

# Faithful & Afire

LCMS Circuit Bible Studies — 2009-2010

# The Pastor as Steward Stewardship Bible Studies for Pastors Leaders Guide

# Leader's Guides

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The Pastor as Steward
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Leaders Guide

### (Commentary for leaders is in bold print.)

# Session 1 How Green Is Our God!

Introduce the concept of "green," as having an active concern for the earth's resources. In this Bible study "green" will also refer to an active concern for the kingdom of God and its treasures. To describe God as "green" affirms God's continued care for His creation, revealed most significantly in His active redemption of creation in His Son Jesus Christ. To describe pastors as "green" affirms their roles as activist stewards and of the treasures of both creation and the kingdom of God.

#### **FOCUS OF THIS STUDY**

Paraphrase the following or invite a pastor in your group to read it aloud. Then invite discussion around the three questions at the bottom of Page 1 in the Participants Guide.

On October 11, 2006 PBS aired a *Moyers on America* program titled "Is God Green?" "Green," of course, refers to living with an active concern for the earth's resources. Moyers chronicled the increasing environmental activism among American evangelicals. Once the mission of liberal mainliners, taking care of the earth is more and more the work of conservative Biblebelievers, Moyers reported.

At one point Moyers offered this comment on Tri Robinson, an activist evangelical pastor in Boise, Idaho: "It isn't easy being green for a conservative, evangelical pastor. In fact, it took Tri Robinson 15 years of pastoring before he dared to preach his first sermon on the environment." According to the Moyers report, a growing number of formerly silent Christians, including pastors, are answering the question, "Is God green?" with a resounding "Yes! And, therefore, so are we!"

Less than a year later, in the June/July, 2007 issue of *The Lutheran Witness*, Matthew Nelson wrote an article by the same title, "Is God Green?" With theological clarity Nelson critiqued the anthropocentric (human-centered) and the ecocentric (nature-centered) ethics of environmentalism to claim instead a Scriptural, moral, and Christological center for environmental concerns. Nelson, too, could answer "Yes!" to the question, "Is God green?"

All this raises another question, "If God is green, does that make LCMS pastors green, too?

This study introduces a series of nine Bible studies on stewardship from the pastoral perspective. Each study is presented with the prayer that grace will abound as the Holy Spirit works in the Word to shape pastors as stewards of God's treasures – from the immediate mysteries at hand to the whole of creation.

#### For Conversation

- 1. What is your response to describing God as green? How about a green pastor?
- 2. What are the pitfalls of going green for a pastor or a congregation?
- 3. Ever preached a sermon on the environment? If yes, summarize it. If no, why not?

#### SCRIPTURE SEARCH

The Scripture Search looks at the "greenness" of both God and pastors. If time is limited, you may want to quickly summarize the familiar passages under "A Green God," and look in detail at the passages under "A Green Pastor."

o A Green God

The Scriptures present God as deeply committed to preserving and redeeming His creation, tainted and threatened by sin.

- God as Creator, Owner, Provider, and Preserver of All Things
  - Psalm 24:1-2
     All of creation, everything in it, belongs to God because God made it all from nothing.
  - Psalm 104:24-28
     Deism to the contrary, God cares for, protects, and sustains His creation.
- Human Responsibility to Manage and Care for the Earth and Its Resources
  - Genesis 1:26-30
     Created in God's image, man and woman are charged to fill the earth, subdue it, and rule over God's other creatures. God gives the earth to man and woman as stewards.
  - Genesis 2:15
     Man and woman are placed in the Garden "to work it and take care of it." In God's wisdom, human beings are given the daunting task of making the most of God's creation and nurturing it as well.
  - Micah 6:1-8
     God's people have always been challenged to have a humble yet active heart for justice and for mercy with the poor. The poor are often victims of an abuse of God's creation by sinful human beings.

- The Impact of Sin on God's Creation
  - Genesis 3:17-19
     Sin brings a curse to God's creation and to the work of humanity in creation.
  - Hosea 4:1-3
     Joining other prophets, Hosea connects the sins of humanity to the struggles of creation as "the land mourns."
- Christ as Creator, Sustainer, Reconciler, and Consummator of Creation
  - John 3:16-17
     God's love for His creation, the fallen and contrary kosmos, moves Him to send His Son as its Savior.
  - Colossians 1:15-20
     This amazing creedal hymn celebrates Christus Creator as the beginning and end of creation, holding all things together.
- All Creation Taken into God's Redemptive Plan
  - Romans 8:19-23
     Just as all creation is impacted by the fall into sin, all creation also participates in God's redemptive plan in Christ.

The cumulative picture above presents a Creator who will not allow His creation to spoil and die. The investment of God in preserving His creation extends all the way through His plan of redemption and culminates in the parousia of Christ. Describing this God as "green" falters when one considers the lengths to which God goes to care for what He creates.

#### o A Green Pastor

These passages paint pastors as "green," particularly from the perspective of their work in God's kingdom. Their preserving and expanding God's kingdom through the use of God's resources present them as active stewards.

Long before being green was "in," the New Testament presented pastors as stewards, eager to preserve, celebrate, and extend the treasures of God's creation and new creation. See how "green" you feel after probing each of these passages. Note especially the variety of our roles as stewards.

- 1 Corinthians 3:5-7
   Pastors participate in the growth of the kingdom, a growth accredited to God's grace. We participate, broken vessels that we are, in the expanding mission of the church.
- 1 Corinthians 4:1-2
   We are "stewards of God's mysteries." We are "those entrusted with the secret things of God" the Gospel, the Word, the Sacraments.

Philippians 4:2-3

We are stewards of relationships, often called upon to be reconcilers and peacemakers. Our concern for harmonious relationships also relates to our concern for preserving the expanding mission of the church.

■ 1 Timothy 1:18-20

We are stewards of the purposes God has for our lives – our vocation. We are also guardians of the faith and the ethics God has given us.

■ 1 Timothy 2: 1-8

Prayer in all its forms is a resource to be practiced and preserved.

■ 1 Timothy 3:4-5

The gift of family and its system of relationships are ours to manage.

1 Timothy 4:9-15

We are stewards of the "life and doctrine" God has given us (vs. 16).

1 Timothy 5:22-23

We are to guard and take care of our moral and physical health.

2 Timothy 1:13

We are to maintain the pattern of sound teaching with faith and a spirit of love.

2 Timothy 3:14-15

We are challenged to continue immersing ourselves in the familiar treasure of the Scriptures.

2 Timothy 4:3-5

The pastor is an activist committed to "discharging all the duties" of ministry, especially evangelism.

#### FROM OUR LUTHERAN PERSPECTIVE

Ask one of the pastors to read the first two paragraphs in the quotation from Luther's Large Catechism. Then offer a summary of the commentary below.

From The Large Catechism on the First Article of the Apostles Creed

Moreover, we also confess that God the Father has given us not only all that we have and what we see before our eyes, but also that he daily defends us against every evil and misfortune, warding off all sorts of danger and disaster. All this he does out of pure love and goodness, without our merit, as a kind father who cares for us so that no evil may befall us...

Hence, because everything we possess, and everything in heaven and on earth besides, is daily given, sustained, and protected by God, it inevitably follows that we are in duty bound to love, praise, and thank him without ceasing, and, in short, to devote all things to his service, as he has required and enjoined in the Ten Commandments.

Embedded in Luther's words is a warning for Christians and pastors who may be wrongly motivated in their environmentalist zeal. We are not friendly to the creation because of some allegiance to "Mother Earth" or to the creation itself. Nor is our concern for the creation simply a politically motivated act or a sign of our relevance. This sort of "geoloatry" takes God out of the picture and puts earth or self at the center.

As Christians, our environmental response is to the love and goodness of God, whose protection and care are constants in our lives. Take faith out of environmentalism, and our care for the earth is at its best just another form of politics and at its worst idolatry.

Just as idolatrous is a pastoral ministry driven not by faith responding to the grace of God but by a desire to be liked, or in control, or perceived as relevant.

Ask another pastor to read the final paragraph of the quotation. Then share the commentary.

How much could be said if we were to describe how few people believe this article. We all pass over it; we hear it and recite it, but we neither see nor think about what the words command us to do. For if we believed it with our whole heart, we would act accordingly, and not swagger about and boast and brag as if we had life, riches, power, honor, and such things of ourselves, as if we ourselves were to be feared and served. This is the way the wretched, perverse world acts, drowned in its blindness, misusing all the blessings and gifts of God solely for its own pride, greed, pleasure, and enjoyment, and never once turning to God to thank him or acknowledge him as Lord or Creator. (The Large Catechism, 17-21, *The Book of Concord* (Kolb/Wengert, p.433.)

Life is so daily that we can live days without a thought of God as Creator or Redeemer. We can begin to see life as ours rather than His. Again, the same is true of pastoral ministry. We can actually begin to believe that we own the mysteries rather than God.

#### POINTS TO PONDER

Be sure to read John Leax's prayer poem aloud. You may want to practice reading it before the Bible study session. In the poem, Leax celebrates the extravagance of God's grace in creation. He recognizes a harmony between God's pleasure and his own needs and relates that harmony to the harmony within the Trinity. His mood is one of being awe-struck at God's willingness to place creation in his human hands for safe-keeping. Like Luther, Leax is aware of the temptation to call creation his own, rather than God's.

Leax finds in creation itself a platform from which he can affirm Biblical truth. Jesus did this often in his teaching and preaching. As God's Word brought creation into being, so creation bears testimony to the truth of God's Word.

After reading the poem and providing some commentary, ask for a response to two or three of the questions provided. Responses will vary.

Christian poet John Leax has a prayer poem titled "My Delight." Read the poem on page 4 and then consider or discuss the following:

- 1. Where do I see extravagant grace at work in the world? At work in my ministry?
- 2. For Leax, the harmony between God's pleasure and his own needs points to an inner harmony within the Trinity. What other harmonies in life, worth preserving, find their source in God?
- 3. What mood accompanies Leax's awareness that he is a keeper of God's pleasures?
- 4. Which am I more likely to do: hold my ministry tightly as my own or humbly be held by the one who owns my ministry?
- 5. Leax finds in creation an affirmation of Scriptural truth. How often do I use creation as a witness to the truth of the Scriptures?

#### My Delight

Though you have made the earth for your delight, I walk your woods and find in hemlock, pine, and poplar shelter from the burning of your sun and fuel to warm me when your cold descends. I find streaming from the hillside clean water that slakes my thirst. and in the wildness of its flow, trout that feed my hunger. At your meadow's edge, I pluck raspberries from the cane and wonder at the thrasher in the briars. With every turn I find extravagancethe unending revelation of your joy's abundance. What other end should I imagine for goldenrod and buttercup. for bloodroot, trillium, and phlox, for jack-in-the-pulpit

and Queen Anne's lace, for coltsfoot, mullein, vetch, and lily, for loosestrife and forget-me-not? I am confounded. What harmony within yourself led you to make your pleasure and my needs be one? What awful purpose then led you to place your pleasure in my keeping? What discord now tempts me to seize what you have made and call it mine? The fitness of this place for my abode portends a grace beyond my strength to hold. I must be held or fall. With these words affirming my delight, I yield my inclination to name my own what can be only yours. Let my delight be as it must vours and vours alone. John Leax, "My Delight," Out Walking: Reflections on Our Place in the Natural World (Baker, 2000)

#### FOR CONVERSATION

Allow at least 20-30 minutes for conversation in groups of three. You may want to ask each group to focus on just two-three questions from those provided (1, 4, and 5, for example). Encourage each group to pray for one another with a focus on specific needs.

- 1. Discuss the many ways in which the work of a pastor is the work of a steward.
- 2. In what sense is a pastor a preservationist? A caretaker? A defender? An activist?
- 3. Agree or disagree? The First Article of the Apostles Creed is often neglected in Lutheran teaching and preaching. Explain your response.
- 4. When has a desire to call the pastoral ministry "mine" brought discord to my ministry?
- 5. When might a "green pastor" become too green? In other words, when might a concern for preserving a blessing of God take a wrong turn?
- 6. How equipped do you feel to lead your congregation in its stewardship of God's resources?
- 7. Close with prayers for one another's personal and ministry needs.

