is a sign of your love for them, and a responsibility. They are counting on you to nurture the plants and tend them, so that they will return to enjoy a rich and fruitful harvest.

It is this sort of nurturing, caring, and tending of which we speak, in a much more profound way, when we explore the call to be good stewards. A steward is one who cares for, nurtures, and makes fruitful that which belongs to another. When we apply this meaning of the word “steward” to our lives, we see that understanding ourselves as stewards can be life-changing.

All you are, have, and will be is God’s and is entrusted to you. You are called to steward it very well. It is my hope this booklet will help you explore the varied dimensions of this deeply spiritual way of life.

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## 1 | All Is Gift

When someone gives us a gift, it is a sign of their love, friendship, and care for us. A really special gift shows that the giver has spent time thinking about what we need or would cherish. When we receive such a thoughtful gift, we treasure it. Every time we use it, we think of the one who gave it to us and are compelled to greater love for the giver of the gift.

This is why growing as stewards is such a powerful way of understanding our lives. Pause for a moment and take this to heart: you are a gift from God! All you are, have, and will be is an outpouring of God's love.

Our lives and all that surrounds us are a blessing entrusted to us. Taking this to heart, we will grow in gratitude for the blessings of life and resources; we will use the gifts wisely and well; and we will see in each the glimmer of God's love and care for us and for the world.

## 2 | Seeing the Gifts Around Us

It is one thing to accept intellectually that everything is gift. It is something quite different to believe this with our hearts and to perceive the blessings that surround us. For that, as the U.S. bishops said in their pastoral statement *Stewardship: A Disciple's Response* (SDR), we need “a flash of insight—a certain way of seeing—by which [we] view the world and [our] relationship to it in a fresh, new light” (SDR, 39).

Seeing the gifts around us requires us to be attentive. We must pay attention in order to see what is already here.

Like any good habit, attentiveness takes practice. It is often a result of quiet stillness, which is not easy for many whose lives are filled to the brim with activity. In order to pay attention, we must develop the habit of noticing things that we otherwise would likely miss: the gift of time with a loved one, a calm peace during prayer, union felt with Christ and others during Mass—glimmers of God's grace, which once seen suddenly seem everywhere, because they are.

### 3 | Grateful

As stewards, we learn to see that all of life is a gift from God, which we are called to steward well: our faith, the relationships that fill our lives with love, talents and skills, money and resources, creation itself.

Filled with gratitude, we see the abundance of life as a glimpse of God's grace and goodness poured upon us and on the world. As we grow in gratitude, this perspective of abundance shapes us. We no longer see the world through an outlook of scarcity, in which we feel we can never have enough and fear we may run out—of money, friends, influence, things. Instead we see life and all it holds through the perspective of abundance. Whatever we have is blessing.

Growing in gratitude not only changes how we see the world, it also shapes the way we respond to the circumstances of our lives. Even in times of great difficulty, material or emotional need, illness, grief, and loss, we still perceive the abundant love and care of God. For this, we may be very grateful!

## 4 | Grateful Response

Have you ever received a gift that left you speechless? Perhaps this was because you knew what went into the gift, the care with which the giver selected it, that conveyed the giver's love for you. Maybe it was a simple moment of presence, a visit with a loved one in which time stood still.

How do you express gratitude for gifts that are ultimately priceless? This is the question that is at the heart of stewardship.

When we reflect on the love behind the many gifts and blessings that fill our lives—love that is God—we may be struck speechless. How can we possibly say “thank you” to God for all we are, have, and will be?

We express gratitude for the many gifts and blessings in our lives by giving in return. Knowing that all we are and have is gift, we appreciate that it is given in order to be shared. When you share time and attention, talents and skills, money and resources, you are using those gifts in the way God desires. This is faithful stewardship.

## 5 | Disciples of Jesus

If you want to know what it means to live and grow as a good steward, you need look no further than Jesus. Everything about Jesus' life and teaching, most especially his passion, death, and resurrection, speaks to the life of the steward.

Jesus shows us that God's way is the way of love. Throughout the gospels, Jesus goes beyond himself for the sake of others and teaches us to do likewise. Jesus not only gave food, forgiveness, healing, and compassion. With each encounter, Jesus gave himself. He sacrificed everything, and he calls us to do the same.

As disciples, followers of Jesus Christ, we are drawn to Jesus' way of self-giving, sacrificial love. We do this by stewarding well the gifts we have been given, using our lives and resources as a sharing of the love of God.

We do not do this lightly. To give of yourself so completely, you must grow in understanding of who you are and Whose you are, and you must trust, as Jesus did, that God is with you every step of the way.

## 6 | In God's Image

You are created in God's image. God, who is love, created you in love, for love. Jesus' great command to love one another is about living as you are created to be, to fulfill your mission, the very reason for your existence. As a person who is created in God's image and likeness, you are to reflect and share this image through your actions and interactions, in the ways in which you live your daily life, so that people may know God's love through you.

The truth that each person is created in God's image is a reflection of the vast greatness of God. God is not contained in one experience, gender, or culture. God is beyond human comprehension. Yet in Jesus Christ, God shows us his desire to be one with us, to be close to us. It is this near, intimate, personal love of God that we are called to share with others. Each of us will do this differently, through the way we steward our time and attention, gifts and blessings, and the talents and skills we have been given.