Parable of the Vineyard

Deep Prep


The Big Idea: God will not tolerate misuse by those called to work for the kingdom.

Learning Goal: Learners will explore the similarities between the owner's reaction to the poor stewardship of his vineyard and God's promised reaction to poor stewardship of the kingdom.

Biblical

In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus tells the parable of the vineyard after his final entry into Jerusalem. What will appear to be his trial and conviction is in reality a judgment against the leaders of the temple and synagogues. Jesus' parable of the vineyard relies on Isaiah 5:1-7. Isaiah relies on a common understanding (Hosea 10:1; Jeremiah 2:21; Ezekiel 19:10-14) of the image of the vineyard as representing the people of God. The vineyard owner and builder is God. Isaiah's prophecy to the people pronounces judgment against them. Jesus' parable introduces tenants, who were to care for the vineyard. The tenants presumed to regard the vineyard and its fruit as their own. Not only did the tenants murder the owner's servants but also the owner's son. The tenants imagined themselves becoming the true inheritors of the vineyard. When Jesus told the parable, Jesus asked the religious leaders what they would do if they were the owner. In their response, they pronounced judgment on themselves. The owner will give the vineyard into others' care.

Theological

Leadership is important to communities of faith. Mindful of human frailty, we are conscious not only of the roles and responsibilities of leaders but also the temptations and pitfalls of being a leader. We sometimes mistake dominance—or other of the world's ways of power—for leadership. Talking the most, having power associated with money or social status, being a longtime member, holding office a long time (including the pastoral office), or knowing the most about something—these are not leadership. Leadership is trust in God's sovereignty over all creation. Leadership is the knowledge that all that we are and have comes from God and belongs to God. Leadership is responding to the fruitful future to which Christ calls us. It is helping others to see and respond too. God calls all believers to listen, ready to respond to Christ's call. True leadership doesn't reside in a few people but is the work of all members of the community. The role of a leader is not to create followers but to create more leaders who respond to the Spirit's leading.

Historical

In the United States, most churches do not teach or practice a biblical model of stewardship, which is generosity toward others with all that God has given, however little or much. Most churches use the term *stewardship* to refer to raising funds to support the church's budget. In the
nineteenth century and into the 20th, churches rented pew space and held church suppers, raffles, or lotteries to raise money. Subscription commitments supported missions. After World War II, stewardship included "time, talent, and treasure." Still focused primarily on meeting the local congregation's needs, the "three T's" acknowledged varied dimensions of the gifts shared. By the late 20th century, globalization brought greater awareness of the needs of the world and the environment. Awareness grew, too, of the vast wealth held in the United States and the extravagant use of resources. Still, most congregations use the word stewardship to focus primarily on their own needs and congregational maintenance.

Contemporary/cultural

Stewardship ministry among younger generations is an important dimension of congregational mission and ministry. In his book The Steward: A Biblical Symbol Come of Age, Canadian theologian Douglas John Hall calls the church to a biblical vision of stewardship, which encompasses care of creation, global justice, and world peace. Part of the ministry is teaching stewardship concepts and practices to children, youth, and young adults—whether they are new Christians or have been in the church since birth. Part of the ministry is modeling what we're hoping to teach. Stewardship of God's grace in all its forms is important, not only financial stewardship. A stewardship ministry that has younger generations particularly in mind should take into account: care of the earth, stewardship of our bodies, stewardship of our relationships, opportunities to witness about generosity and giving, teaching biblical principles and stories for stewardship, and a variety of avenues for financial giving. Visible adult models of faithful stewardship, including people who are willing to talk about money and possessions in their lives, is crucial. Young people may be the prime leaders in making this happen—starting dimensions of stewardship ministry and calling the congregation to account for the care of God's vineyard.

Quick Prep


The Big Idea: God will not tolerate misuse by those called to work for the kingdom.

Learning Goal: Learners will explore the similarities between the owner's reaction to the poor stewardship of his vineyard and God's promised reaction to poor stewardship of the kingdom.

• Jesus' parable relies on Isaiah 5:1-7 and the understanding of the vineyard as the people of God, who is the vineyard owner and builder.

• Relying on Isaiah's prophecies against the people of God, Jesus' parable introduces tenants, leaders of the people, who were to care for the vineyard. In their response to Jesus' parable, the leaders pronounced judgment against themselves.