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# The Pastor as Steward Stewardship Bible Studies for Pastors Leaders Guide

(Commentary for leaders is in bold print.)

# **Generous Giving**

**Scriptural Truths to Guide Generous Giving among Christians** 

### 1. Focus of this Study

Every adult likely remembers as a child counting the seconds between lightning and thunder. As soon as lightning flashed across the sky, the counting would begin: "One-thousand one, one-thousand two, one-thousand three." A count of one-thousand five meant that the lightning was one mile away. One-thousand ten, two miles away. How thrilling it was when the flash and the boom occurred simultaneously. "That was so close!" everyone would exclaim.

The leader may want to stop here and ask the group for their own memories of counting the seconds between lightning and thunder. The leader also may want to add some scientific fun facts. Actually lightning and thunder always occur simultaneously, but because light travels faster than sound, we see the lightning flash before we hear the thunder boom. According to <a href="http://wiki.answers.com">http://wiki.answers.com</a> the delay of 5 seconds between the time one sees a flash of lightning and hears the thunder, if the temperature is 20 degrees Celsius, means that the lighting is one mile away. This is a rough guide based on the fact that sound travels about five miles per hour in air that is that temperature.

Have someone from the group read the next two paragraphs.

The twentieth century theologian Karl Barth is quoted as saying: "Grace evokes gratitude like the voice of an echo. Gratitude follows grace like thunder lightning." Just as one expects to hear thunder after lightning, one expects to find gratitude in a person who comprehends grace. Grace begets gratitude, it might be said.

This study rests on the premise that God's grace prompts gratitude and a natural outgrowth of gratitude is giving. Stated simply:

Grace inspires gratitude expressed in giving.

# 2. Scripture Search<sup>2</sup>

Before starting to read the Scripture passages below, the leader should note the following for the group: 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 constitute the longest single section in the Bible on the subject of giving. We will be covering chapter 8 today. The

discussion of giving in the Bible is not limited to money, but this text clearly focuses on that topic. The context is a specific offering appeal. Some scholars believe this section is part of another letter or even that chapter 8 is part of a third letter and chapter 9 part of a fourth. Regardless, there is consistency with Paul's first letter, in which he had made an appeal to the Corinthian congregation (1 Corinthians 16:1-4) to gather money for a specific purpose: to aid the poor in Jerusalem. That collection apparently had not been completed either because of poor organization on the part of the congregation, the tension that existed between Paul and the congregation, or some other reason. Nevertheless, Paul raises the subject again. This kind of appeal is consistent with the commitment Paul had made to the leaders of the Jerusalem church to remember the poor (Gal. 2:10) and his past actions in bringing a gift from the church at Antioch to Jerusalem. (Acts 11:29-30). The leader may want to have the group look at the passages cited above for background to the text or just make his own comments about them.

#### o 2 Corinthians 8:1-7

<sup>1</sup>And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. <sup>2</sup>Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. <sup>3</sup>For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, <sup>4</sup>they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. <sup>5</sup>And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will. <sup>6</sup>So we urged Titus, since he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. <sup>7</sup>But just as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

Verse 1. The grace  $(\chi \alpha \rho_i \varsigma)$  of God motivated the Macedonian churches to give, in spite of the fact that they were disadvantaged financially. Grace as the motivating power for giving is key to the premise of this study.

Verse 2-4. Paul points out that the Macedonian Christians gave generously and joyfully despite their own lack of resources. This joy  $(\chi\alpha\rho\alpha\zeta)$  is the "gratitude" inspired by grace in our study's premise. Paul may be contrasting the Macedonian's impoverished situation with the Corinthians, who apparently were relatively well off financially (1 Cor. 4:8; 2 Cor. 8:14), suggesting that the Corinthians were well blessed and in a good position financially to be able to contribute.

Verse 5. The grace of God moved a faith response in that they gave themselves (εαυτους εδωκαν) to the Lord and then to Paul as well or, in this context, to the appeal Paul was making for the saints in Jerusalem. This statement raises at least five very important points regarding the matter of giving:

- 1. Paul makes these givers aware of giving opportunities. Our premise is that grace inspires gratitude, which is expressed in giving. But how do individual Christians or congregations decide what to give unless someone raises opportunities?
- 2. Paul is acting as solicitor, bringing the motivation (God's grace), the need (the church in Jerusalem), and the giving plan (an offering, collected according to a certain procedure) to the attention of the congregation.
- 3. The givers, in this case the Corinthians and before them the Macedonians, have confidence in the person who is making the appeal. Paul is able to

- constructively raise the need and make the appeal because he has a pastoral relationship with these people. He is a trusted servant of Christ, a caregiver, and a minister of God's Word.
- 4. Paul points out the need for which a gift is being asked. The congregation believes that the need Paul is presenting is an important one. Giving motivated *from* a heart that has been touched by grace does not preclude giving to a specific need.
- 5. Finally, because Paul has acted as solicitor, the verse begins to raise the issue of accountability for the gift, which will be discussed more thoroughly in verses 19-21.

Verse 6. For the first time in this section we learn that Paul is sending Titus to help complete the process of gathering the offering (i.e. "this act of grace").

Verse 7. As a last word of encouragement in this section he encourages the Corinthians to "excel in this grace of giving." He advises that each Christian should do the best he can to maximize his giving potential. This is a matter of personal decision and of each individual evaluating just how much he/she can give. Similarly, Paul had said in 1 Cor. 16:2 "each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income" (italics added).

#### o 2 Corinthians 8:8-9

<sup>8</sup>I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. <sup>9</sup>For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

Verse 8. No one should feel compelled by Paul's request to make an offering or by anything other than, again, the grace of Christ (v. 9). Nevertheless, he does make an interesting statement that the size of their gift will have something to say about the sincerity of their gratitude in response to this grace. This statement should prompt a lively discussion about the appropriateness of comparing gifts. Paul seems to say that a little friendly competition among congregations trying to outdo one another in doing good is not out of order. Leader, what does your group think of that? Perhaps discussion should be extended to the small group time.

Verse 9. The motivating power of grace, which inspires gratitude expressed in giving, is beautifully presented in this verse. Grace is the center and focal point of the Biblical concept of Christ-centered giving.

#### o 2 Corinthians 8:10-15

<sup>10</sup>And here is my advice about what is best for you in this matter: Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. <sup>11</sup>Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. <sup>12</sup>For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have

<sup>13</sup>Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. <sup>14</sup>At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality, <sup>15</sup>as it is

written: "He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little."

Verse 10-11. Paul again is quite frank in his advice that the congregation should complete the process of gathering the offering. He commends their giving history and then directs them to finish the job to the best of their ability.

Verse 12. Paul again addresses the subject of giving according to ability. While the encouragement of Christian giving is not fundraising in the classic sense of the term, it is helpful to know that fundraisers often talk in terms of an individual's "giving capacity." It is certainly legitimate in preaching and teaching on Christian giving, to note that every gift is valuable regardless of size, but that part of the joy of giving is to give to the best of one's ability. Hymn writer Edward Dayman expresses this idea in verse 4 of his hymn, which is reproduced for study participants in section 3. The leader may also want to read verse 5, the hymn's concluding doxology.

We, Lord, would lay, at Thy behest The costliest offerings on Thy shrine; But when we give, and give our best, We give Thee only what is Thine.

O Father, whence all blessings come,
O Son, dispenser of God's store,
O Spirit, bear our offerings home
Lord, make them thine forevermore, (TLH 438:4-5)

Verse 13-15. Paul again emphasizes that he is presenting a real giving opportunity, and that the Corinthians, who have much, can do something meaningful for the Judeans, who currently have little. The comment is reminiscent of Acts 2:44-46, where the church shared what they had in common. The comment is not an endorsement for socialism, nor a criticism of capitalism or any other economic theory, but rather a common-sense view that when you see a need and can do something about it, plunge ahead. The quoted reference in verse 15 is to the gathering of manna by the Israelites in the wilderness (Ex. 16:18).

#### o 2 Corinthians 8:16-24

<sup>16</sup>I thank God, who put into the heart of Titus the same concern I have for you. <sup>17</sup>For Titus not only welcomed our appeal, but he is coming to you with much enthusiasm and on his own initiative. <sup>18</sup>And we are sending along with him the brother who is praised by all the churches for his service to the gospel. <sup>19</sup>What is more, he was chosen by the churches to accompany us as we carry the offering, which we administer in order to honor the Lord himself and to show our eagerness to help. <sup>20</sup>We want to avoid any criticism of the way we administer this liberal gift. <sup>21</sup>For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men.

<sup>22</sup>In addition, we are sending with them our brother who has often proved to us in many ways that he is zealous, and now even more so because of his great confidence in you. <sup>23</sup>As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker among you; as for our brothers, they are representatives of the churches and an honor to Christ. <sup>24</sup>Therefore show these men the proof of your love and the reason for our pride in you, so that the churches can see it.

Verse 16-18. Paul again notes that he is sending Titus and now adds two others (cf. 8:18 and 22), who will help the Corinthian Christians complete the process of gathering the offering. Perhaps the leadership of the church was finding it difficult to implement the process. Perhaps Titus was known to them and would inspire their confidence. At the very least, he carried Paul's endorsement. Titus' two companions are not identified and the group may speculate on who they think they were.

Verse 19-21. Not only will the involvement of this committee of three help the Corinthians complete the job, but it will also help ensure accountability for the offering. This key principle in gift solicitation and giving continues to be a vitally important issue for the church today. Paul did not come in by himself, take the money and leave by himself. Financial accountability in congregations and Christian ministries is essential. A division of duties is one key principle in financial accountability. One person, for example, should not count the offering, make the deposit at the bank and also have check-writing authority. The leader may want to discuss other aspects of financial accountability in a congregational setting.

### 3. From Our Lutheran Perspective

The Apology of the Augsburg Confession says faith produces "spiritual impulses," and gives examples of the good works these impulses produce.

Because faith truly brings the Holy Spirit and produces a new life in our hearts, it must also produce spiritual impulses in our hearts. The prophet shows what those impulses are when he says [Jer. 31:33], "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts." Therefore, after we have been justified and reborn by faith, we begin to fear and love God, to pray for and expect help from him, to thank and praise him, and to obey him in our afflictions. We also begin to love our neighbor because our hearts have spiritual and holy impulses. (Apology IV, 125)<sup>3</sup>

Hymn writer Edward Dayman captures the idea of "giving to one's capacity":

We, Lord, would lay, at Thy behest The costliest offerings on Thy shrine; But when we give, and give our best, We give Thee only what is Thine. (The Lutheran Hymnal, 438:4, Public Domain)

#### 4. Points to Ponder

- Grace inspires gratitude expressed in giving
- Paul uses grace alone to motivate giving.
- Paul acts as solicitor by
  - Lifting up the joy of giving
  - Pointing out the example of others
  - Describing the need
  - Encouraging individuals to give to their capacity
  - o Helping organize the appeal in the congregation
  - Sending others to help with the process of gathering the offering

- Paul is in a position to act as solicitor because he is in a trust relationship with the members of the congregation.
- Accountability is an indispensable part of gift solicitation and management.

#### 5. For Conversation

- Define *giving*. Does your definition of giving include only money? Other things and money? Other things and not money?
- How do you approach the subject of the giving of money in your own preaching and teaching? Do you enjoy it, avoid it, do it grudgingly? What drives your decision to include or exclude giving in your preaching/teaching? What insights on the subject of giving do you personally gain from Paul's approach to this topic with the Corinthians or from the readings in the Confessions?
- To what degree does your congregation understand the premise: Grace inspires gratitude expressed in giving?

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#### Notes:

- 1. <a href="http://faith-theology.blogspot.com/2006/11/ten-propositions-on-karl-barth.html">http://faith-theology.blogspot.com/2006/11/ten-propositions-on-karl-barth.html</a>
- 2. Scripture taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.
- 3. Kolb, R. & Wengert, T. J. *The Book of Concord: Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church.* Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2000.



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The Pastor as Steward

Stewardship Bible Studies for Pastors

Leader's Guide

(Notes for the leader are in bold print.)

