

## Stewardship of Gifts Exercise

Christians believe that everything we have is a gift of God. We also believe that God has given all of us innumerable gifts and has asked us to be faithful stewards of those gifts (Please note: For this exercise we are **not** focusing on what are often called “spiritual gifts,” but a much, much broader notion of gifts that God has entrusted to us.) But what does it actually mean to be a faithful steward of all these gifts? A faithful steward is one who *acts in place of the owner in full keeping with the desires of the owner*. As we have talked about in class, Scripture suggests that God’s deepest desire is to mend the universe, to restore wholeness (*shalom*) to all of creation. Every time some measure of wholeness is restored to God’s creation, God’s will is done and God’s reign or kingdom is extended. (As we pray in the Lord’s Prayer: “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”) Yet God hasn’t chosen to mend the universe apart from us. Instead, God has called all of us in Jesus Christ to be part of this amazing and beautiful restoration project. Moreover, God has graciously empowered us to participate in that project by breathing Christ’s Spirit into us. Every good gift that God has given us, therefore, has been given to us not simply so that we may enjoy those gifts, but even more importantly, so that we can experience a deeper joy by using those gifts as partners in God’s work of mending.

As a way of exploring this understanding of stewardship, you are being asked over the course of the next month to 1) consider thoughtfully and prayerfully how you might more intentionally use one or more of the gifts you’ve been given to participate in God’s work of mending; and 2) find some small but concrete way to put that gift (or gifts) to use in service of God’s work of shalom over the course of this month.

Here is one possible way to approach this exercise:

1) Make a list of the gifts God has given you. Obviously, you will have to be somewhat selective, but don’t limit yourself to those gifts that are peculiar to you. Most of what you have been given (life, health, time, opportunities, relationships, resources [financial and otherwise], knowledge, wisdom, life experiences, passions, etc., have been given to others as well. We are just as responsible for being good stewards of these gifts as we are of specific talents we might have.

2) Reflect on the current shape of your daily life. Where might God already be using you and these gifts to bring some greater measure of wholeness to a broken world? These need not (and likely won’t be) big and dramatic things, but it’s important to recognize that God is already working in and through your life to extend God’s reign of shalom, even if you aren’t fully aware of it.

3) Next ask yourself these questions: In my daily life, when and where do I most frequently and concretely experience the world’s brokenness? Where are the broken places where I most long to see God’s reign of wholeness come? Again, work to be as specific as you can.

4) Prayerfully discern how one or more of the gifts you’ve listed in #1 might be used in some small way to address some of the brokenness you’ve noted in #3.

5) Prayerfully (and joyfully!) respond to what you discern in #4 by taking a concrete step of faith. Put your gift to work in some specific way, either as a one time affair, or by doing something several times over the course of this assignment. That is for you to determine.

Remember: Never underestimate what God can do through seemingly small and insignificant gifts. Five loaves and two small fish didn’t look like much either! (John 6:1-14)



## Instructions for Stewardship of Gifts Essays

On the assigned date in the syllabus, please submit online an essay (800-1200 words, double-spaced) explaining how you carried out this exercise and what you learned as a result. The essay should have at least four paragraphs, one (or more) devoted to each of the following:

- 1) Begin by giving an account of some of the ways you believe God may already be using you and your gifts to bring some greater measure of wholeness to a broken world.
- 2) Explain which gift (or gifts) you chose to focus on for this exercise and how you came to decide to use that gift (or gifts) to be part of God's work of mending in the world.
- 3) Explain in some detail how you intentionally sought to use this gift (or gifts) during the past several weeks to be part of God's work of mending in the world.
- 4) Explain what you learned about stewardship through this experience. For example, you might consider what difference it might make in your life if you considered yourself a steward of *all* that you have been given, including all that you are.

[Please note: If you do not currently consider yourself to be a Christian, please speak with Dr. Kenneson or send him an email and he'll discuss with you an alternative way of working through this assignment.]