• Leadership is: trusting in God's sovereignty; knowing that all we are and have is God's; responding to Christ's call to the future; everyone's work; creating more leaders who respond to the Spirit's leading.

• A biblical vision of stewardship encompasses care of creation, global justice, and world peace.

• Stewardship ministry among younger generations is an important dimension of congregational
Adolescent Connection

Metaphor is a powerful teaching tool that Jesus used with skill and pinpoint accuracy. Youth can understand metaphorical teaching and often "get" the message by using their brain power in a different way. If a story is told outright, it is simply there. If it is told as metaphor, youth must use their own thinking skills to sift and sort and make meaning of the story. They must take the information presented and set it against their own life experience to make meaning of it. Debriefing is a critical part of any metaphorical teaching. Youth must be asked to elaborate and explain why they think what they do and how they arrived at their conclusion. Lessons taught through metaphor have a lasting quality due to the personal connection. Making a connection to one's own experience causes the message to be imprinted deeply and becomes part of one's mindset.

Baptismal Connection

In the Rite of Affirmation of Baptism, a five-part question addresses each confirmand's intent to continue in the covenant God made with them in Holy Baptism. Here We Stand resources help adolescents—with support from parents, leaders, and the entire congregation—prepare to answer this question as they continue in their lifelong faith journey. Today's lesson focuses on the clause "to live among God's faithful people" (Lutheran Book of Worship, page 201; Evangelical Lutheran Worship, page 236).

Welcoming

Prepare your large group space by playing upbeat music in the background and by welcoming learners as they arrive. Make a special effort to welcome and thank adult small group leaders for their presence and for being willing to help pass on the faith to the next generation.

• Begin by thanking learners for coming! Remind the group what a privilege you feel it is to serve God by leading confirmation, and what a gift from God you consider all of them to be.

• Ask learners to recall last week's Big Idea if they can. Reward the first person to get it right with a handful of candy or some other small treat to share with their small group. (Be aware of any food allergies in the group.) Ask for a volunteer to capture last week's lesson in their own words; affirm all genuine responses; keep going until you're satisfied everyone has been oriented.

• Project this week's Big Idea on the screen or write it in HUGE block letters on your presentation board or overhead slide. Invite learners to recite it with you aloud. Repeat it two or three times.

Skit: The Popcorn War

Ask or assign a small group to perform the skit. In a pinch, grab enough volunteers from the Parable of the Vineyard page 3
audience to form an impromptu "readers' theater" troupe.

CHARACTERS: Jimbo, Sarina, Lenny, Zach, Zach's dad

PROPS: school supplies, table, chairs, bowls, popcorn. Option: have enough popcorn available offstage to share with everyone in your group after the skit. Always check for food allergies before serving any food. Provide alternatives if necessary.

NOTE: All violence in this skit should be mimed.

(Jimbo, Sarina, and Lenny are on stage studying. Zach enters with a bowl of popcorn.)

ZACH: Hey, guys! While you're over here studying, my dad wanted me to offer you some popcorn.

(Everyone cheers. Zach sets it on the table.)

SARINA: Oh, I really shouldn't. I'm on the new popcorn-free diet. Oh, well! You only live once, right?

LENNY: He really said we could have some?

ZACH: Yeah, of course. Just don't eat it all.

(Zach exits. The rest start chowing down on the popcorn. Lenny looks up, startled. During their conversation, they continue to put popcorn in their mouths.)

LENNY: Oh, no!

SARINA: What?

LENNY: What are we doing? Zach's dad might want some popcorn later, and we're eating it all! We're idiots!

JIMBO: He ain't getting my popcorn! (Laughs at himself.)

LENNY: I'm serious! (Hits Jimbo.) He's going to want some popcorn later!

SARINA: Lenny, I think you're overreacting.

(Zach enters with a small bowl.)

ZACH: Hey guys. My dad asked me to bring him some of the popcorn.

(Jimbo, Sarina, and Lenny scream. Most of the popcorn is gone.)

LENNY: Get him!

(Jimbo, Sarina, and Lenny attack Zach. They get him down on the ground and are kicking him)
when Zach's dad walks in. They all freeze in terror.)

DAD: What are you doing?

JIMBO: (Mouth full of popcorn.) Lenny made us.

LENNY: (Turns to Zach's dad.) Sir, we were afraid of losing the popcorn. Then Zach came in asking for it...and we panicked.