# December 2009 Stewards of the Mysteries

Pastors are called to be stewards of the mysteries of God.

#### 1. Focus of This Study

Do you love a good mystery? From childhood, many have read the adventures of the Hardy Boys and Nancy Drew, then Sherlock Holmes, and even now may enjoy the mysteries of John Grisham and other current authors. A plain old story could begin by saying "The butler did it!" and then give the details. In a mystery, however, clues are combined with misdirection to make us think the pool guy did it until another clue shows that he was out of town. The clues keep accumulating until the last chapter reveals, perhaps to the reader's surprise, that the butler did it. There's a tension in the mystery which compels us to keep reading.

In Scripture and theology, there are mysteries. Although never to be seen as fiction or entertainment, the mysteries of the Bible compel us to keep reading. Since these mysteries don't deal with what the butler did, but with what God has done, the pastor serves as the steward of the mysteries of God.

# 2. Scripture Search<sup>1</sup>

• 1 Corinthians 4:1 (Theme Verse)

This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.

The leader may take time to note that two very descriptive words are used here for the pastor. The words translated "servants of Christ" are  $\dot{\mathbf{U}}$ πηρέτας Χριστοῦ, which is the "under-rower" or the slave at the bottom of a ship. Although we are "under-shepherds" of the Chief Shepherd, Jesus, it doesn't work so well to say we are "under-rowers" of Jesus since I don't recall him ever being called the Chief Rower! Servants we are, however, as stated in the theme for Concordia Theological Seminary: "Forming servants in Jesus Christ who teach the faithful, reach the lost, and care for all."

<sup>1</sup> Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

The word translated "stewards" is οἰκονόμους, which means manager and which sounds a lot like the English word "economist!"

The key word, of course, is "mysteries" which is barely translated from the original  $\mu\nu\sigma\tau\eta\rho i\omega\nu$  and means "secret, secret rite, secret teaching, mystery." It's used only once in the gospels at Matthew 4:11 and 21 times in Paul's writings. This didn't have so much to do with mystery books, as we usually use the term, but with religions in which only the privileged few were let in on the secret things.

Here of course, Paul is saying that the pastor has the stewardship of these things which God has revealed and is called to reveal them to his flock. Although the notes in the *Concordia Readers Edition of the Lutheran Confessions* indicate that the Latin Vulgate translates μυστηρίων in this verse as "sacrament," it was translated mysteriorum in the version which the author of these notes read. Though the sacraments would be called mysteries, Paul is careful to distinguish between the rites of the church and those of mystery cults. According to Kittel, "In sum, μυστηρίον is a rare expression in the NT which betrays no relation to the mystery cults. Where there seem to be connections (e.g., in sacramental passages), the term is not used; where it is used, there are no such connections. In spite of certain analogies, there are thus serious objections against bringing Jesus or Paul under the category of the mystagogue.

The following verses are purposely grouped together as they show that God has made the mystery known. It's not a secret anymore nor is it only available to those who are higher in the mystical pecking order of a religion shrouded in secrets. They are available to be made known to all. They center in Christ.

#### Ephesians 1:9

...making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ...

#### Ephesians 3:2-6

...assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

Here St. Paul gets into the details of the mystery of Christ. Gentiles become members of the church by being incorporated into Christ through the power of the Gospel.

#### Colossians 2:2-3

...that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

#### Here St. Paul equates the mystery with the person of Christ.

The following verses are grouped together because they tend to deal with specific mysteries that have not been made fully known by revelation from God. It's not that these things are completely unknown, but how they can be true is the mystery to us. In the case of these mysteries, we allow the tension to continue and do not attempt to solve the mystery by assuming things rationally when they have not been revealed by God.

#### 1 Corinthians 15:51

Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed...

#### • Ephesians 5:32

This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

#### 1 Timothy 3:16

Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.

#### 3. From Our Lutheran Perspective

These two references to "mystery" in the *Book of Concord* are among several that deal with the person and work of Christ. There are a few references, not surprisingly, in the sections dealing with Foreknowledge, Eternal Election, and Predestination. An example is Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article XI, Election:

We should not judge this matter according to our reason, nor according to the law, nor on the basis of outward appearance. Nor should we have the temerity to search the secret, hidden abyss of divine foreknowledge. Instead, we are to pay attention to the revealed will of God. For he has revealed to us and 'made known the mystery of his will,' and has accomplished it through Christ, that it may be proclaimed.

#### Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article VIII: Person of Christ

"Next to the article of the Holy Trinity this is the greatest mystery in heaven and on earth, as Paul says, "Without any doubt, the mystery of our religion is great, that God was revealed in the flesh" (I Tim. 3[:16]. For the apostle Peter [2 Peter 1;4] testifies clearly that even we, in whom Christ dwells only by grace, become 'participants in the divine nature' in Christ because of this great mystery."<sup>2</sup>

"Because the Holy Scripture [Col. 1:27] calls Christ a mystery, over which all heretics stumble and fall headlong, we warn all Christians that they not pry presumptuously into this mystery with their reason but simply believe with the dear apostles, shut the eyes of their reason, take their understanding captive in obedience to Christ, and take comfort

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Kolb, R & Wengert, T.J. The Book of Concord: Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2000. Page 622, paragraphs 33 and 34.

and rejoice without ceasing in this, that in Christ our flesh and blood have been raised so high, to the right hand of the majesty and almighty power of God. In this way they will certainly find abiding comfort in every adversity and be preserved from harmful error."<sup>3</sup>

#### 4. Points to Ponder

- The theme verse from 1 Corinthians 4:1 (compare Ephesians 3:7-9) speaks about the role of the pastor as "steward of the mysteries."
- The verses including Ephesians 1:9, Ephesians 3:2-6 (compare Colossians 1:26-27), and Colossians 2:2-3, are related and speak about mysteries which have been made fully known by God.
- The verses including 1 Corinthians 15:51, Ephesians 5:32, and 1 Timothy 3:16 are related and speak about mysteries which have not been made fully known and therefore, must remain mysteries.
- The Book of Concord includes both kinds of mysteries, urging us to note those which have been fully revealed and cautioning us against solving those which have not been fully revealed.

#### 5. For Conversation

• The theme verse clearly describes the office of the ministry. Is the phrase "stewards of the mysteries" synonymous with "preachers of the gospel"? What dimension does "steward" or "administrator" add to the task of preaching?

To be a steward of the mysteries makes it even more objectionable if one lacks the time or desire to engage in thorough sermon preparation and just "wings it!" In fact, when it comes to preaching, the leader may well want to spend a few moments talking about how a preacher might take advantage of the tension inherent in a mystery in his sermon preparation. In a mystery, a reader pays attention for clues which he or she has to analyze and fit together in an attempt to solve the mystery.

You might point out the difference between deductive and inductive preaching. In deductive styles, the preacher makes a point and then cites various verses and arguments to prove the point. In inductive styles, the preacher cites the verses and arguments which lead to the point.

There's an inherent tension in the inductive style which keeps the hearer attentive and processing information at higher levels to discover the truth with which the preacher concludes. It's like the difference between saying "The butler did it" and then telling how versus giving clues which guide the hearer to the conclusion which is finally revealed, "Oh, the butler did it!" There's a presumption that modern hearers prefer inductive sermons and there are many books proposing various forms of that style.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Ibid. Page 634, paragraph 96.

• The second group of verses refers to mysteries which have been clearly revealed. Once we know the outcome, are they still mysteries? Where there is no need to solve a mystery, we are now compelled to believe the answer God has given. Can you give examples where people were going the wrong direction until the solution was revealed?

One could quickly mention the Jews, who supposed themselves to be the exclusive beneficiaries of the Messiah's deliverance. Their misunderstanding of the clues led many to believe that the Messiah would be a political deliverer who would restore them to greatness and power over the Romans. Then there is the default position of the human nature which convinces us that we must do something to be saved. When Jesus performed miracles, expelled demons, healed the sick, and raised the dead, crowds flocked to see Him. When he spoke of the cross and the necessity of being delivered to the authorities, killed, and rising on the third day, the people stopped following. The cross is still a stumbling block and foolishness to those who are perishing.

• The third group of verses refers to mysteries which have not been fully revealed and which should remain a mystery. What happens when people are not content to let a mystery remain a mystery? Since the Lutheran confessions deal with matters that were disputed, why does the Book of Concord contain numerous references to this last group?

Whenever we go beyond the revealed Word of God and try to fill in the gaps with information that is rational and logical, there will be disagreements and disputes. Each person's opinion is as valid as the next under that sort of arrangement. As Lutherans, we not only allow the tension created by mysteries and paradoxes to stand unanswered and unresolved, we insist that they remain so. This would be a good place to repeat the citations from the Book of Concord.

If time allows, participants may be interested in looking at the many references to mystery and the revealing of mysteries by God recorded in the second chapter of the prophecy of Daniel. Daniel's God becomes known as the revealer of mysteries. This picture is made complete in a much more glorious way in the New Testament in the revealing of Jesus Christ as the totally human and totally divine Messiah.

Close with prayer, thanking God that all of the mysteries concerning Christ that
have been fully revealed to us so that we can make them fully known. For those
which remain mysteries, we may want to include the collect from *Lutheran*Service Book, page 311, "For guidance in our calling."

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# **FAITHFUL & AFIRE**

The Pastor as Steward
LCMS Circuit Bible Studies, 2009-2010

Leader's Guide

### **Making the Most of Time**

Be very careful, then, how you live--not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. Ephesians 5:15-17

### **Focus of this Study**

Introduce the theme "Making the Most of Time" with two thoughts:

- 1. You can't make <u>more</u> time. Like many precious things, there is only so much of it available to us. Ask, "How do you treat limited commodities? Wisely, carefully or foolishly and in a frivolous manner?
- 2. Having the "most" time, often requires working long/extra hours something like "burning the candle on both ends." Eventually the two flames come together and burn out! And at that point, guess who suffers or pays the price?

Read Ephesians 5:15-17 together and ask participants to think/talk about what kind of care is required when dealing with time.

Invite one or two participants to read aloud the "Focus" section in their Participants Guide. Lead a brief discussion about the tensions of completing just the <u>necessary</u> tasks of life, even before considering the extra things we "wish" we had time for.

Ask, "How many times have people stopped or called you and begun with the question, "Pastor, are you busy?" And how often have you answered with something like, "Never too busy for you?" Ours is an important calling, and we deal with serious issues. Invite participants to share how they "triage" their pastoral responsibilities. When it is appropriate to ask someone to wait or to refer a seeker to someone else? After all, there are only so many hours in the day.

Paul's goal notwithstanding, we cannot, humanly speaking, "do all things!" "To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some." 1 Corinthians 9:22.

Ask, "What does God in His Word say to you as a pastor about "making the most of time?" Your time! Or is your time really His? When do your expectations go beyond

His? Is God talking about efficiency? Is God talking about "seizing the day?" How can you learn what the will of the Lord is for you and your time?

You may also ask them to respond to this question: "if you weren't here today, what would you be doing?"

With the theme "Making the Most of Time" in mind, ask everyone to join you in a brief four-to-five word "Thank You" prayer. Instead of a random, "popcorn" prayer, ask the person to your left to begin, continuing in a circular fashion, going around the group as many times as their prayers continue, allowing anyone to simply "pass" whenever they feel like it.

While we all have 168 hours each week, some people just seem busier than others. Are you too busy? Do you ever wish, as an early cell phone commercial suggested, that you could "buy an hour?"

Scripture describes a holy tension experienced by God's people of old as they sought to accomplish necessary tasks before Jesus' return. While Jesus was here on earth, Jesus encouraged His people to simply relax in His forgiving arms. He echoed His Father's third commandment about resting. But when Jesus departed this earth, He charged His people with the demanding task of discipling the whole world. Most of us experience a similar tension just seeking to accomplish the necessary tasks of life much less the extra things we wish we had time for.

What does God in His Word say to you as a pastor about "making the most of time?" Your time! Or is it His?

# **Scripture Search**

Allow a few minutes for them to read and react to these verses. Then, again, with the theme, "making the most of time," in mind, invite their reaction to the value or meaning of the verses for them right now.

