

This page is part of series designed to give parents and children – separately and together – a greater understanding of stewardship and what it means to be a steward.

Auxiliary Bishop of Green Bay, Robert Morneau, one of the apostles of stewardship in North America, has spoken of ‘12 Gardens of Stewardship’. He has suggested that there are (at least) 12 different areas in our lives in which we can cultivate stewardship. This is one of them:

The Garden of Decisions

It may seem unusual to consider decisions as gifts. Sometimes some of them may feel like curses. The opportunity to make choices, both large and small, is a great responsibility that we usually take for granted.

For Parents:

Make a point of telling your kids how your faith and your belief in God influences the decisions you make. Whether it is choosing which television shows or movies to watch, what car to buy, where you go on vacation, or how you treat people even in difficult circumstances, etc.

Living Stewardship Together:

Discuss how you will make big decisions when they come up. What process will you use? Pray (together)? Talk it over as a family? Consult things like Consumer Reports or the Church’s movie reviews? Other approaches?

For Children:

What are some things you should decide *to* do, because God and our faith say – or suggest – we should?



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The Garden of History

God calls us to understand our past and use that knowledge for a better future. The Bible tells of our experiences as God's people through history, in our failures and triumphs. Some of us are more aware than others of the gift that each new day is.

For Parents:

Reading the newspaper, listening to the news on TV or the radio, or visiting news pages on the internet, is an important way to set an example for our children, that we pay attention to 'history in the making'.

Living Stewardship Together:

Visit a local history museum. When on family vacations talk about the area where you are going and the history attached to it.

For Children:

Because you are young – and because our society considers the 'latest and greatest' the best – it can be easy to ignore the past. Make a point of respecting the wisdom that has led us to this point. Either by paying attention to history, or listening to your grandparents and relatives tell their stories, etc.



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The Garden of Emotions

Our feelings and mental state are integral parts of us as human beings. Emotions are tricky things, as we all have different ways of dealing with them, some more healthy than others. A good place to start is to recognize our emotions as gifts from God that we are called to faithfully tend.

For Parents:

Make sure you let your kids know that you do make an effort to keep your emotions under control and to improve your outlook. They need to know that control over our emotions doesn’t always come easily, but that we have to consciously work at it.

Living Stewardship Together:

Sharing the comics or jokes with each other can often be a great way to boost everyone’s emotional happiness.

For Children:

Say hello and give a smile to everyone you meet. So many people need this simple but important every-day pick up!



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The Garden of Creation

While ecology, concern for the environment, and responsible use of our natural resources are well-known concerns in our society at large, we should not forget the connection between them and our faith. The first book of the Bible reminds us how God entrusted the earth to us, so that we might be good caretakers.

For Parents:

Talk to your kids about the way the conditions of the environment have improved recently. The air is cleaner in many places. Some animals have come off the endangered species list. It is important that kids know that we can make a positive difference in the garden of creation.

Living Stewardship Together:

Take some time to look around your house and figure out how you could be more ‘green’. Cold water in the laundry. Full loads in the dryer and in the dishwasher. Computer off or on standby when not being used, etc.

For Children:

Take care of your neighborhood. Spend some time going around your neighborhood and picking up some trash. Be nice to your pets.



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The Garden of Money

A central insight of stewardship is that the material “possessions” we have are not really ours. They belong to God, who has entrusted them to us so we can nurture, tend, and share them. How does God want us to use these gifts?

For Parents:

Make sure you show your kids how you budget and how you make decisions about what you save/spend your money on. They need to know that good stewardship of money requires deliberate and planned decisions, especially to do so in the spirit that God & our faith call us to.

Living Stewardship Together:

If you haven’t already, create some system (like 3 or 4 jars or envelopes) to help your kids keep track of their money. One for saving, one for spending, one for charity, maybe one for investing . . This will help children to visualize making good decisions about finances.

For Children:

If you set aside some money regularly for charity, think about the charities you would like to give to. What charities make you excited about the work they do?



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The Garden of the Soul

How do you answer when you are asked if you have a “personal relationship with your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ?” All relationships take commitment, effort, time, and communication to be healthy and grow.

For Parents:

Regularly, in front of your kids, thank & praise God. Whether observing a beautiful sunrise/sunset, hearing good news about something, thanking God for the good life of someone who has died, or many others, our kids need to know that we see God as the source of all good things.

Living Stewardship Together:

Create a prayer 'plan' so that the family will be more likely to take time to pray – in the car on the way to school, in the morning or evening, at meal time. A plan will make it more likely to make it happen.