DAD: So you threw him to the ground and beat him up?

LENNY: Yeah, pretty much.

DAD: All right; that's it. Give me the rest of the popcorn. All of it. (He grabs a bowl and holds it out.)

SARINA: But it's almost gone, sir.

DAD: I don't care! I want all of it! Now!

(One at a time, they all put leftover popcorn in the bowl. Jimbo is last. He hides some pieces in his pocket.)

JIMBO: All of it?

(Zach's dad nods. Jimbo digs deep into his pocket for the popcorn and sadly sets it in the bowl.)

DAD: Thank you. (He walks offstage.) Come on, son. (Zach gets up and chases after his dad.)

(Following the skit, offer popcorn or other healthy snacks with everyone in your group.)

Quiz Show

Experts

Divide the group into two teams and let each team choose one "expert." Place two chairs near the front of the room and have each group line up, from youngest to oldest, behind a chair. Have the team "expert" sit on the floor in front of the chair. The two students standing at the front of the lines behind the chairs will be asked a question. The first person to tap the chair gets to answer the question or pass the question to the team expert; however, the expert can only be used two times during the game. If the person standing answers the question correctly, the team gets two points; if the team expert answers the question correctly, the team gets one point. If the answer is incorrect, the question goes to the first person on the other team (the same answering and scoring process applies). After each question, the people at the front of the lines move to the back and the game continues with the next question. The team with the most points at the end of the game wins a prize of your choice.
Squishy Ball Questions

Have everyone stand in a circle and throw a squishy ball randomly from person to person. When you blow a whistle or clap your hands, the person with the ball gets a chance to answer a question. If the question is answered correctly, the student gets to sit down. If the question is answered incorrectly, the person stays in the game and that question can be used again later in the game. Play until time is up or all questions are answered. Everyone is a winner in this game for having fun and learning something.

1. In the parable of the vineyard, the tenants killed the owner's son because...
   a. they were jealous of him.
   b. they were drunk and didn't know what they were doing.
   c. they wanted the vineyard for themselves.
   d. both A and C. (Correct.)

2. God wants us to be good stewards of what we've been given because...
   a. God created this earth and everything in it.
   b. it brings God glory.
   c. both A and B. (Correct.)
   d. none of the above.

3. Stewardship is about...
   a. money.
   b. ignoring God's commands.
   c. serving others.
   d. both A and C. (Correct.)

4. The teachers of the law and the chief priests were angry at Jesus after he told the parable of the vineyard because...
   a. they were too dumb to get it.
   b. he told it in a foreign language.
   c. Jesus was talking about them. (Correct.)
   d. Jesus drank all their wine while he told the story.

5. Jesus often spoke in parables because...
   a. people often relate better to stories. (Correct.)
   b. he didn't know how else to communicate.
   c. he hoped no one would understand them.
   d. he never finished his degree in creative storytelling.

6. Leadership is...
   a. trusting in God's sovereignty.
b. knowing that all we are and have is God's.
c. responding to Christ's call to serve.
d. all of the above. (Correct.)

Presenter's Interruptions

Keep this menu of short theme-related bits at the ready for those moments when you feel you're losing your audience.

• Blow a whistle! Have everyone open *The Lutheran Handbook* to a blank page at the back and draw an example of what stewardship means to them. Ask for two volunteers to come up and draw their picture on the board or chart paper and explain it to the group. Reward them with a stick of gum, a sucker, or a round of applause.

• Blow a whistle! Have everyone open their Bible to Isaiah 5. You might want to give the page number for help. Ask for a volunteer to stand and read verses 1-7. Why do you think the vineyard produced bad fruit? In this story, who or what is the vineyard? Who or what is the fruit? If God is the vineyard and we are the fruit, why is it so important to God that we become "good" fruit?

Opening Prayer

Have the lights turned down low and play some quiet music. If you know the song "Sanctuary," you could sing it together. What do you think of when you hear the word sanctuary? (Sacred place, place of worship, place of refuge and protection.) What places are sanctuaries for you? Do you think God needs a sanctuary? Pray together this prayer:

Gracious God, we ask that you give each of us the strength to be a sanctuary for you. Forgive us when we misuse the gifts you have given us to further your kingdom. May we be faithful stewards of all you have given us. In your name we pray. Amen

My Faith Story

It's important for youth to see examples of healthy adult role models, but at the same time, it's important for them to see that adults are human and can grow and learn from mistakes. Share with a group about a time in your life when you struggled with faithful stewardship to God, remembering that stewardship is not just about money. In addition, share with them what you learned from that experience and how you have grown in your faith because of it.