Read each passage and write a few notes as you react to these verses:

- 1. Deuteronomy 33:25 As your days, so shall your strength be. **God's promise of sufficiency for as long as we live.**
- 2. Psalm 90:9-12 Our days pass quickly Lord, teach us to number them carefully. This is a prayer or plea for insight into God's time and timing, and an indication that we are willing to learn/take instruction from our Heavenly Father!
- 3. Ecclesiastes 3:1-11 There is time for everything. **Or is there? For what do you** "make time," and when do you "not have the time?"
- 4. Matthew 13:24-30 Enemy sowed look-alike weeds among the wheat while the farmers slept. Patience required here! **God grant me patience to accept Your timing**
- 5. Matthew 21:33-41 "They will respect My Son" (vs. 37). But they didn't! Can you share God's patience until His judgment? Your time is in His hands.

- 6. John 2:1-4 Jesus at Cana, "My time hasn't come yet." What does Jesus have in mind for your time today? In the future? Calls elsewhere? Sickness and even death?
- 7. Galatians 4:4-5 At just the right time God sent His Son! Remind exegetes of the two words for time: kairos, right and special time, and kronos, ordinary/clock time.
- 8. Romans 13:11-14 There is a time for sleep and wakefulness. Our task is to discern when each is appropriate. Or do you rest only when too exhausted to go on? (Heb 4:4, "For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: 'And on the seventh day God rested from all his work.") Include here some thoughts about "play." Scripture frequently speaks about "playing" an instrument, (Gen 4:21, 1 Sam 16:18, 23; Ps 33:3; 81:2). Ask, "Why is play important?" Scripture seldom talks about a literal "playing," (Job 40:20; Is 11:8). Ask them to respond to this thought: "Play is the work of children, but adults often graduate from play too quickly and too early!" Ask, "When given the choice to work or play, what is your default setting?" Also ask: "If you feel you don't 'play' enough, what could you do to expand your play time?"
- 9. John 9:4 If day is for work, what is night for? Consider how the invention of the electric light has allowed us to extend our working time well into the hours of darkness.

Ask for additional pertinent verses and, as leader, add your own.

As you are thinking about the theme of this study, include additional verses which you believe are pertinent. For example: Genesis 3:17-19 - Who/what was cursed? Adam, the ground, or his labor? Does this "curse" extend to the <u>activity</u> itself or merely to the <u>time</u> at work? Ask them to comment on the truth or meaning or the statement, "A bad day fishing beats any good day at work!"

### From Our Lutheran Perspective

#### **Small Catechism**

- In His third commandment God urges us to "remember the Sabbath to keep it holy."
   What is God saying to you, personally, right now? How do <u>you sanctify</u> His day?
   Some may recall a time when most stores were closed on Sunday and people actually sat on their front porches or visited others on theirs! What would it take for you to return to these times more often?
- In confessing the First Article of the Apostle's Creed, we acknowledge that God made everything, including time. How do you acknowledge "time" as His gift, and a particular blessing to you? How would you react if someone abused a gift you had given them? How do you believe God feels when we misuse His gift of time to us?
- In the second petition of the Lord's Prayer, we ask, "thy kingdom come." How is God's timing and yours most evident as His Kingdom comes to you? Would others agree with your answer? Would your wife?

#### Large Catechism (79-81)

• "You are to hallow the day of rest.""
Our word "holy day" or "holiday" is so called from the Hebrew word "Sabbath," which properly means to rest, that is, to cease from work; hence our common expression for "stopping work" literally means "taking a holiday." In the Old Testament God set apart the seventh day, appointed it for rest, and commanded it to be kept holy above all other days. As far as outward observance is concerned, the commandment was given to the Jews alone. They were to refrain from hard work and rest, so that human beings and animals might be refreshed and not be exhausted by constant labor. In time, however, the Jews interpreted this commandment too narrowly and grossly misused it. They slandered Christ and would not permit him to do the very same things they themselves did on that day, as we read in the gospel – as if the commandment could be fulfilled by refraining from work of any kind. This was not its intention, but rather, as we shall hear, it meant that we should sanctify the holy day or day of rest. (*The Book of Concord*, Kolb/Wengert, eds. [Fortress, 2000], pp. 396-397)

How and when do you "rest?" Are you more effective when you rest regularly, or when you work non-stop? Read Mark 2:27, and ask, "Was God's gift of the Sabbath for Him or us for us?

### **Luther's Theology of Vocation**

 Medieval Catholicism taught that only priests, nuns and those in other church-work professions have a vocation, a calling from God. The Reformation taught that all Christians have callings from God, including those who work in the so-called secular sphere. [Gene Edward Veith (*The Lutheran Witness*, July, 2001)]

In another article (*The Lutheran Witness*, August, 2001), Veith quotes Luther:

Vocations are "masks of God." On the surface, we see an ordinary human face—our mother, the doctor, the teacher, the waitress, our pastor—but, beneath the appearances, God is ministering to us through them. God is hidden in human vocations.

God's time becomes our time! Make the most of it!

#### **Points to Ponder**

Allow time for the group to work through these points, and lead them in talking about and discussing their observations.

- 1. Review recent entries in your calendar (or check book). Which are wise uses of your time, and which are unwise? How often do you look back (or ahead) at a week, with dread? If you were to "tithe" your time to God, what would that look like?
- 2. When is the clock your friend and when is it your enemy? **Some talk about not taking on** a new activity until they relinquish another? Is that possible for you? Why is this a good idea or why isn't this possible for you?
- 3. Borrowing the title of Mitch Albom's book, *For One More Day,* if you could spend just one more day with someone, who would it be, and why? **An interesting activity, but some may not be comfortable sharing.**

- 4. If you could re-live one moment or time in your life, what would it be and why? **Most often** people would pick pleasant and relaxed times to repeat. During busy and stressed times we may say, "Boy, I hope I never have to do that again!"
- 5. Everyone has been gifted by God with the same number hours each week. Consider the "type" of person whom God calls to be a pastor. Or consider the person who seeks this unusually rewarding calling.
- 6. Why do you believe that if you want something done, you'll ask a busy person?
- 7. Here are several commonly known drivers or stress-producing commands: Be perfect! Be strong! Hurry up! Try harder! You're okay if you please everyone!

  Think about when/where you may have heard each, and how you respond to these challenges: It might also be interesting for them to talk about who most often poses these drivers to them? Is it someone else? Or themselves? Someone "over" or "under" them, or someone with no influence over them?
- 8. How do you respond to people who frequently echo the White Rabbit in <u>Alice in</u> Wonderland; "I'm late. I'm late for a very important date?" **Our response is often** determined by whether or not we are busy at the time of the question, or whether we feel the busyness of the other person is controllable or desirable.
- 9. "The hurrier I go the behinder I get." How is this true and then untrue in your life? **How is** this true or untrue in your life?

#### For Conversation

Given your particular time constraints, you will need to choose from the activities below, hoping that appetites are sufficiently whetted for participants to complete remaining exercises later, on their own.

- 1. Suppose you are sitting down with God over coffee and reviewing your calendar (# 1 above). Write down some of the things you think He would say to you about your current schedule.
- 2. Respond to the following quote, both personally and theologically: "God put me on earth to accomplish a certain number of things. Right now I am so far behind, I will never die." (cf., Deut 33:25, "...your strength will equal your days.")
- 3. Respond to the following quote: "The only thing that is 'done' is a corpse!"
- 4. Consider areas of your life which you feel may be out of balance, and what you can do to improve the balance in your life.

Since this may be very sensitive to some, indicate that their responses will be private unless they choose to share them. As leader you may chose to provide an example as you share first.

	Doing too much	Doing too little
Home		

Remember	er activities you would li balance between work uded below.			
Daily				
Weekly				
Monthly or less often				
Now identify How many 'do them rig could you p	activities you would like "church" things do yo ht? While painful, wh pass these off to? Is it nittees and allow a vac yould step forward to	ou do because you to ich can you elimina to possible just to sto cuum to occur, unti	hink no one else ca te from your regula ep away from some I someone else, mo	an do them, o ar route? Wh
Now identify How many 'do them rig could you p	"church" things do yo ht? While painful, wh pass these off to? Is it nittees and allow a vac	ou do because you to ich can you elimina to possible just to sto cuum to occur, unti	hink no one else ca te from your regula ep away from some I someone else, mo	an do them, o ar route? Wh
Now identify How many 'do them rig could you p tasks/comm	"church" things do yo ht? While painful, wh pass these off to? Is it nittees and allow a vac	ou do because you to ich can you elimina to possible just to sto cuum to occur, unti	hink no one else ca te from your regula ep away from some I someone else, mo	an do them, o ar route? Wh

7. Set personal priorities.

Work

Familiarize yourself with this chart, perhaps practicing with it before you try to lead others through the exercise. If you try it out ahead of time, you may be willing to share with the group how you did.

- Select four issues that are most stressful for you
- Put one into each of the four boxes below.
- With a partner in the group, talk about how you will handle each of these priorities

	You are able to change	You are able to change only with difficulty
High Priority	ONE – Most critical Issues	TWO
	What changes can you make?	How do you plan to cope?
Low Priority	THREE	FOUR – least critical issues
	Are you spending too much time on low priority issues?	Can you accept or forget about these issues?

#### Closing

Return to the theme "Making the Most of Time," and invite some sharing about how participants' attitudes and feelings about time may have changed during the study. Read Eph 5:15-17 again, and stress the "care" which Paul encourages. Invite someone to slowly read the following:

#### Psalm 23 – Antithesis

The Clock is my dictator, I shall not rest.

It makes me lie down only when exhausted.

It leads me to deep depression; it hounds my soul.

It leads me in circles of frenzy for activities sake.

Even though I run frantically from task to task,

I will never get it all done, for my "ideal" is with me;

Deadlines and my need for approval, they drive me.

They demand performance from me, beyond the limits of my schedule.

They anoint my head with migraines; my in-basket overflows.

Surely fatigue and time pressure shall follow me all the days of my life,

And I will dwell in the bonds of frustration forever!

(From *Discipleship Journal*, November, 1990, page 60, by Marcia Hornok. Quoted on page 7 of *Time Traps: Proven Strategies for Swamped Salespeople*, by Todd M. Duncan, Nelson Books. Nashville, 2004.)

Now read the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm as written by David in the Holy Bible, with thoughts about how God has provided for you to make the most of your time.

Invite someone else to slowly read the 23rd Psalm as written by David in the Holy Bible, with thoughts about how God has provided for you to "make the most" of your time.

Close with a circle prayer of thanks similar to the prayer at the start of the session.

#### Some resources:

Six Weeks to a Simplier Lifestyle, by Barbara DeGrote-Sorensen and David Allen Sorenson (Augsburg, 1994).

The Balanced Life: Achieving Success in Work and Love, by Alan Loy McGinnis (Augsburg, 1997).

Quiet Conversations: Concrete Hope for Weary Ministry Leaders, by Alan C. Klaas and Cheryl D. Klaas (Mission Growth Publications, Kansas City, MO, 2000).

*Time Traps: Proven Strategies for Swamped Salespeople*, by Todd M. Duncan (Nelson Books, 2004).

Clergy Self-Care: Finding A Balance for Effective Ministry, by Roy M. Oswald (Alban Institute, 1991).

The Spiritual Leaders Guide to Self Care, by Rochelle Melander and Harold Eppley (Alban Institute, 2002).

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# Faithful & Afire

LCMS Circuit Bible Studies — 2009-2010

The Pastor as Steward

Stewardship Bible Studies for Pastors

Leader's Guide

(Commentary for the leader is in bold print.)

# February, 2010 Conserving Relationships

Pastors by definition are relational and therefore responsible for maintaining and building strong relationships.

The leader may want to assess the group for this study. Do they think this study will be too 'touchy-feely' or not theological enough? Assure them that this study will be as Biblically focused as studies in previous months.

### 1. Focus of This Study

All Christians are called upon to love one another (e.g., 1 John 3-4). This instruction is obviously as much for pastors as it is for laity. Love is described in very relational terms (not human feelings) in 1 Corinthians 13.