For Children:

When you pray, make an extra effort to focus on what you are saying to God. It is easy to let our minds wander, but doing such things as closing your eyes might help you concentrate better.



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The Garden of Citizenship

We often take for granted that we live in a country in which we can speak our minds and opinions. We have the opportunity to vote, and we have people who represent us in our government. We have a tremendous amount of influence when we work together as a city, state, or country. We also can have a surprising level of impact as individuals when we simply pick up a telephone. These are all gifts that we must use wisely.

For Parents:

Let your kids know when you are voting. Let them see you reading the voter's pamphlet. If you go to community meetings, let them know you are involved in the community, perhaps bringing them along when appropriate (a lot of these meetings even offer free munchies even!)

Living Stewardship Together:

When it comes time for voting, let your kids know why you voted the way you did and how your voting is influenced by God and our faith.

For Children:

Make it a point to read the newspaper regularly. Staying on top of current events is one of the best ways to prepare for being an adult steward of your citizenship.



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The Garden of Technology

We live in a vastly different world from the one of just fifty years ago. Our technological advances allow us to both heal people more effectively, and kill them more effectively. It is our choice daily in how we want to use the gifts of technology surrounding us.

For Parents:

Before you purchase some new gadget, discern, including our faith as a guide, whether it is really important to have the latest and greatest and fanciest when it comes to technology we use? Sometimes we just buy technology to 'keep up with the Joneses' or for prestige. Our faith calls us, as good stewards, to prudently take care of our needs, but to be very careful about those 'wants' that we pursue.

Living Stewardship Together:

Set the parental controls on your technology together. It will be a good opportunity to explain to your kids both the benefits and dangers of technology.

For Children:

If you are asking your parents for some technological gadget, first discern whether you actually need it. Are you just getting it to be part of the 'in-crowd' or to appear cool?



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The Garden of the Body

We can sometimes forget that our physical body is a gift given to us by God. St. Paul reminds us that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. We need to take good care our bodies.

For Parents:

Do you set a good example for eating and exercise? Your kids will imitate you! Almost all of us have room for improvement. Make a decision to make at least some small positive changes.

Living Stewardship Together:

Exercise together. Also consider together how to be a good steward of what we put on our bodies. What would God & our faith say about the clothes we wear? Should we dress to show off or be 'cool'?

For Children:

What kind of things do you choose to eat too much of? Resolve to give a little more of that up to be a better steward of the body that God gave you.



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The Garden of the Arts

Our world would be a dull place without the many arts, which includes many visual arts, music, drama, poetry, literature, dance, and many others. We are called to support and explore artistic creativity, both what we personally have and those of others with particular gifts.

For Parents:

Do you make art a regular part of your life? (Music, visual arts, etc.)

Living Stewardship Together:

Choose a time to go together to a musical performance or the theater or an art museum or gallery (maybe on a free evening). Discuss how the arts can make us appreciate better what God helps us create.

For Children:

Choose a favorite painting or musical piece to share with your parents and tell them why you like it and why it makes you happier.



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The Garden of the Mind

Science tells us that we only take advantage of a small part of the capabilities of our minds. We can develop our God-given mental capacities in a variety of ways, but we can be sure that God wants us to grow.

For Parents:

How does what you put in your mind (tv, movies, music, internet, books, etc.) show that you are a good steward of the marvelous mind God gave you to make the world a better place?

Living Stewardship Together:

Make it a point before you go see a movie, buy a cd or dvd, or an electronic game to check with Catholic rating sources to at least see what our faith says about it.

For Children:

Limit the amount of any one thing you do. Your mind needs to be enlivened by many different activities. Do many different activities that require thinking.



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The Garden of Relationships

Our relationships are precious gifts that we do not always nurture as much as we should. Sometimes the people we are closest to are the ones we hurt the most. Cultivating our relationships means being attentive, communicative, and showing our love and commitment.

For Parents:

Do you model good relationships with your friends & family & neighbors? Do you avoid gossiping about them?

Living Stewardship Together:

Develop a plan to stay in touch or get together with family & friends. If we don't make a deliberate decision to do this, it is easy for us to let this slide. We can then fall out of meaningful contact with our extended family and friends we don't always see.

For Children:

Everyone wants to be treated with respect. Think how you have treated someone in a way that you wouldn't want to be treated. Let them know you feel badly about how you treated them and want to do better.