Cartoon Connection: Does the Vineyard Have Sunblock?

*The Funny Shape of Faith, page 236)*

Parable of the Vineyard page 7
Have you had that group project at school? The one where you got stuck in a group where you were the only one who did any of the work? Where you stayed up all night to finish, and the whole group got an A because of your hard work? That's how this guy must be feeling. It's not even his vineyard, and he's doing all the work. So frustrating. But as Christians, we are called to take on the problems of this world, even if they feel far away, or like they aren't really our problem to begin with. It's up to us to be stewards of God's creation. This means treating the Earth with respect, but it also means standing up for those people who can't stand up for themselves. Speaking out against injustice. Responding to violence with love. Taking care of all of God's creation.

Brainstorm with your young people ways they can help to be better stewards of God's creation, remembering that God's creation includes not only the environment, but also the people and animals that live in that environment. Using the list you've created, encourage them to take on one project this week to help bring about positive change.

Handbook Connection

Ask students to find "How to Respond When Someone Sits in Your Pew" on page 20 in The Lutheran Handbook. Share with the group that God expects the people of God to care for creation and to care about global justice and world peace. With that in mind, read the opening paragraph. Ask three volunteers to each read one of the points. Besides responding in a positive way when someone sits in "your" pew, how else can we show love and compassion for a visitor at church? How can you show love and compassion to a new kid at school? In your neighborhood?

Invite students to open their Bibles to Matthew 22. Ask for a volunteer to stand and read verses 34-40. This is known as the Great Commandment. Then turn to "Seven Important Things Luther Said (and One Funny One) and What They Meant" on pages 55-57 in The Lutheran Handbook. Write Matthew 22:34-40 in the margin next to the third point. Read point 3 aloud. By this statement, Luther meant that Jesus Christ is a Christian's only Lord—a Lord who commands us to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. In the small space at the bottom of the page, write two ways to show love to our neighbor. Ask for two or three volunteers to share what they wrote.

Find "History's Six Most Notorious Heretics" on pages 62-63 of The Lutheran Handbook. Ask the group if it knows what a heretic is. (A heretic is anyone who does not conform to an established view, doctrine, or principle.) With that definition in mind, ask three different volunteers to read sections 3, 4, and 5. Each of these three people—Joan of Arc, Girolamo Savonarola, and Martin Luther—worked to help liberate the poor and disenfranchised of society and, because of their efforts, they were branded heretics and two of them were killed. Do you think these three people were right in what they did? Why or why not? Ask students to give an example of what a contemporary Joan of Arc, Girolamo Savonarola, or Martin Luther would look like.

Bible Connection: Being a Faithful Tenant

• Invite all to open their Bibles to Luke 20:9-19. Have a volunteer stand and read the parable of Parable of the Vineyard page 8
the wicked tenants. Why do you think the servants were beaten? (The tenants presumed the vineyard and the fruit belonged to them.) Why was the son killed? (The tenants wanted to inherit the vineyard.) If you were the landlord, how would you have reacted? Would you have been angry, hurt, saddened, furious? (Answers will vary.) How do you think God feels when we mistreat those things we have been given to take care of? (Answers will vary.)

• Invite everyone to turn in their Bibles to Matthew 21:33-46, and ask a different volunteer to read this passage. Work together to write on the board or chart paper the differences and similarities between the Luke story and the Matthew story. (In Luke, the owner sent a servant three different times and all were beaten and sent away; in Matthew, the owner sent servants twice, some of whom were killed. In both Gospels, the owner's son is killed. In both stories, we hear the message that we are to care for what God gives us and not keep everything for ourselves.)

• Invite all to turn in their Bibles to Isaiah 5:1-7, which is "The Song of the Unfruitful Vineyard." Ask for a volunteer to read this passage. If you were the landowner who created the vineyard, how would you feel to discover that all your fruit was bad, especially after all of your hard work? Is there anything the landowner could have done to ensure good fruit? Why or why not? God (the landowner), wants each of us (the vineyard) to produce good fruit, but God has given us a choice as to whether or not we will. Why do you think some people choose wisely and others choose poorly?