Pastors are by definition, God's definition, in a relational office, an office that offers God's love to his people. We are therefore responsible for building and maintaining strong relationships with those Christ has called us to serve. These relationships are not just about horizontal, human emotional connections but exhibit to others that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is incarnate within us. Others, both unbelievers and believers, congregation members and those outside our congregation, are looking for relational evidence that we genuinely believe what we teach and confess about God's love and peace.



#### For Conversation (or Self-Reflection)

These questions are "Law" and may be difficult for some groups to discuss if a high degree of trust has not developed (The Gospel is coming in the "Points to Ponder" section). The leader may opt to read the questions aloud to the group, allowing self-reflection time for each participant, but not expecting discussion. The leader (or the participants) may want to focus on only a couple of the questions.

Do I sometimes approach my role as pastor as if I were a "Lone Ranger," mysterious and emotionally aloof from those I serve? How, specifically, might I do that?

To what degree do I sometimes use the relationships I've developed with others to protect myself and my role rather than to be a 'Seelsorger' (German, soul healer) for others?

What are my motivations for sometimes being impatient, less than gentle, or less than compassionate with others for whom my Lord Jesus gave His life?

How can my life better model the grace, peace, and love Jesus exhibited to his oftenfailing disciples?

#### 2. Scripture Search

• We LC-MS pastors often view ourselves as the "protectors of the faith and of sound doctrine," and well we should. Twenty-five of the 27 books of the New Testament have at least one direct admonition to protect against false teachings. We live in a larger American church context that de-emphasizes the importance of sound doctrine. However we sometimes neglect how this protection of sound, healthy doctrine is taught by the Apostles as a relational enterprise. Take Paul's teaching in Titus 1 as an example. In verses 5-6 Paul instructs Titus to appoint elders in every town; these elders must be above reproach with stable marriages and families. Now notice how many times Paul emphasizes the relational qualities of the men who are to be appointed (NASB with relational descriptions bolded and in italics):

Titus 1:7-9: "For the overseer must be **above reproach** as God's steward, **not self-willed, not quick-tempered**, not addicted to wine, **not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, but hospitable, loving what is good**, sensible, just, devout, **self-controlled**, holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that **he may be able both to exhort** in sound doctrine and **to refute** those who contradict."

#### Word Study of Titus 1: 7-9

"anegkletos" Above reproach, blameless. In this context it does not mean overseers are sinless (although in 1 Corinthians 1:8 and Colossians 1: 22 all Christians are blameless in Christ), but without serious public sin and the disgrace that comes with it. Paul uses the word in both verses 6 & 7.

- "authades" Self-willed, stubborn, arrogant
- "orgilos" Inclined to anger, quick-tempered
- "plektes" Pugnacious, prone to being a bully, overbearing
- "aischrokerdes" Greedy for money, fond of dishonest gain
- "philoxenos" Hospitable (see also 1 Peter 4:9), welcoming (wouldn't it be nice if visitors found all of our churches and pastors as friendly as Walmart?)
- "philagathos" Loving what is good (see 1 Corinthians 13 description of love (agape) as patience, kindness, etc.)
- "egkrates" In full control of oneself, self-disciplined
- "parakalein" To invite, urge, encourage, implore, comfort, exhort. This is a huge New Testament word.
- "elegchein" To exhort, expose, convince, reprove, correct, discipline. Note also 2 Timothy 2: 24-25 about how correction (paideuo) is to be done with patience (anexikakos) and gentleness (prautes).

If time is short, the leader may wish to focus the participants on two or three of the verses from the *Agenda*. Be sure to strive to keep the focus of the discussion on the relational aspects of the verses (Men often do want to talk about something other than relationships). The participants' guide has only a short focus phrase from the verse, so you may want to have someone read the verses aloud in their entirety.

- There are many verses we cite for ordinations and installations of pastors (see LW or LSB Agendas). How do many of these verses focus pastors on the importance of relationships?
  - o John 21:15-17: "Take care of my sheep" Jesus presses Peter three times with the importance of caring for and feeding His beloved lambs. Among domesticated animals, sheep are among the least intelligent and least able to defend themselves. This is the metaphor Christ uses to describe our spiritual condition and our need for the "Good Shepherd." But here the Good Shepherd is calling his undershepherd(s) to faithfully and lovingly care for His sheep.
  - 1 Timothy 4:14-16: "Watch your life and doctrine closely" Do we Lutheran pastors often focus on watching our own and each other's doctrine closely, but neglect watching our lives?
  - 2 Corinthians 5:17-21: "We are Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us." He could have chosen angels with much better social skills than we have, but, in His wisdom, He appointed us.
  - 2 Timothy 4:1-5: "Correct, rebuke, and encourage with great patience..." The Lutheran emphasis from these verses is usually upon "Preach the word" and the warning that people will not appreciate sound (hugiainouses, healthy) teaching. These are obviously key aspects to Paul's teaching here, but pastors should not neglect 'how' this is to be done: "with complete patience... sober-minded, enduring suffering..." Doing all these things in these ways fulfills Pastor Timothy's ministry. We follow in Timothy's legacy.
  - o 1 Timothy 3:1-7: Expands on the Titus 1 verses
  - 1 Peter 5:2-4: "Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care... not domineering... but being examples to the flock." Peter listened to his Lord's instruction (John 21 above) and taught the shepherding metaphor to the next generations. These verses end with the encouraging promise, "And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory."

#### 3. From Our Lutheran Perspective

The Leader may want to say or paraphrase the following: Some pastors diminish the importance of personal relationships, emphasizing that their call is to do Word and Sacrament ministry. While we obviously do emphasize the power of God's Word and sacraments to bring forgiveness and new life to God's people, we should not forget that according to Luther in the Smalcald Articles, the Gospel comes to us in another way, through our relationships with fellow Christians. Note also Paul's words in Romans 1:12 where he seeks mutual encouragement in his Christian faith with the Christians in Rome.

• From the Smalcald Articles, Section 4, Concerning the Gospel, Luther notes that God's grace comes to us in five ways: Spoken word, baptism, Sacrament of the Altar, power of the keys, "and also through the mutual conversation and consolation of brothers and sisters. Matthew 18[:20]: "Where two or three are gathered..." (Kolb & Wengert edition, p. 319)

We often view the Reformation primarily as a doctrinal dispute. But what motivated Luther to publish the 95 Theses and lead the Reformation was not a desire for academic debate, but his pastoral heart and concern that people's souls were being led astray by papal indulgences. The following Luther quote emphasizes how important he thought pastors' attitudes and willingness to love were to the pastoral office.

- o Luther (in a 1544 letter):
  - Men who hold the office of the ministry should have the heart of a mother toward the church; for if they have no such heart, they soon become lazy and disgusted, and suffering, in particular, will find them unwilling. The Lord indicates this very beautifully in John 21 when He makes Peter a preacher and, before doing so, asks him three times: "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" (v. 15ff). As though He would say: Unless your heart toward the sheep is like that of a mother toward her children a mother, who walks through fire to save her children you will not be fit to be a preacher. Labor, work, unthankfulness, hatred, envy, and all kinds of sufferings will meet you in this office. If, then, the mother heart, the great love, is not there to drive the preachers, the sheep will be poorly served (from Plass, What Luther Says, p. 932).

If there is time the leader could include something like: As Luther said in the quote, pastors are called to endure many difficulties in human relationships, e.g., unthankfulness, hatred, envy. Consider Matthew 18: 21-35, the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant, in light of the following Oswald Chambers quote:

Watch the kind of people God brings around you, and you will be humiliated to find that this is His way of revealing to you the kind of person you have been to Him. "Now," He says, "exhibit to that one exactly what I have shown to you" (*My Utmost for His Highest*, September 11).

#### 4. Points to Ponder

The 'Points to Ponder' is the most explicit Gospel in this study and should not be overlooked lest the participants leave feeling burdened by their lack of stewardship in relationships. All of our stewardship (time, talent, treasures, relationships, etc.) is compelled by our response to the Gospel (like thunder to lightning as Tom Ries quotes Karl Barth in the October 2009 Circuit Study).

If participants have never read Bonhoeffer's Life Together: A Discussion of Christian Fellowship, encourage them to do so. It is a wonderful pastoral/theological (not socio-psychological) treatise on the importance of Christian community, something we individualistic Americans need much help with. Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, (students, staff, and faculty) is reading the book together this year in order to help build our sense of Christian community. It's a short read (110 pages) and worth a re-read for

anyone who has not picked it up in five years. Bonhoeffer was feeling the persecution of Hitler's Nazi Germany when he wrote these poignant words.

• In the first pages of *Life Together*, Bonhoeffer reminds us:

"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Ps. 133:1).... It is not simply to be taken for granted that the Christian has the privilege of living among other Christians. Jesus Christ lived in the midst of his enemies. At the end all his disciples deserted him....

"The physical presence of other Christians is a source of incomparable joy and strength to the believer. Longingly, the imprisoned apostle Paul calls his 'dearly beloved son in the faith,' Timothy, to come to him in prison....

"The believer feels no shame, as though he were still living too much in the flesh, when he yearns for the physical presence of other Christians. Man was created a body, the Son of God appeared on earth in the body, he was raised in the body, in the sacrament the believer receives the Lord Christ in the body, and the resurrection of the dead will bring about the perfected fellowship of God's spiritual-physical creatures. The believer therefore lauds the Creator, the Redeemer, God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, for the bodily presence of a brother. The prisoner, the sick person, the Christian in exile sees in the companionship of a fellow Christian a physical sign of the gracious presence of the triune God" (pp. 17, 19-20).

• Relationships with fellow Christians, even the difficult ones, are truly gifts to us from God. After the pure Gospel of Ephesians 2:8-9, we are reminded (v.10), "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." All stewardship, including the stewardship of conserving relationships, flows from our response to the grace of Jesus Christ. Relating in peace, love, and unity with fellow Christians, as far as it is possible for us to do (Romans 12: 18), are those good works God has prepared in advance for us to do.

#### 5. For Conversation

Allow at least 20 minutes for conversation in groups of three. You may want to ask each group to focus on just two-three from the questions provided (probably 3, 4, and 5). Encourage each group to pray for one another with a focus on specific needs.

- M.D.'s who prescribe potentially life-saving medications or procedures to their patients are sometimes ignored (even fired) if their relational skills ("bed-side manner") are poor. In what ways is the importance of relational skills of pastors similar to those of M.D.'s? In what ways might the vocations' relational skills be different?
- Pastors do differ in their EQ (the new term for emotional intelligence), personalities (e.g., introversion and extraversion) and social skills. In what ways do the Biblical emphases of love, gentleness, peace, etc., transcend EQ and social skills? In what ways do they not transcend social skills? In what ways are relational skills culturally dependent (e.g., what is simply assertive on the East Coast of the USA may be considered aggressive in some rural Midwest settings)?
- Just like some children are 'easier to love' than others, some parishioners are "easier to love" than others are. How does the Gospel of Jesus Christ empower you as a pastor to love those who are, at times, difficult to love?

- Share with one another situations in which you showed an extra measure of patience and gentleness with someone in your parish and found this extra effort resulting in a noticeable pastoral effect.
- Brother pastors can mutually encourage one another in the Gospel, building each other up so that each can better share the Gospel and feed the 'sheep' God has placed under their care. Discuss among yourselves how you are already mutually encouraging one another and how you might strive to do that more intentionally. Invite participants to give thanks for the mutual encouragement they are already receiving from each other.



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# Faithful & Afire

LCMS Circuit Bible Studies — 2009-2010

# The Pastor as Steward Stewardship Bible Studies for Pastors

Leader's Guide

(Commentary for the leader is in bold print.)

# All Creatures Great and Small March, 2010

#### 1. Focus of This Study

"Daddy, will our dog Lucky be in heaven when we get there?" **The question raises a** fundamental curiosity about the nature of the age to come following the resurrection of the body.

Approximately 46 million of us are bird watchers. Another 100 million people visit zoos and aquariums every year—more people than attend all sporting events in America combined. We might add that many studies have shown that animals play important roles in the psychological well-being of children in hospitals to elderly people in nursing homes.

