

BRENDA'S STEWARDSHIP 101

What you really need to know about Stewardship

When the word “stewardship” is used in a Christian community, it is usually code for a conversation about the financial support of the church. At St. James’, we believe that Stewardship means a great deal more. Understanding Stewardship as a discipline in our life as Christians clarifies our priorities ... and may even change them — for the better!

Stewards manage someone else's belongings.

Today, “steward” is not a term much used outside the Church, but it used to be — often for those who managed livestock or property. If we are stewards, whose belongings are we managing? The Church believes we are stewards of gifts that God has given to us — everything from the gift of time on this earth, the gift of relationships, and the gift of skills and talents we possess, to the gift of money — that is, the currency by which we transact in our world, pursue opportunities, and secure our material well-being (among other things).

Stewardship is a response.

If we consider that everything we have comes to us as a gift from a generous and gracious God, our decisions about how we use those gifts will increasingly reflect God’s generosity and trust in us. *How* we make those decisions may shift; past priorities may fall by the wayside and others may become more central.

Stewardship is personal, but not individual.

Each of us has to decide how to use the gifts God has entrusted to us. Those are personal decisions. But every decision we make has an effect on someone else. As Christians, we know that we are created for relationship with God and with one another. So when it comes to making decisions about the use of our time, skills, and financial resources, we are asked to think about how these decisions will help fulfill our commitments to all those whom God made and loves.

Good stewardship requires some homework.

Pull up your calendar for the last three months and the three months ahead, gather up your credit card and checking statements. If someone didn’t know

you, could they tell what matters most to you from what they see in these records? Are you spending yourself in ways that you think would please God and that make you glad? (You are, after all, one of the precious gifts God has given the rest of us.) If not, what can you change right away and what will need some planning and incremental steps?

Don't give until it hurts; give until it feels good.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, a tithe (10%) was the standard for giving to God: The first ten percent of the crop and the first (and best) of the newborn livestock were given in worship. In the New Testament, Jesus tells a rich young man who wants to follow God what he must give: Everything. Tithing can help you shape your life so that all of it (everything) reflects your commitment to God.

At St. James', we ask that members pray, work, and give for the kingdom of God that Jesus' proclaimed. Those are the essential marks of discipleship. What would it mean to give 10% of your income for the work of God's kingdom (through giving to St. James' and to other organizations that proclaim the Gospel), to devote 10% of your time and talent to the building up of God's kingdom (whether through ministries at St. James' or through other organizations), and to commit yourself to daily prayer and weekly worship in the community? It would likely disrupt your calendar and your finances! Which is precisely why tithing can help shape the "everything" that Jesus wants from us. For if we make those commitments, there are others which we will have to let go. If we make those commitments, we will discover new opportunities and grace we hadn't thought possible. If we make those commitments, we will discover how freeing it is to be a steward.

You don't need to wait!

As a part of your life at St. James' you will receive a financial commitment card. If you have never tithed, it will give you some ways to think about getting started. But you don't need to wait. You can start reordering your life now. You can recognize your capacity as one of God's stewards now. And if you want to talk about anything here, please call and speak to one of the clergy. We'd love to discuss this (and whatever else on your heart).