More Bible Connections

• Read Matthew 5:1-12. This is the part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount called the Beatitudes. The word blessed means more than happy, because happiness is an emotion that is often dependent on outward circumstances. Which of these blessings brings you the most comfort? Which ones help you think about what it means to be a good steward of God's gifts?

• Matthew 22:34-40 is known as the Great Commandment. Work as a class to memorize verses 37 and 39. Divide into two groups. One group says verse 37 and the other responds with verse 39. Switch parts.

Object Lesson: The Potter

Bring a pitcher to class and set it on a table while you read the story.

There was a potter who needed a pitcher for the milk she poured over her cereal every morning. She measured the height of the shelves in her refrigerator and calculated the necessary dimensions for a milk pitcher.

She went to her studio, chose the clay she thought best, and sat at her wheel. She made a shape pleasing to her eyes—after all, it was her pitcher—and added a handle shaped to her hand and a pouring lip, for that was the purpose of the pitcher.

She brushed on her favorite color of glaze, fired it, and was delighted with the results. She had created a beautiful pitcher. She took it home, filled it with milk, put it in the refrigerator, and went to bed.
The next morning the potter poured a bowl of cereal, opened the refrigerator, and reached for her new pitcher. The pitcher suddenly shouted, "Oh, no, you don't! Keep your hands off!"

The potter responded, "I was just going to pour some milk on my cereal."

"No, you're not!" replied the pitcher. "I worked hard to get this. I started out with no milk at all, but through hard work and careful stewardship, I am now full of milk. No one's going to come along and pour out all that I've wanted so long to achieve! Anyway, I need all this milk; I've got a kid going to dairy school next year."

"Hmmm," pondered the potter. "I don't think you understand the real story here. You see, I created you for the express purpose of filling you with milk so I could pour it out each morning on my cereal. You were made to pour—not to store!"

"A nice story, but I don't get it," said the pitcher. "But seeing that you are in need, I am a generous pitcher. I will give you two spoonfuls of my milk. That should wet the cereal nicely. Everything in moderation; that is what I think!"

The potter looked into the heart of the pitcher, "You're afraid," she said. "If you allow me to pour out the milk you're afraid that you will find yourself empty, you will then be poor, and I will throw you out and find another pitcher. You don't realize that if you allow me to empty you, I will have found you to be a priceless pitcher.

"I will continue to fill you to the top over and over and over again, and we will become partners in emptying and refilling you. Perhaps, if you are willing to be emptied more completely and more often, I will find many other bowls of cereal who are longing to be drowned in the love of your giving."

"And what if I don't believe you and want to play it safe and just keep the milk I've got?" the pitcher inquired.

"You are free to make that choice," the potter said with a sad voice. "Then I will make another pitcher that is willing to be my partner. I will have to set you on the back of the refrigerator shelf. You can keep your milk. But after a time, your odor will keep everyone away, and you will have missed the greatest job for which all pitchers are created—the joy of being poured out!"

Science Connection: Acids and Soil

_In advance of this lesson, assemble the following items and read through this experiment._

2 pints (.94 liters) purified water
Half of a red or purple cabbage, chopped
Saucepan
Pitcher
3 or more soil samples in clear glass jars
About 30 minutes prior to meeting with the students, heat the water and the chopped cabbage. Let stand for 30 minutes; then pour the cabbage water into a pitcher. (Remove the cabbage.)

Have you even had a garden or a fruit orchard? Maybe you've visited a vineyard where grapes are grown. Every part of the world, and even the microclimates in your own yard, is a bit different than other parts of the world! Soils are different, and we need different types of soil to grow different kinds of fruits, vegetables, and other foods that we eat. This cool experiment shows us how much acid is in soil. Some plants need acidic soil and others need more alkaline soil.

Show the students the water you have prepared, and explain what it is. Ask for volunteers to add a little of the red cabbage water to the different soil samples in each jar. The redder the water mixture in the jar looks, the more acidic the soil is. The bluer the water mixture is, the more alkaline the soil is.

Some soils are more acidic because they are richer in organic matter. Carbon dioxide gas created by decaying materials (such as leaves) and even by animals breathing, makes it more acidic. Or maybe the rain that fell on that soil had more acid in it. We call this measurement of acid in soil the pH factor. The further the pH number is below 7 (neutral), the more acidic the soil is.