#### What are the issues?

- For what purpose did God create such an extravagant diversity of nonhuman creatures (fish, animals, birds, etc.) since Adam and Eve did not need them for food or clothing?
  - Many tend to assume that everything was created exclusively for our use and to do with as we wish. It is this anthropocentric position that many in the environmental movement find objectionable and destructive.
- What place do other nonhuman creatures have within the story of how God created, reclaims, and renews his creation?
  - Do we think of the eschatological age in purely spiritual terms? Is it only for humans or does God reclaim and restore His entire creation?
- Why do we find ourselves fascinated by and drawn to other creatures, a
  phenomenon that Edward Wilson, the Harvard entomologist, calls "biophilia," a love
  for living things?
  - What is it that fascinates us about elephants, tigers, polar bears, wolves, birds, butterflies, snakes? Do we need them to draw us out of ourselves?
- What are our stewardship responsibilities toward other creatures, both tame and wild?

How ought we treat animals that are used in laboratories for research or raised in industrial farms? What are our responsibilities toward wild animals and their habitats?

#### 2. Scripture Search

An "ecological doxology" (Joseph Sittler) — Psalm 104:10-31

Psalm 104, is an "ecological doxology." In many ways it involves a retelling of the story of Genesis 1 but with an emphasis on God's ongoing provision for creation even now after the Fall.

First, God has given every kind of creature (the Bible mentions over 120 different species) a place to live on this planet. Like a master gardener God designed and laid out the landscape of His garden. One might say God created different kinds of "garden rooms" ranging from mountains, to deserts, to grasslands, to fresh waters, to salt waters, to marshes, to forests, to hot springs. Those rooms are set to a variety of climates ranging from hot to cold and from humid to dry. Then He filled each one of these rooms with creatures specially suited for them. We see birds make their nests in the cedar trees and storks in the pine trees (v 17). Wild goats live on the high mountains while coneys seek refuge in the crags (v 18). The sea is vast and spacious, again teeming with creatures beyond number—living things both large and small (v 25). In this creation, humans have a place for they, too, are one part of creation.

Second, God provides for the continued well-being of all His creatures. After establishing boundaries for the water, God channels it into valleys. He pours springs into the ravines between mountains and gives water to the beasts of the field, to wild donkeys, birds, and trees until the entire earth is satisfied. In addition, He makes plants to grow for the cattle to eat and for humans to cultivate thereby bringing food from the earth. God provides prey for the wild animals. All of these creatures look to God to give them their food at the proper time. God provides for them all. Humans live in the same relationship to God as do other creatures—they are dependent upon Him, and He fills their life with gusto. Within this creation, birds sing (v 12), wine gladdens hearts (15) and the Leviathan frolics (26).

Third, each creature carries out its God-given purpose within its God-given place. In Psalm 104 the moon marks off the seasons, the sun marks off days and nights. Of special interest here is the symbiosis of human and animal activities. When the sun goes down, the beasts of the forest prowl and the lions roar in search of food. Each creature seeks its good. But when the sun comes up, the wild animals retreat to their dens for sleep, and God's human creatures come out to work in the fields until evening. Humans are one part of creation, creatures among creatures, but are they not the beginning and end of creation. Some creatures may exist for no other purpose than for God's amusement and delight as is the case with the Leviathan. The Psalmist concludes with the hope that the Lord may rejoice in His works (v 31).

#### "Where the wild things live" — Job 38-40

We live in an age of unparalleled human knowledge about our world—and with it control of the world. Much of it has been good, but not all of it. In the wake of the scientific revolution, we came to picture the physical world as a machine that operated according to the laws of physics. One cog turned another cog. The world as a machine operated in a predictable manner. Wendell Berry noted the consequences of such thinking: "If the world and all its creatures are machines, then the world and all its creatures are entirely comprehensible, manipulable, and controllable by humans." After all, "knowledge is power."

Thinking that the world is ordered in ways that are predictable and controllable is not new. In fact, that's what the book of Job about. Job and his friends assumed that they knew how the world worked. It was ordered and predictable. In some ways, they thought about it the way we might think about a machine. When you know how it works you can predict what will happen with near mathematical precision. When you know how it works you can then "control" it for your own benefit. Thus in his suffering, Job laments that the system did not work for him as it should. He was a righteous man who suffered as if he were unrighteous. And so Job brought charges of a faulty design and unjust governance against God. ""

God responds to Job from within a whirlwind in two speeches that initially seem irrelevant. The first questions the extent of human knowledge about the world and its design (Job 38-39). The second challenges human attempts to make the world work in predictable ways (Job 40-41). In both cases, God challenges Job's preconceptions by showing him the wild things of the world—wild animals, the wild sea, and wild weather (rain, hail, ice, snow, lightning, uncertainties of the night). Od's creation is mysterious precisely because it does not conform to human purposes."

In the first speech, God describes a creation that is ordered in unconventional ways by human standards. "God celebrates the wild ass, to which Job earlier likened himself (6:5), and which Zophar had then taken as an epitome of stupidity (11:12)." God has freed the wild ass and now it runs in search of pasture in areas that humans avoid. Similarly, God celebrates the wild ox, "who does not find its food in a human crib, nor is bound to the furrow with ropes." The ostrich provides a striking example of God's unconventional thinking (39:13-17). As Janzen notes, birds in the Bible are often "celebrated for building nests in the safety of high trees and rocks." It is a "birdly wisdom" that humans should emulate. Yet it can also become an example self-reliance that distrusts God and leads to injustice (Habakkuk 2:9). In contrast with human attempts to secure themselves within a dangerous world, "the ostrich lays its eggs on the unguarded ground." It is folly. Yet God celebrates it.

The second speech addresses God's governance. God parades before Job two gigantic creatures, the Behemoth and the Leviathan (hippopotamus and crocodile?). They are part of a wonderfully diverse creation. But these good creatures are beyond human control. Human beings by comparison have limited strength and agility. They cannot "bring under their control the very creature that God has made any more than they could bring all the wicked in the world to their just end" (40:10-14). The "proud" cannot bring these creatures to heel (40:11-12). To the contrary, these creatures rule over "all who are proud" (41:34). God made these creatures integral parts of his creation. He expresses delight in the Leviathon (41:12-34). God creates a world that "has

elements of the extraordinary, the beautiful, the bizarre, and the irregular." We would not have designed them this way.

So what might we learn from Job? We live in a creation is God's doing and not our doing. He designed it; we did not. This does not mean that God did not give us any capacity for knowing it. But it does suggest that we live within certainly creaturely limits when it comes to our capacity for understanding the complexities of the creation that God has placed into our care. Solomon speaks of eagles and serpents as wonderful and beyond his comprehension (Proverbs 30). We do not understand the mystery is that is other creatures. We cannot see the world or experience the world as they do. We cannot understand what goes through their minds or feelings. "Exactly what the world is like for a robin or a rabbit or wolf or elephant or any animal we can only guess, a mystery that science may approach but never really grasp, like the mysteries of our own heart and mind."xi

• Showing compassion for God's creatures: **Deuteronomy 22:1-4; 6-7**; Leviticus 22:27-28; **Matthew 12:11-12**; Luke 14:5; Luke 13:15-16

The Scriptures enjoin us to show compassion for our fellow creatures. The Israelites were to care for the land and treat their animals humanely. They were to relieve overburdened animals (Deuteronomy 22:1-4). The counsel about taking the young birds from the nest can be understood as preserving the source that will produce young again (Deut 22:6-7), but it can also understood as compassion for the bird as well. Leviticus forbids the slaughter of an animal together with its young (22:27-28). Proverbs provides the general principle: "Whoever is righteous has regard for the life of his beast, but the mercy of the wicked is cruel" (12:10).

Compassion also lies behind the need to help animals on the Sabbath. Bauckham notes that each time the issue arose, Jesus pointed out that the law was generally understood as requiring the considerate treatment of animals. And so it would be appropriate on the Sabbath to lift a sheep from the pit (Matthew 12:11-12), to pull an ox out of a well (Luke 14:5), and to untie an ox or donkey in order to give it water (Luke 13:15-16). Bauckham argues that these exceptions to the prohibition of work on the Sabbath were remarkable because they do not involve cases in which "the lives of the animals were in danger, and so they cannot be understood as motivated by a concern to preserve the animals as valuable property. Rather they are acts of compassion, intended to prevent animal suffering."

• The restoration of creation's harmony: **Mark 1:13; cf.** Genesis 9:10, 12, 15, 17; 8:12; Isaiah 11:6-11; Hosea 2:18. Cf. Isaiah 56:17; 55:12-13.

One passage is especially suggestive as it speaks of the messianic age inaugurated by Jesus. Mark 1:13 reads, "And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him" (ESV). Jesus begins his messianic ministry by going out into the wilderness. Generally speaking, wilderness in the Scriptures does not refer to the rugged beauty and rich biological diversity with which we associate wilderness in North America. Instead, wilderness generally refers to the non-human sphere of creation that exists outside of human control and that was the antithesis of civilization. It is frequently described as barren desert unsuitable for human habitation. People feared that wilderness

(desertification) might encroach on the precarious fertility and fragile ecosystems of land that could be cultivated. xiv

So when Jesus goes out into the wilderness He encounters nonhuman beings, namely, Satan, angels, and wild animals. By going out to be "with them," Jesus signals the dawn of the Messianic age as portrayed in Isaiah 11:6-9 (see also Ezekiel 28:13-14; Hosea 2:18-19). His action recalls the prophecy of Isaiah who spoke of the Messianic age in terms of peace between the domesticated human world (lamb, kid, calf, bullock, cow) and the wild nonhuman world (wolf, leopard, lion, bear, poisonous snakes).\* In this context, Jesus goes out into the wilderness and is "with the wild animals." Bauckham suggests that this phrase is used to suggest a close association or friendship. Jesus is in peaceable harmony with the wild animals. "Jesus does not terrorize or dominate the wild animals, he does not domesticate or even make pets of them. He is simply 'with them."..."He lets them be in peace."

#### 3. From Our Lutheran Perspective

- We usually translate the first article of Luther's Small Catechism, "God has created me and all creatures." But it should read, "God created me together with [sampt] all creatures."
- "Perhaps the human being would find a helper suitable among these brothers and sisters—for that is what they are, the animals who have the same origin as humankind does."... "As far as I know, nowhere else in the history of religions have animals been spoken of in terms of such a significant relation" (Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 96-97).
- "Delight is the basis of right use.".... "To enjoy a thing is to permit it to be what it is prior to and apart form an instrumental assessment of it, and some things are to be so enjoyed" (Joseph Sittler, *Evocations of Grace*, pp. 53, 56). \*\*Viii

#### 4. Points to Ponder

- God is a God of extravagant generosity. When the famous evolutionary biologist J.
   B. S. Haldane was asked what he had learned about the Creator from his work, he replied, "He [God] had an inordinate fondness for beetles!"
- The existence of God's wild creatures reminds us that everything on earth does not exist to serve our needs alone. Instead, many of them exist for God's delight, are valued by Him, and are cared for him apart from any use that they may have for us.
- All creatures are given a place and purpose within God's creation (Psalm 104) and ultimately sing His praises as part of the choir that is all of creation (Ps 148).
- Other creatures may not have been created in the image of God but they are fellow creatures with whom we share a common origin, are made of the same stuff, share a common life pattern, and have been given the promise of a new covenant.
   Note in Genesis we are made from the ground and are called *nephesh* (Genesis 2:7, 9, 19; 1:20), we all were given the blessing to procreate (Genesis 1:22), and we all share a common life (eating, raising young, seeking food).

 We have no warrant to cause the extinction of any species (through habitat loss, invasive species, pollution, population, overharvesting). This diminishes creation and us.

By the way we live, we contribute to the disruption and destruction of habitats and with it the accelerated extinction or near extinction of many of God's creatures. Of all the ecological issues that we face, the extinction of species is the one irreversible action to which we contribute. The very word extinction may send chills down one's spine. It is "not just the death of an individual—but of all the individuals—past, present, and potential—that collectively make up a species." Scientists estimate that over 170 amphibian species have gone extinct in recent years and another thirty to fifty percent are threatened with extinction. A number of reasons account for this. Conservation biologists summarize those factors with the acronym HIPPO. It stands for Habitat destruction, Invasive Species, Pollution, Population, and Overharvesting.

