



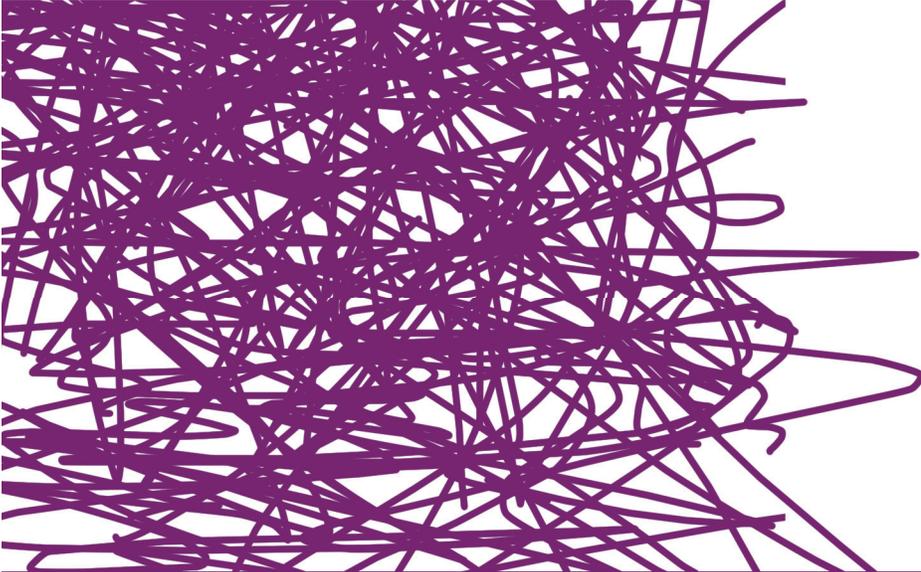
Presented by

Michigan District

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod



Leading Through Chaos



Leading Through Chaos - Nine Devotions

A resource for congregation leaders to use
as opening devotions for meetings

Provided by the Michigan District Stewardship Committee

The following nine devotions are for use by congregational leaders to open meetings.

We pray they will be a blessing to boards of directors, church councils, committees,
and any others who might use them in these challenging times.

To God be the glory!

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1.1 FINDING OUR IDENTITY IN TIMES OF CHAOS: GOD IS THE OWNER

Opening Prayer

Many today describe a world in chaos as the new normal. There are wars and rumors of war, diseases like Covid and such, political fighting and infighting and a long list of other challenges. One result of all of it is an escalation in the level of antagonism against Christians and the Church. Instead of thinking it's them against us a more accurate way to see it is all against God and His Son Jesus. One help for us Christians is to reorient our thinking from a very basic level. Consider the following:

Two men are quarreling over the ownership of a piece of land. They come to a rabbi and ask him to settle the dispute. The rabbi says, *"I will ask the land which of you it belongs to."* He put his ear to the ground and then said, *"The land said it belongs to no one, but that both of you belong to it. Dust you are, and to dust you shall return."*

The basic issue of ownership is important for people today as they seek to live in the chaos. Consider that success is often measured by how much "stuff" one has. People often find a sense of security (a false sense of security to be sure) in how much they have. There have been countless arguments over who owns what.

Ownership is also a key issue for the Christian steward, but in a completely different way. The Christian steward recognizes that he/she is **not** the owner. *"The biblical truth,"* says Charles R. Lane in *Ask, Thank, Tell*, **"that it all belongs to God—is the cornerstone of everything we have to say about stewardship"** and how we frame the world in which we live.

The term "stewardship" immediately identifies the steward as one who is not the rightful owner of what is to be stewarded. "stewards," R. Scott Rodin writes in *stewards in the Kingdom*, *"are by definition not owners, but they have a relationship with the owner in order to be a faithful steward."*

1. What do the following Bible verses say about God's ownership?

"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1).

"The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein" (Psalm 24:1).

2. How do the following incorrect statements influence our thinking?

We own what we have.

We have what we have because we deserve it.

Starting with the truth of God as the Creator and owner influences how we think about all that is going on around us. God is the owner. We are stewards of all that He blesses us with to use according to His purposes. We're accountable to Him for our stewardship.

Discussion Question:

What can you do this week that will demonstrate that you really believe that God owns everything?

Closing Prayer

1.2 FINDING OUR IDENTITY IN TIMES OF CHAOS: BAPTISM DRIVEN

Opening Prayer

Ask each person present to share: What personal life event do you feel has defined you as an individual (possible answers might be: my education/graduation, employment/job, marriage, becoming a parent, etc.)? How old were you when this happened? (*Allow for sharing time*).