**Video/DVD: How Responsible?**

**Option 1: Hoot**

Provide the movie *Hoot* (2006, PG).

Start cue: (Chapter 17, 01:16:42) Officer Delinko works to untie Muckle, who is duct-taped to a chair. "Sir, calm down."

End cue: (Chapter 18, 01:22:22) A crouching photographer snaps pictures of an owl.

Roy and his friends have been trying to stop land developer Chuck Muckle from building a new Mother Paula's Pancake House. It's not that they don't like pancakes. But the proposed project would destroy the homes of numerous burrowing owls, an endangered species. Roy and his friends manage to restrain Muckle before today's groundbreaking. But Roy must summon the courage to persuade the gathered crowd to abandon the plan. Roy's actions mirror the message within the Parable of the Vineyard.

- What examples of good stewardship do you see in this clip? Where do you see poor stewardship?
- How does God want us to take care of this "vineyard" we live in? What does it mean to be a good steward?
- Muckle insists that, because he can't see the owls, no harm will be done. Where do you see this attitude playing out in your daily life?

*Please preview this content to determine its appropriateness for your setting.*
Option 2: Are We There Yet?

Provide the movie *Are We There Yet?* (2005, PG).

Start cue: Nick and the kids walk between two giant ice-cream cones into a party (1:00; scene 20). End cue: "My shoe!"

Nick has been entrusted with his girlfriend's children, Kevin and Lindsey, while she is away. In the midst of a road trip to meet her, Nick stops in a small town to get a new asthma inhaler for Kevin. Since the pharmacist is otherwise occupied, Nick must take on even more responsibility to get what he needs.

- Do you ever feel overwhelmed by global issues like poverty, hunger, pollution, war, and so forth? How can one individual make a difference and effect change?
- How can the church as a body lead the way in caring for others and for the planet?

*Please preview this content to determine its appropriateness for your setting.*

Option 3: Meet the Parents

Provide the movie *Meet the Parents* (2000, PG-13).


Greg's girlfriend's suspicious father, Jack, doesn't like or trust Greg. When they first meet, Jack lays down the law about caring for Jinx the cat, who is never to go out of the house. When Greg accidentally lets Jinx out, he frantically scrambles to retrieve him before Jack finds out.

- What guidelines has God given us for taking care of the world and the people in it?
- What would the world look like if everyone followed those guidelines to the letter?

*Please preview this content to determine its appropriateness for your setting.*

*NOTE: Consult Christian Video Licensing International at Motion Picture Licensing Corporation (1.800.462.8855 or www.mplc.com) for its umbrella licensing program covering the use of videos/DVDs or video/DVD clips in any public gathering.*

Learning in Motion: Do It Now

Part of stewardship is caring for spaces that many people use, like rooms at church. Take a few minutes to clean up and organize your classroom space. If weather permits, go outside and pick up any trash that has been left around your church building. Encourage students to be on the lookout each day for things that need attention and attend to them whenever they can.
Closing Questions

Consider starting the Closing Time with a "Stump the Presenter!" moment in which learners may ask you questions that have come up during their small group discussions, but for which they want further explanation. This gives the small group leaders an "honorable out" when they get into sticky theological territory, and it's a great way to start out your final minutes together.

If there are no "Stump the Presenter!" questions, tickle learners with one or more of the following questions to connect Small Group Time with the larger conversation:

• List three ways we can be good stewards of the resources God has given us.
• How does God feel when we misuse the resources that God created for us? Why do you think God feels this way?
• How can you be an example of a good steward to your family and friends?

Closing Ritual

Have all form a circle and hold hands as they pray the Lord's Prayer. Afterward, have each person turn to the individual on his or her left and right and say, "God loves you and created you to serve others and God."

Closing Blessing

Before anyone leaves to go home, make sure each learner receives the following blessing from the small group leader, or from you! (Or, if you like, consider writing your own blessing, based on your teaching time.) Have leaders trace the cross on each learner's forehead as they say the blessing.

Before anyone leaves to go home, make sure each learner receives the following blessing from their small group leader, or from you! (Or, if you like, consider writing your own blessing, based on your teaching time.) Have leaders trace the cross on each learner's forehead as they say the blessing.

God's gifts are for you. May you be a faithful steward of all you have been given. Go in peace in the name of the Father +, and of the Son +, and the Holy Spirit +. Amen
Instructions

Make sure each learner has a Learner Sheet for use during your discussion. At the end of the lesson they can take the Learner Take-Home Sheet to use with their household at dinner or bedtime.