The loss of biodiversity (also in seeds and foods) may result in a homogenized world with a bland sameness everywhere we go in the same way that a few chains like McDonalds or Walmart have become ubiquitous as they have crowded out local stores along with the local culture from which they arose. Then a few species may become ubiquitous in the place of the multitudes of different species created by God. Unfortunately, the loss of diversity may not trouble us. Studies in user satisfaction have demonstrated that humans are adaptable to lesser qualities of nature. Consider life in the modern city and how we have adapted to starless skies and treeless avenues. Rene Dubois puts it bluntly: "humankind is so adaptable that we can adapt to hell on earth and never know that we are its prisoners." XXIII

#### 5. For Conversation

Wendell Berry, the Kentucky farmer and agrarian essayist, commented that, once
material sufficiency is met, "life itself, which is a membership in the living world
(italics added), is already an abundance" (The Way of Ignorance).

The questions we face in the Western world early in the 21<sup>st</sup> century center on such questions as: How do we define ourselves? How shall we live? And what constitutes a well-lived life? Questions about our values arise such as: How much is enough?" And with that question, "Enough for what?" Do we define ourselves by what we purchase and consume or by how we live in our creaturely relationships? C.S. Lewis has pointed out that our problem is not the love of material things. God loves material things—He invented them. Our problem lies not so much in the love of material things as in the love of quantities of material things.

The questions of consumption and waste go to issues of our lifestyle and the impact of that lifestyle upon our fellow creatures in a day when "we have unlimited appetites and unlimited means to pursue them." With the emphasis on quantities, moreover, a person might calculate "acceptability" of environmental degradation in terms of collateral damage. In other words, one often defends "long term damage for short term gain." XXV

What would happen instead if we defined ourselves in terms of creaturely relationships? God created us as members of a larger creaturely community. And so our creaturely desires are to some extent circumscribed by the needs

of other creatures. We might take into account the needs of our fellow nonhuman creatures for habitat and food. This is not to say that they are as valuable to God as His human creatures. They aren't. But that does not mean that God does not care for them. He does. Thus the question being raised here is not one of human life versus animal life. It is a question about how we will live with God, with each other, and with creation. Again, as Wendell Berry has noted, once material sufficiency has been met, "life itself, which is a membership in the living world, is itself an abundance."

- Richard Bauckham suggests that Deut 17:14-20 might provide a paradigm for our exercise of dominion. Israel was to choose a king from among the brothers so that he would not become a tyrant. We look after creation as "creatures among fellow creatures."
  - God gave us dominion as creatures among fellow creatures. In other words, God gives us authority "within creation, not over it." Here we might draw upon the idea of a brother-king (Deut 17:14-20) as a model for our dominion. When God allowed Israel to have a king He insisted that he rule "as a brother or sister 'rules' over the others in the family." Richard Bauckham points out that in this way God sought to subvert ordinary and secular notions of kingship. Israel's king must never forget that he is a brother so as not to become a tyrant. XXIX Thus a king's rule equals service (1 King 12:7). This model of kingship finds its perfect expression in Jesus. As the Creator He became a creature and came into the world not to be served but to serve (Mark 10:45) and exhorted His followers to the same manner of life (Mt 5:5). And so as our Lord He is at the same time our brother, so we who have dominion are at the same time creatures among fellow creatures.
- Animals were not on the dinner menu for Adam and Eve in Genesis 1 & 2. Eating them is not a commandment but a concession after the Flood. Wendell Berry suggests that when we eat them, we eat "the broken body of creation." How and what we eat determines how the animals we eat were raised and treated. What might this suggest for the way we eat today?
  Do you find that more and more young people are becoming vegetarians? What about animals that were raised in mass confinement industrial farms? Would it be more humane to eat animals that were allowed to live their short lives as God created them to do? In other words, are chickens and turkeys
- Matthew Scully, a speech writer for George W. Bush, suggested that it is "by default that Peter Singer and others with no religious faith are left to champion the causes of animals" because we [Christians] have so little to say on practices that we know are inhumane and cruel (*Dominion*, 135). Why have Christians said so little on this topic?

straw bed beneath them? Are cattle allowed to range in fields?

allowed to spread their wings? Are hogs allowed to see the sunlight and feel a

The last several decades has witnessed the rise of an animal rights movement that has directed its attention especially at animal abuse in the food industry, entertainment industry, clothing industry, and laboratories. One of the largest and most well-known advocacy groups for animal rights is PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals). Its founder, Ingrid Newkirk, has said, "When it comes to pain, love, joy, loneliness, and fear, a rat is a pig is a dog is a boy. Each one values his or her life and fights the knife." The intellectual foundation for the movement came from Princeton Professor Peter Singer's 1975 book, Animal Liberation. He did not argue for animal rights, but did argue that we determine all ethical action on whether or not one experienced suffering and pleasure.

Conservatives often charge that Singer and animal advocacy groups equate the value of human life and animal life. Some of that criticism is well-deserved. But where have been the Christian voices objecting to the abuse of animals? Scully suggests that if it were not to oppose the radicalism of animal rights groups, many Christian thinkers would say nothing at all about the compassionate treatment of animals.

Robert Frost: "The question that he frames in all but words; Is what to make of a diminished thing.' Jonathan Rosen asks, "How do you relate to nature when so much of it is gone? ... How do you embrace the natural world in an era of urbanization?" xxx

At the turn of the twentieth century, Robert Frost wrote a poem titled, "The Ovenbird." It speaks about a small brown woodland bird with a rusty-colored crown that lives on the ground. It constructs its nest on its side so that it resembles a Dutch oven—hence the name. In this poem, Frost lamented the loss of rural America with "highway dust all over." In the last two lines, Frost asks,

"The question that he frames in all but words Is what to make of a diminished thing."xxxi

Jonathan Rosen observes that in the wake of the Armenian genocide of 1915 and the Jewish Holocaust, we are faced with a diminished natural world and a diminished humanity. In its own way, Frost echoes Paul's statement that all creation groans awaiting its liberation. The world is diminished in light of sin. But it is still God's good world and will be restored. In the meantime, what do we make of it? How do we live with it? To that question we now turn. "How do you relate to nature when so much of it is gone? ... How do you embrace the natural world in an era of urbanization?" xxxiii

- If God makes a covenant with not only human beings but also all the animals, what
  might this suggest for how we think about the eschatological age to come?
   We need to speak less about the goal of the Christian life as dying and going
  to heaven as a disembodied soul and more in terms of being raised up on the
  last day and living in the renewed physical creation. Too often we think of
  dying and going to heaven as the main event and being raised up on the last
  day as icing on the cake. In point of fact, dying and being with Jesus is the
  appetizer for the main event of the resurrection of the body and the new
  creation.
- The following prayer is attributed to St. Basil the Great, key author of the third article in the Nicene Creed:

O God, enlarge within us the sense of fellowship With all living things, our brothers the animals To whom thou gavest the earth as their home in common with us

We remember with shame that in the past we have exercised the high dominion (of humankind] with ruthless cruelty

So that the voice of the earth, which should have gone up to thee in song, Has been a groan of travail.

May we realize that they live not for us alone But for themselves and for thee, And that they love the sweetness of life<sup>xxxiii</sup> Dr. Charles Arand, Professor of Systematic Theology The Waldemar A. and June Schuette Endowed Chair Chairman of the Department of Systematic Theology Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO arandc@csl.edu

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Terrence E. Fretheim, God and World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 234

iv Fretheim, 329

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>v</sup> Wendell Berry, *The Art of the Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, ed Norman Wirzba (Washington, D.C.: Shoemacher and Hoard, 2005), 298

vi J. Gerald Janzen, "Creation and the Human Predicament in Job, Ex Auditu (Pickwick Publications, 1987), 50

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>vii</sup> Janzen, 50

viii Janzen, 50.

ix Fretheim, 236

x Fretheim, 239

xi Matthew Scully, *Dominion: The Power of Man, the Suffering of Animals, and the Call to Mercy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2002), 5.

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xvi Bauckham, "Jesus and Animals,"59.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>xx</sup> Wildlife Conservation Society, *State of the Wild: A Global Portrait of Wildlife, Wildlands, and Oceans, 2008-2009,* (Washington: Island Press, 2008), xii.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>xxii</sup> Fred Van Dyke, David C. Mahan, Joseph K. Sheldon, Raymond H. Brand, *Redeeming Creation: The Biblical Basis for Environmental Stewardship* (Inter-varsity Press, 1996)., 45.

xxiii Wendell Berry, Art of the Commonplace, 301.

xxiv Scully, Dominion, 45.

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xxx Rosen, 153-154.

xxxi Rosen, 153.

xxxii Rosen, 153-154.

xxxiii St. Basil the Great, in *The Westminster Collection of Christian Prayers*, ed. Dorothy M. Stewart (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 6. Quoted in Ellen F. Davis, Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 46.



# Faithful & Afire

LCMS Circuit Bible Studies — 2009-2010

# The Pastor as Steward Stewardship Bible Studies for Pastors

#### Leader's Guide

(A commentary for leaders is provided in bold print.)

## TO OUR GOOD HEALTH April, 2010

#### I. Focus of the Study

J. I. Packer once wrote in an article in Christianity Today.

Twice it has been my privilege to introduce Joni Eareckson, who is a quadriplegic...Each time I have ventured to predict that her message would show her to be the healthiest person in the building—a prediction which, so far as I could judge, came true both times.

Describing exactly what constitutes "good health" or what makes a person "healthy" is a difficult thing to do. There will always be a variety of opinions about which criteria should be considered and which are most important.

When the World Health Organization (WHO) was created in 1948, health was defined as being "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." Increasingly, the world has come to think of health in a more holistic way, involving far more than the physical well-being of the individual.

Most of us probably think of health in physical terms because that is the way most of the media and literature address it. Even our Concordia Plan Bulletin seems most concerned about how we can do more to promote good health and live "healthy" lives by being attentive to the care of our bodies. The Scriptures, however, seem to have a minimal concern with physical health, even though the New Testament was written in the context of a Greek culture which almost glorified the human body and vigorously promoted its well being. Instead, the Scriptures think of health in a much more holistic way, placing more emphasis on the spiritual and primarily on our relationship to God as the key to health.

#### For Conversation

- What are the primary factors in achieving/maintaining health?
- Why would a country like ours with so many blessings not be the healthiest place to live?
- What are the main factors that contribute to people being unhealthy?

Thinking of health in a holistic way will cause us to answer these questions in very different ways. The spiritual dimension of health is difficult if not impossible to quantify, but can perhaps be discerned in more subjective ways. Many studies have demonstrated that those who have a strong spiritual dimension in their lives/families have lower incidences of some of the major health problems.

#### 2. Scripture Study

- In the Old Testament, health is related in a fundamental way to a relationship with God that demands obedience. Disobedience produced disease and made manifest a disrupted relationship with God.
  - o Psalm 38:3-8, 17-18

Note how the Psalmist relates his lack of health to his own sin and the overwhelming guilt that he bears because of his folly. Pain, festering wounds, and sickness are all related to sin.

- o Exodus 15:26
- o Exodus 23:25-26
- o Deuteronomy 7:12-15

In all of the above passages God promises health and prosperity to those who remain faithful to the covenant and the curse of disease and plague on those who do not keep the requirements of the covenant.

- The above passages all deal with the relationship between health/sickness and sin. You may want to look at some specific examples of God's judgment upon Miriam (Numbers 12); David and Bathsheba's son (2 Samuel 12:15ff); Elisha's servant, Gehazi (2 Kings 5:25ff), and David (2 Samuel 24:10ff).
- Shalom is the Hebrew word that comes the closest to describing what we usually
  mean by health (well-being), but it means far more than just physical well-being. It
  encompasses the fullness of well-being in all dimensions of life.
  - o Numbers 25:12
  - o Malachi 2:5

In both of these passages God speaks about a covenant of *shalom*, first with Eleazar and then with Levi, because of the reverence and zeal they demonstrated in honoring the name of the Lord. We might easily refer to this covenant as a promise of wholeness and health, based upon their faithfulness to God and His covenant.

