

Session Four Stewards of God's World

Stewards in the Bible

The word *steward* means someone who is entrusted to care for another person's property. The word is used in the Bible to describe our responsibility for the creation God gave us to live in. Read these passages, and answer the questions that follow: *Luke 16:1-13* (Note: In some Bible versions the word "manager" may be used instead of "steward"); *1 Corinthians 4:1-2*; *Titus 1:7*; *1 Peter 4:10*.



1. In the old days before computers with spell check, students writing a paper would often ask the teacher, "Does spelling count?" Someone once wrote a tongue-in-cheek description of what it means to live a Christian life, which was: "Spelling counts—in fact, everything counts!" How do you think this might relate to the reading from the *Gospel of Luke*? How might it relate to the question on the continuum about the gum wrapper?
2. What, if anything, in these Bible readings gives you the idea that our Christian stewardship makes us responsible for more than the environment and the earth around us?
3. Why do you think the bishop (or overseer in the *Titus* verse) is described so specifically in terms of being a steward?
4. With the readings and your question answers in mind, write a few sentences or a short paragraph giving your own definition of Christian stewardship.

Prayers from the *Antasdan* Service of the Armenian Church

Blessed and guarded and kept under divine care be the east side of this land, and the Patriarchate of Armenians, by this sign of the Holy Cross and by this Holy Gospel and by the grace of this day, in the name of the Father and of the Son and by the Holy Spirit, now and always and unto the ages of ages.

Blessed and guarded and kept under divine care be the west side of this land, and the kingdom of Christians, by this sign of the Holy Cross and by this Holy Gospel and by the grace of this day, in the name of the Father and of the Son and by the Holy Spirit, now and always and unto the ages of ages.



Blessed and guarded and kept under divine care be the south side of this land, earth, field and crops of the year, by this sign of the Holy Cross and by this Holy Gospel and by the grace of this day, in the name of the Father and of the Son and by the Holy Spirit, now and always and unto the ages of ages.

Blessed and guarded and kept under divine care be the north side of this land, hospice, hermitage, town and village and the people dwelling therein, by this sign of the Holy Cross and by this Holy Gospel and by the grace of this day, in the name of the Father and of the Son and by the Holy Spirit, now and always and unto the ages of ages.

Session Four

Stewards of God's World

Key Concepts

1. God has given us the world to use and also to respect and take care of.
2. Like many things in life, being a good steward involves several levels of concern and care.
3. Our stewardship of the earth is related to our love for God—to respect and love the creation God has given us is a reflection of love for him.

Objectives

Students will:

1. Define the word "steward," with the Bible and Church Tradition as sources for a definition.
2. Enumerate ways of being a good steward.
3. Describe how the contents of Armenian Church prayers reflect a concern for good stewardship of the environment as part of God's creation.

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This session will include several "levels" of stewardship, a word which means being entrusted to care for something that belongs to someone else. The class will consider the important issue of environmental stewardship (land, resources, animals, etc.) and also the other things that God entrusts to us such as the use of our time and talents, and our relationships with each other.

Once again, the Church's prayers will be used to show a Church teaching that is based on the Bible: the teaching that we should respect and care for the earth and ask God's blessing on it.

Bibles

1. Open with a prayer, and get reports on ongoing projects in the group and with each student at home. (10 mins)

2. As a way of looking at the subject of environmental stewardship, have the class take part in a continuum exercise. You will pose questions, and the two opposite ends of an imaginary line across the room will represent the two opposite answers or opinions that could be given in response to the question. Students will stand at whatever point on the line represents their response. (For example, in the first question posed, a student would stand all the way at the "yes" end if they feel strongly that the answer is yes, or at some point on the line that represents their opinion, all the way down to a strong "no.")

A person whose opinion is neutral would stand somewhere near the middle. Read each question slowly twice, and indicate which end of the line represents which answer.

Continuum Questions/Situations

a. Do you feel that global warming and pollution are as serious as war and political unrest in the world today? (Yes or No)

b. Are the world's political leaders paying enough attention to environmental questions? (Yes or No)

Procedure

Materials Needed

Procedure

Procedure

c. Do rich industrial nations like the U.S. have more responsibility than other nations, or the same responsibility as other nations, for cleaning up the environment? (Yes or No)

d. A gum wrapper that somebody throws out a car window is no big deal environmentally. (Agree or Disagree)

e. How we treat the earth doesn't necessarily reflect how much we love God. (Agree or Disagree)

Let students share their reasons for answering as they did, and discuss with each other, particularly if their answers differed widely. No right-and-wrong answers here; it is a chance to express and share opinions and ways of thinking. Try to keep students from labeling each other's answers as right or wrong. (10 mins)

3. Have the class complete the exercise **Stewards in the Bible** in the student text. When they have completed their answers to the questions, discuss them. Try to include these points:

— The Luke passage tells us that in order to be entrusted with the great things of God's Kingdom, we must be faithful stewards of the little we have now. So everything we do counts, including how we treat others, our honesty in all matters, and our putting gum wrappers in the trash!

— We are stewards of God's mysteries. This means that we are called to come to know him, and to make him known to others. This is a responsibility even greater than that of respecting the earth.

— Bishops have the greatest responsibility of anyone in the church, for their priests and the lay people are in their care, and they are also charged with seeing that the truth is taught in their churches. So, of all people, bishops must be good stewards of what God has entrusted to them.

When students have completed their definitions of Christian stewardship, ask them to think of some ways that they might put this stewardship into practice. Talk specifically about being stewards of the environment. List ways in which natural resources support the activities of a typical day. Then list ways that students see their houses, their schools, and their church help to preserve these resources.

(20 mins)

Procedure

4. Tell the class that the Church has always been concerned with the environment and the well-being of the earth in a very specific way. In their student text, read together the prayers of the Antasdan Service. Ask students to notice that as we ask God to bless each of the four "sides" of the land we also ask him to bless something else. God's blessing on these other things is no more important than his blessing on the land. As you go through the prayers, list the other things we ask God to bless. (Patriarchate of Armenians—east, kingdom of Christians—west, field and crops—south, town and village and people dwelling in them—north.) Have the students brainstorm ways we might be good stewards of these other entities. (We might be good stewards of an Armenian Patriarchate by having a fund-raiser and sending the money to Jerusalem for the upkeep of the holy places under the care of the Patriarchate there. We might be good stewards of the kingdom of Christians by helping Christianity grow—perhaps reading a Bible story to a child, or being willing to speak about our faith. The more usual things—field and crops, towns and their inhabitants—will be easier for students to come up with ideas. But let them be creative—to be a good steward of a field, for example, might mean helping someone mow their big lawn!)

You may decide that some of the students' ideas should be offered as services to parishioners or used as gifts the students will offer to their families or friends in place of store-bought presents for special occasions. (10 mins)

5. Take a few minutes to have students look at the *Book of Psalms* (e.g. 145-146, 147, 148) to find some psalms that talk about creation and about being good stewards by praising God for it. Use one of these psalms as a closing prayer. (10 mins)