Be sure to start on a positive note. Welcome each learner by name. Let them know you're glad they're here! If anyone is absent, mention you'll be praying for that person together. Small Group Time is for give-and-take discussion. Your main job is to draw learners out and get them talking about the theme. Ask open-ended questions that will provoke responses. Once the conversation begins, intervene only to bring it back on track or to stimulate more talk.

Quick Prep


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Learning Goal: Learners will explore the similarities between the owner's reaction to the poor stewardship of his vineyard and God's promised reaction to poor stewardship of the kingdom.

• Jesus' parable relies on Isaiah 5:1-7 and the understanding of the vineyard as the people of God, who is the vineyard owner and builder.
• Relying on Isaiah's prophecies against the people of God, Jesus' parable introduces tenants, leaders of the people, who were to care for the vineyard. In their response to Jesus' parable, the leaders pronounced judgment against themselves.
• Leadership is: trusting in God's sovereignty; knowing that all we are and have is God's; responding to Christ's call to the future; everyone's work; creating more leaders who respond to the Spirit's leading.
• A biblical vision of stewardship encompasses care of creation, global justice, and world peace.
• Stewardship ministry among younger generations is an important dimension of congregational mission and ministry.

Prayer Time

Go around the group and have each learner share the best and worst thing from his or her week. Remind learners to pay special attention to (for example) the person on their right, as they will be praying for that person in a moment (alternate prayer partners from week to week). When the group has finished, prayer partners can pray for each other.

Key Words

STEWARD is an overseer. Christians are said to be stewards of God, of God's gifts, and of God's
graces.

STEWARDSHIP encompasses the care of God's creation, global justice, and world peace.

PARABLE is a short story designed to illustrate or teach a truth or a religious principle.

LEADERSHIP is an act or instance of leading, guiding, or providing direction.

MISSION is a specific task that a person or group has been sent to complete.

Discussion Time

Use the following questions to kick off a conversation about the theme:

• What mission has God called you to fulfill? How can you complete or fulfill that mission? (Accept all answers.)

• Review "How to Respond When Someone Sits in Your Pew" on page 20 in The Lutheran Handbook. Although this is a fun way to address that specific situation, how can you apply this situation to your own life as you strive to be a good steward of what God has given you? (Accept all answers.)

• In the parable of the tenants in Mark 12:1-12, why do you think the owner sent his only son to the tenants? How does it feel to know that God sent God's only Son to us and he was killed? (Answers may vary. Remind the students of the depth of God's love, and because of that love our responsibility to be good stewards of all we have been given.)

• Pass out index cards. Have students write three things they intend to do during the upcoming week that will be an example of a good steward. Have them tape the card to their mirror or pin it to their bulletin board as a reminder. Tell them you like to hear about their efforts when the class meets next time.

Big Fun Idea

Go out as a group for pizza, but give the server his or her tip before you get your meal. Also completely clean up your table afterward, making sure to pick up all your garbage off the table and the floor. Then ask for a cloth to wash your table.

Big Serving Idea

Depending on the season, make arrangements to go as a group and rake leaves, mow lawn, or shovel snow for an elderly person or couple. Bring a batch of cookies and milk to share with them afterward.
Funny Shape of Faith Small Group Devotions: Parable of the Vineyard

Have a volunteer read the devotion that corresponds with this cartoon: "Does the Vineyard Have Sunblock?" The Funny Shape of Faith: Devotions for the Rest of Us (Augsburg Fortress, 2007), p. 237. Then use the following questions to spark group discussion.

When have you worked your tail off for God?

What might your role in God's kingdom demand of you?

What are you most talented at doing? How could God use your gifts?
Learner Sheet: Parable of the Vineyard


The Big Idea: God will not tolerate misuse by those called to work for the kingdom.

Big Fun Idea

Go out as a group for pizza, but give the server his or her tip before you get your meal. Also completely clean up your table afterward, making sure to pick up all your garbage off the table and the floor. Then ask for a cloth to wash your table.

Big Serving Idea

Depending on the season, make arrangements to go as a group and rake leaves, mow lawn, or shovel snow for an elderly person or couple. Bring a batch of cookies and milk to share with them afterward.

Prayer Time

Remember your partner's prayer needs—record them here.