Did anyone answer, “My Baptism?” Our individual identity takes on a completely new meaning when we realize that as Christians we do not live our life as our own. St. Paul writes in Romans 6:3–4, *“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by Baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”*

We have each been baptized into Jesus’ death and have been uniquely connected to His blood-bought forgiveness so that we might walk in newness of life. This means we are not alone in our decision-making and choices. We are wonderfully led as God’s children to walk in the new life of being His disciple. We no longer ask the question, “Who am I?”, but instead we live out the answer of “Whose am I?” Plain simple water applied with God’s powerful Word has identified us as forgiven, redeemed children of the King. We are Baptism-driven.

How do we live out this unique Baptism-driven life? St. Paul writes in Galatians 3:27, *“For as many as you were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”* Having put on Christ, through Baptism, the Holy Spirit leads us in Christ-like servanthood to others. We spend time encouraging one another; we use our abilities to serve others in need; we give from the blessings we have received to bless others and to give all glory and praise and honor to God.

Not only are we Baptism-driven individuals but we are a Baptism-driven congregation. Centered on our Baptismal identity, together we assemble and serve in His name. We give of our time to encourage one another inside and outside of our membership; we use our abilities to serve one another inside and outside of our membership; we give sacrificially (remember: we have put on Christ and He gave sacrificially) that the promises of God’s Kingdom in Jesus would be made known to those who are members and those who are not members, that all glory and praise and honor is given to God through all that we think, say and do.

Discussion Question:

What are some ways we can teach and encourage our Baptism-driven congregation, that has put on Christ, to use our time, abilities, and financial blessings to the glory and praise and honor to God in a greater way than we have been?

Closing Prayer: All-providing God, thank You that You have immersed us in the waters of Baptism and connected us intimately with Jesus’ death. We are not our own; we have been bought with a price. By the power of Your Holy Spirit, Christ has been put on us and You have called us Your children. Lead us as Your Baptism-driven congregation to manage wisely the time, abilities, and financial blessings You have provided that we might give You all glory, praise, and honor. In the precious name of Jesus, we ask this. Amen.

1.3 FINDING OUR IDENTITY IN TIMES OF CHAOS: EQUIPPED TO SERVE

Opening Prayer

“He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others” (2 Corinthians 9:10–13).

It is impossible to understand and appreciate your identity as a steward without acknowledging that you have no claim to the creation of the gifts given to you. Our identity is in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We are who we are and do what we do because God loved us and gave us freedom in Christ to live a redeemed life with purpose and joy.

He knows the needs of His children and designed each of us with unique traits to care for and enjoy all things in creation. First and foremost, these gifts we have been given allow us to express our joy and thanks to God. When we share our gifts with others, they see this joy and are compelled to seek the source of this joy.

Paul writes that we will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way. From seed to bread in meeting the body’s needs, from seed to the “harvest of your righteousness” in meeting the soul’s needs, God has all needs covered and provided through His acts of stewardship through us. When God says every, He means every. No gift used by God’s steward is unimportant or unworthy nor is any gift too important or too worthy in the sharing of His grace with the world. Knowing that what this world calls “self-esteem” is sourced by these God-given gifts, we can humbly and confidently lift others up with our unique gifts and point them to Jesus. What a privilege!

Coming full circle, at the end of each day remember what God has done through you and give Him thanks for the opportunities and outcomes enabled by His gifts in you. Consider the results, seen and unseen, that God has delivered through you. Embrace the knowledge and joy that comes with participating in the work of the Gospel as a loved and redeemed child of God. He identifies, He equips and we, along with others, receive the blessing of fellowship and service in the name of Christ.

Discussion Questions:

What trait or gift in you helps you to express joy?

How does it allow you to share God’s love with others?

Closing Prayer: Heavenly Father, giver of all good gifts, thank you for creating each of us with special gifts to share the joy of the Gospel. We celebrate our differences from each other and ask you to help us find ways to serve each other. Remind us daily that our identity is in Christ who uniquely equips us to be good stewards for His sake. In Jesus’ name, amen.

2.1 FINDING OUR PURPOSE IN TIMES OF CHAOS: RECEIVING GOD'S CARE

Opening Prayer: O Lord God, open our hearts by Your Holy Spirit to trust, treasure, and nourish the Baptismal grace and faith you have given to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.

*“So **you** also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Romans 6:11).*

In our previous “Leading Through Chaos” devotions, we have heard about what it means to be a steward. We have learned about our identity as baptized children of God, and that we are equipped by God to serve Him and each other. We now turn our attention to the unique purpose that God gives to His children.