- Health in the New Testament is blessedness and holiness:
  - o I Thessalonians 5:23-24 (the only verse in the New Testament where the three terms, body, soul and spirit are brought together)

- Matthew 5:1-10
- St. Paul introduces the idea that our bodies deserve special attention because they are the "temples of the Holy Spirit."
  - o I Corinthians 3:16-17
  - o I Corinthians 6:18-20
  - Romans 8:9-11

Here there should be an interesting discussion of these passages that deal with body as the "temple of the Holy Spirit." What would St. Paul say about those who do not care for their physical health or take no regard for how their over-consumption might not honor God with their bodies?

#### 3. From Our Lutheran Perspective

From the Large Catechism, on Baptism:

Think about it. Imagine there was a doctor somewhere who understood the art of saving people from death or, even though they died, could restore them quickly to life so that they would afterward live forever. Oh, how the world would pour in money like snow and rain. No one could find access to him because of the throng of the rich! But here in Baptism there is freely brought to everyone's door such a treasure and medicine that it utterly destroys death and preserves all people alive.

We must think this way about Baptism and make it profitable for ourselves. So when our sins and conscience oppress us, we strengthen ourselves and take comfort and say, "Nevertheless, I am baptized. And if I am baptized, it is promised to me that I shall be saved and have eternal life, both in soul and body." For that is the reason why these two things are done in Baptism: the body—which can grasp nothing but the water—is sprinkled and, in addition, the Word is spoken for the soul to grasp. Now, since both, the water and the Word, make one Baptism, therefore body and soul must be saved and live forever (I Corinthians 15:53). The soul lives through the Word, which it believes, but the body lives because it is united with the soul and also holds on through Baptism as it is able to grasp it. We have, therefore, no greater jewel in body and soul. For by Baptism we are made holy and are saved (I Corinthians 6:11). No other kind of life, no work upon earth, can do this. (*The Large Catechism*, 43-46, Concordia, The Lutheran Confessions)

Baptism reminds us that God is concerned not only about the soul but also about our bodies. He who created us and redeemed us has given eternal value and dignity to our bodies. He has promised to raise us up from the dead, to give new and glorified bodies. Obviously, He cares about the whole of us, and that has implications for how we care for our bodies.

#### 4. Points to Ponder

- The Scriptures think of health as much more than physical and mental well-being. Health also involves the wholeness of our emotional, social, and spiritual potential.
- God's presence in His grace makes possible true health and hope.
- The healing miracles of Jesus are signs of both the human predicament of sin and the redemption Jesus initiates in His kingdom.
- Sickness and healing in the Scriptures are not presented from a medical or scientific point of view, but always in terms of the relationship between the Creator and His creatures.
- God did not create people to experience disease. Sickness is the result of an alien invasion of sin. Jesus came to destroy this alien power, and His ministry of healing the sick and diseased is a sign of His redemptive power.

#### 5. For Conversation

"Life has taught us to endure many things, but disease presents a challenge that renders us vulnerable. Disease is a sign that all is not well; it is the symbol of our human frailty. We yearn for the aliveness we feel when we are healthy." (Garth Ludwig, *Order Restored*, p.11.)

"Men may be sound in body and agile in mind, and yet be devoid of wholeness...Any really effective ministry of healing must begin with a full appreciation of the nature of sin and the scope of its devastation...Advocates of healing recognize man's frustrations, his loneliness, his feeling of a great void in life; but they rarely sound the depths of man's basic ailment, which is the disruption and distortion of the very relationships in which he was created to live." (Martin Scharlemann, *Healing and Redemption*, p.28-9.)

• What does the Biblical understanding of health say about pastoral care?

"A Christian congregation serves as a potent therapeutic community when it develops its various resources for liberating men from the exaggerated individualism and consequent isolation which characterizes so much of our contemporary life." (Scharlemann, *Healing and Redemption*, p.104.)

- How can we help to make the local congregation a more caring, healing community?
- How does the exaggerated individualism of our culture impact the issue of health?

Be sure to close your session by giving pastors a chance to pray for one another.

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## **FAITHFUL & AFIRE**

#### The Pastor as Steward

LCMS Circuit Bible Studies, 2009-2010

#### Leaders's Guide

#### Gifts and Graces

Pastors are called to equip the saints, helping God's people identify and use their gifts and talents in ministry.

(Commentary for Leaders is in BOLD print.)

#### Focus of this Study

It may be helpful to remind those pastors who have been participating in these Bible studies (or to inform those who are new) how we first began these studies back in September. Remind (inform) participants that we have been exploring what it means to "go green" in our ministry.

One of the first questions posed in this year's initial Circuit Bible Study, "The Pastor as Steward," was this one: "If God is green, does that make LCMS pastors green, too?" Now that we've arrived at the last study in this series, how about this question: "What makes a LCMS pastor blue?"

Could it be the burden of his responsibility? Might the "blue" LCMS pastor be blue because of the unrealistic demands and expectations many in his congregation may have of him? Or could he be blue because he has been trying to do the ministry too often by himself?

The focus of this study is an examination of the pastor as equipper of the saints. Pastors serve in a variety of roles in their congregations. Above all they are charged with preaching the Word and administering the Sacraments. Pastors also have the awesome responsibility and joy of helping people discover and use their gifts in ministry.

#### For Conversation

- 1. What is your response to being a "blue" pastor? Have you ever been there? If so, what have you discovered about how you become blue?
  - If not evident by now, the reference to "blue" has to do with a pastor's sadness or discouragement, surely something that all pastors deal with from time to time. Perhaps this is getting too serious too fast, but this may also provide opportunity along the way, and certainly at the close of your time together, to pray for and care for pastors who may be suffering from some "blueness."
- 2. How would you rate yourself as an "equipper of the saints?"
  - Hopefully this question serves as a thought-provoker intended to assist you with diving into the Word on this matter.

#### **Scripture Search**

• Ephesians 4:11-12

<sup>11</sup>It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup>to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up...

The Greek word (*katartizmon*) translated here in the NIV as "prepare," has quite a number of additional translations: KJV translates it as "perfecting;" the ESV and NASB as "equipping." The Amplified Bible does just that—it amplifies this in its translation, "His intention was the perfecting and full equipping of the saints..."

The result of saints being equipped is a stronger and more mature body.

• 2 Timothy 3:16-17

<sup>16</sup>All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup>so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Here is another reference from St. Paul to show how important it is that the individual believer be thoroughly equipped. If equipping the saints is one of the functions of the pastor, here we see our greatest tool for such equipping—God's Word. When pastors diligently preach the Law and the Gospel in all of its power, believers will mature and, as Paul says here, they will be ready for not just some or a few good works, but for "every good work."

• Ephesians 2:10

<sup>10</sup>For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

The Greek word here translated, "workmanship," is "poiema." This word sometimes has the connotation of a "work of art," or a "masterpiece." We can see the English word "poem" in this Greek word. We are, because of God's gifts of grace and faith, the very handiwork of God. He has made us saints by grace, through faith, and continues to prepare good works in advance for us to do.

Read 1 Corinthians, Chapter 12

This entire chapter, of course, is packed with Paul's teaching about the Body of Christ. You may choose to emphasize particular verses that point out that God has given spiritual gifts to each believer so that we can mature as a body. Paul also clearly teaches here that we cannot be a healthy body apart from the other members of the Body.

Romans 12:4-8

<sup>4</sup>Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, <sup>5</sup>so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. <sup>6</sup>We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. <sup>7</sup>If it is serving,

let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; <sup>8</sup> if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

A similar passage to 1 Corinthians 12, here Paul is very specific as to some of the gifts of the Spirit that are given to the church.

• Luke 10:1, 17-20 (see also Luke 9:3-5)

<sup>1</sup>After this the Lord appinted seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go.... <sup>17</sup>The seventy-two returned with joy and said, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name." <sup>18</sup>He replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. <sup>19</sup>I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. <sup>20</sup>However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

Before reading this section of Scripture, ask the participants if they can see the connection of this passage to the ones you have looked at so far. Here's the connection: Jesus was clearly an equipper of his disciples. Here he sends out the 72. In the previous chapter he sends out the Twelve. In both cases they return to give him a report. In this passage he debriefs them, using this as another teaching opportunity. A further connection is this: If Jesus saw the value in equipping and training his disciples, how could we not see ourselves as equippers of the saints today?

#### From Our Lutheran Perspective

We confess in the third article of the Apostle's Creed: "And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen."

Martin Luther, in writing about the communion of saints (he preferred "community" of saints), says in the Large Catechism:

I believe that there is on earth a holy little flock and community of pure saints under one head, Christ. It is called together by the Holy Spirit in one faith, mind, and understanding. It possesses a variety of gifts, and yet is united in love without sect or schism. Of this community I also am a part and member, a participant and co-partner in all the blessings it possesses. (The Large Catechism, 51-52, The Book of Concord, Kolb/Wengert, pp. 437-438)

Here Luther clearly calls attention to the fact that the church, the communion or community of saints, possesses a variety of gifts. Though these gifts may be diverse, the church is still united in love.

Interestingly, the only appearance of Ephesians 4:11-12 in the Lutheran Confessions is found in the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope:

"When he ascended on high...he gave gifts to his people." Among those gifts belonging to the church he lists pastors and teachers and adds that such are given for

serving and building up the body of Christ. (Treatise on the Power and Primacy, 67, The Book of Concord, Kolb/Wengert, p. 341)

While Ephesians 4:11-12 clearly teaches that pastors are called to prepare (or equip or perfect) the saints for their work of ministry, here Philip Melanchthon reminds us that we are called to do so as servants.

#### **Points to Ponder**

- God has entrusted to pastors a tremendous responsibility—to equip his people for the work of ministry.
- Pastors are equipped to equip. The very means of grace which equip us are those means by which we equip the saints.
- Every member of your church is a "masterpiece" of God. These "works of art" are being fashioned by God to do the good works that God has prepared in advance.
- Every member of your church has been given gifts by the Holy Spirit to be used for the building up of the Body of Christ.
- Though the there are a variety of different gifts, there is a unity as the Body of Christ operates with these gifts in love.
- Jesus did what the apostle Paul so frequently talked about—in the three years of His
  earthly ministry He spent huge amounts of time teaching and equipping His disciples for
  their work of ministry.

#### For Conversation

Allow for at least 30 minutes of discussion for the following questions. Depending on the number of pastors gathered, consider doing this in groups of three. Especially in light of the introduction, pay special attention to any pastors who might be feeling "blue." Encourage prayer for one another.

- 1. While congregations are in many ways alike, they are also in many ways different. Do you think the size, location, or style of ministry in a congregation affects the pastor's ability to equip the saints? If so, how? If not, why not?
- 2. What would a congregation filled with fully equipped people look like (no, you can't say "heaven"!)? Or to ask it another way, how can you know whether or not you are making progress in the equipping of your people?
- 3. Jesus spent three years equipping twelve men to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth. Does this model have any relevance for you today? Does it make sense to you to consider gathering a dozen people around you and investing heavy amounts of time and teaching to prepare them?
- 4. What practical ways have you found to help people identify their gifts and talents so that they can build up the body? Are there helpful resources you have assisted you in this?

- 5. How often do you get the feeling that the members of your congregation have expectations of you which you cannot possibly meet? How much of this do you think is related to the idea that the "pastor is supposed to do the ministry," and the people are there to be served?"
- 6. Share a "success" story of someone the Lord blessed you to equip. Reflect on the component parts of God's preparing grace in this person's life. How did the equipping happen?
- 7. Returning to the opening, what is your "blueness" status these days? On a scale of 1-10 how would you rate yourself on the Pastor-Blue-O-Meter: (1=Zero Blueness: I am experiencing the joy and peace of the Lord on a daily basis and feel appreciated and energized by the members of my church; 10=Deep, dark blueness: I am having an extremely hard time right now finding joy in the ministry and feel little or no appreciation from the members of my church.)

This is obviously a pretty honest and transparent issue. Use your judgment as to whether this last question would be helpful in your group or not. If used, it could certainly lead to some much needed prayer for a brother.

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