Discussion Time

• What mission has God called you to fulfill? How can you complete or fulfill that mission?
• Review "How to Respond When Someone Sits in Your Pew" on page 20 in The Lutheran Handbook. Although this is a fun way to address that specific situation, how can you apply this situation to your own life as you strive to be a good steward of what God has given you?
• In the parable of the tenants in Mark 12:1-12, why did the owner send his only son to the tenants? How does it feel to know that God sent God's only Son to us and he was killed?
• Write three things you intend to do during the upcoming week that will be an example of a good steward. Tape the card to your mirror or pin it to your bulletin board as a reminder. Plan to tell your classmates about what you did the next time your group meets.
Learner Take-Home Sheet: Parable of the Vineyard


*Take this sheet home and keep it someplace near the dinner table, like on the fridge. At least three times next week at dinner, use Prayer Time and one other family activity to make your confirmation learning come alive!*

Prayer Time

*Gracious God, you have called us to be good stewards of those things you have given us. Forgive us when we have failed to be a good steward and help us to live our lives in a way that is modeled after your Son, Jesus Christ. Show us how we can best serve others for your glory. In your name we pray. Amen*  

Key Words

Keep a family white board someplace near the dinner table, and write these words on it. Try writing a family definition for each one during the week.

STEWARD  
STEWARDSHIP  
PARABLE  
LEADERSHIP  
MISSION

Talk Time

• Talk about one thing your family can do together that would be an example of being a good steward for God.

• Work together to memorize Matthew 22:37-39, the Great Commandment. Then talk about how your relationship with people is positively or negatively affected by this command.

• As a family, commit to caring for others on a regular basis.

• Remembering that actions speak louder than words, what can you do during the next month that will enable you to live out God's expectation of you as a faithful steward? For example, you could rake someone's yard, wash her or his car, mow the lawn, and so forth. Be sure to do this without pay.

Web Time

Go to the Luther Seminary Web site at www.luthersem.edu/stewardship. Read about their purpose, their resource database, and their newsletter. As a family, sign up to receive their
Ritual Time

Hold hands and pray the Lord's Prayer. Have one person say, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37). Everyone else responds, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (22:39).
In this parable, Jesus illustrates the consequences of pride, selfishness, and neglect within church leadership. We are called to love, care for, and nurture one another as Christ did (Philippians 2:1-5). Ideally, those in positions of authority among God's people would also lead as Christ did: selflessly, compassionately, sacrificially. Just as Jesus sent his disciples to represent him, leaders today are appointed to speak on behalf of God and serve with God's hands. God expects those who tend the vineyard of the church to act with integrity, humility, and love.

"With great power comes great responsibility." How might this catchphrase from the movie *Spider-Man* apply to this parable? What are the characteristics of leaders who "speak for God"? In Jonathan Rundman's music video, other people speak on his behalf. When have you experienced this? What is it like when others misrepresent you?
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Music Clip: Speak for Whom?

Media file: ParableoftheVineyard.mp3

Song: "You Don't Speak for Me"
CD: Sound Theology Disc Two (www.jonathanrundman.com)
Artist: Jonathan Rundman
© 2000 Jonathan Rundman

Yeah when you speak for me
You don't speak for me
Yeah when you speak for me
You don't speak for me

As followers of God, we are called to a higher standard than nonbelievers. This is especially true with our leaders. Have you ever turned on the television and witnessed a preacher making a mockery of our faith? God has a short fuse when it comes to people abusing power in God's name. This song refers to someone who has gotten fed up with media ministries that do not reflect the truth of Scripture. Play it, then ask the following questions.

• Do you think all TV preachers are dishonest? How can you tell the good ones from the bad ones?
• What are other examples of people who have been called to do God's work but instead abuse their power and hurt other people?
• What can we do about this problem?

Note: You can purchase the CD featuring this song from the Augsburg Fortress online store (www.augsburgfortress.org).
This presentation includes a video file and an audio file. All three (the presentation, the video, and the audio) will download at once as a ZIP archive. Unzipping the archive will produce a single folder containing all three files. **For the presentation to work properly, the files must all be in the same folder;** therefore, we recommend you not remove them from the folder produced when you unzip the archive, but rather move the entire folder as a single unit.

*Media file: ParableoftheVineyard.zip*
Cartoon

*Media file: ParableoftheVineyard.tif*

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