Our purpose as Christian stewards begins with “receiving God’s care,” but how do we do that? St. Paul in Romans 6:11 gives us a good outline for “being taken care of by God.”

The words, “So you must consider yourself,” are key, because reality shows us to be sinners not saints. We have the identity of baptized children of God, but our sinful thoughts, words, and deeds prove otherwise. It takes faith to “consider” ourselves to be God’s holy children when we act like sinners. It takes being faithful stewards of God’s grace to continually run to God and find forgiveness in His Baptismal grace. This is a continual, non-stop, daily act of stewardship. It draws us into His mercy and love. It draws us into daily “being taken care of by God.” God alone has the ability to redeem us, God alone can forgive us, and God alone can reassure us of our beloved identity in Jesus.

“Considering” ourselves to be God’s holy children happens in two ways. First, we are to “consider” ourselves as being dead to sin. This means that we no longer believe that sin, guilt, and shame have the right to determine our value or worthiness. We steward our lives by daily rejecting the beliefs and feelings that we are no good or unworthy failures. Instead, we trust that we are God’s children, and neither sin, nor death, nor the devil himself has any claim on us or our identity. Second, we “consider” ourselves to be alive to God. As Christian stewards of the Good News, our reason for living is found in God’s love, grace, and in His many promises. We trust Jesus as our fountain of life!

While most of us don’t really like others taking care of us, because we like to have the control ourselves, it is an essential work of stewardship that we let God take care of us by “considering” ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus!

Discussion Question:

Do you like to be taken care of by others?

Why/Why not?

Closing Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, help us be faithful stewards of Your merciful love as we live lives that are dependent on You. Give us Your Spirit’s aid that we may consider ourselves dead to sin, but alive to You in Christ Jesus our Lord, Amen.

2.2 FINDING OUR PURPOSE IN TIMES OF CHAOS: TAKING CARE OF CREATION

Opening Prayer

“You have given [us] dominion over the works of Your hands...” (Psalm 8:6).

In the beginning, God told Adam and Eve about the special role He was giving them. *“And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth’”* (Genesis 1:28). This responsibility has been passed down from generation to generation. How blessed we are that God has given us the privilege to take care of the beautiful and abundant world that He created out of nothing! While God is the creator, our work is to take care of His world and use responsibly what God has already made.

Because God gives us dominion, we are His representatives who are responsible to exercise our dominion for the good of all that God has created. In order for us to carry out our duties as God’s stewards, we need to be faithful to God’s will for His creation.

God is the creator of all, and He has never relinquished His ownership. Psalm 89:11 announces of God, *“The heavens are yours; the earth also is yours; the world and all that is in it, you have founded them.”* God delegates authority to us, but not ownership. God makes us stewards, managers, and caretakers of all that He entrusts to our care.

In the second chapter of Genesis, we read, *“The Lord took the man [Adam] and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it”* (2:15). Adam’s role in relationship with God’s creation was to till it and to take care of it. Adam’s life work was to make the garden thrive and prosper. We who follow after Adam carry on the work of Adam as caretakers of God’s creation. What God created was “good,” and we are expected to have respect for what God has created. In our caretaker roles, we seek to maintain the beauty of God’s creation and make things flourish in the small part of the world in which God places us.

When we live as faithful stewards of God’s creation, God is glorified, and the world will maintain its beauty and abundance. May God grant us the wisdom, strength, and passion to be the stewards He calls us to be.

Discussion Questions:

God calls you to be a steward of His creation. What can you do and what are you doing to care for it?

God gave Adam and Eve (and us) dominion over His creation. What does dominion entail?

Closing Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for giving us the honor to be stewards of Your beautiful creation. Help us to rely on Your wisdom and strength so we can hear Your words, *“Well done, good and faithful servant.”* In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

2.3 FINDING OUR PURPOSE IN TIMES OF CHAOS: TAKING CARE OF OTHERS

Opening Prayer

Read Ephesians 5:22–6:4

A strange thing happens on the sixth day of creation. After speaking into existence everything else, God is silent as He creates something in an entirely new way. It must have seemed so small. After creating the universe full of galaxies, solar systems, stars, planets, and everything on those planets, God quietly forms something else out of this creation. Not only is this new thing unique in that God forms it quietly, intimately even, but it is the first thing created out of creation itself, save one thing from God Himself. God breathes into this new, unique creature and gives it life. Even alone, this new thing, this creature from the earth, a man named Adam, would have stood out in the story of creation, but God was not yet finished. From the earth God had made the man, and from the man God would form a woman, and together they were complete. God's final act of creation was not just a man and a woman, or even humanity itself, but the family. And from the very beginning they were created for each other, to take care of each other, to love each other, to serve each other—in short, to love each other.

Fast forward beyond the fall, past Noah, Abraham, Moses, and all the prophets, priests, and kings of the Old Testament, until finally you arrive at Paul and a certain letter to the church in Ephesus. The family is still at the heart of what it means to be human, and it is here that we find our closest vocations and dearest callings, but never in just a general sense. We can talk marriage in general and so on, but it is never experienced that way. Every husband doesn't have 'just a wife,' but his very own Eve, and she is his to care for, and no one else's. Paul makes it clear this is just as true for the wife, she doesn't just have 'a husband,' but her very own Adam, who dearly needs her help. He is hers to care, and no one else's. And with children, this call to care for, to serve, to love, only grows to include others, but again never in a generic way. Each son and daughter known and loved by their parents in a way that no one else in creation will love them—this is how God created, and continues to create, unique families. But we also know it is never this perfect, and often far from it, and yet still God creates, and brings into existence new families and unique relationships full of this same love. Adoption, guardianship, friendship, to name just a few, even those cut off from their families, where sin's thorns are most present, are still drawn together by God's great mercy. Family is not the limit and measure of God's command to love our neighbor, but this is where it begins for all of us.

Discussion Questions:

'Family' can be defined in many different ways. What is a family, and how does God work through a variety of families to share His love?

Our highest highs and lowest lows often revolve around our families. Name some challenges that a family might experience, and then discuss ways to serve in those difficult times.

Closing Prayer

3.1 FINDING OUR LIFESTYLE IN TIMES OF CHAOS: LIVING AS A LEADER

Opening Prayer

In the introduction to *Relational Leadership: A Biblical Model for Leadership Service*, a book by Walter C. Wright, Eugene Peterson writes, “We begin by following. ‘There are no born leaders.’ We start out by following our parents, our siblings, older children in the neighborhood. Later we follow teachers, coaches, bosses, managers, counselors and guides. And then somewhere along the line, whether we intend it or not, whether we want it or not, whether we realize it or not, people start following us. We become leaders. All of us. People see what we are doing and where we are going; it looks like we know what we are doing and where we are going. They follow. We are leaders before we know how to be leaders. Leaders of every shape and kind—mothers and fathers, friends and neighbors, brothers and sisters, presidents and chairpersons, pastors and teachers, artists and athletes—which is to say, all of us, need help” (pp. viii and ix).

1. What leadership roles do you have?
2. What kind of help have you received in those roles? What kind of help do you still need?

Wright writes, “If by leader we mean one who holds a position of authority and responsibility, then every Christian is not a leader. Some are—some are not. But if by leader we mean a person who enters into a relationship with another person to influence their behavior, values or attitudes, then I would suggest that all Christians should be leaders. Or perhaps more accurately, all Christians should exercise leadership, attempting to make a difference in the lives of those around them... I will suggest that leadership is a relationship—a relationship in which one person seeks to influence the thoughts, behaviors, beliefs or values of another person” (p. 2).

3. What do you think of Wright’s definition of leadership?

According to Wright, leadership is about influence and service, vision and hope, character and trust, relationships and power, dependency and accountability.

Read Philippians 2:1–8

4. What is to be the attitude of those who lead in the Church (or anywhere for that matter)?
5. What does God expect of those who lead in the Church?

Discussion Questions:

In what ways are servant leaders stewards?

What are some things you can do to increase your leadership skills—especially in the area of Christian stewardship? What help do you need?

Closing Prayer

3.2 FINDING OUR LIFESTYLE IN TIMES OF CHAOS: LIVING AS GOD'S FAMILY

Opening Prayer

“So we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another” (Romans 12:5).

The word family is one of the most loosely defined terms in the English language, because it means something different to everyone. One person may define family as the relatives who share a common ancestry. Still others may consider family to include extended relatives and even very close friends. Families are vastly different, but they all function under one single premise: shared love and commitment that binds them together as one.

The biblical definition was created by God in the garden as He formed Adam and Eve. There in the beginning, God not only created the institution of marriage, but He also created the very first family. Even though they were two very different people, Adam and Eve were one body bound together in their faith towards God and their love for each other.

Even though sin would come through Adam's fall, God's design for the family was not destroyed. Throughout the world, families continued to be the building block of all societies and cultures. Despite all the things that tear at the bonds of our family relationships, God has not abandoned the family. In fact, the one who created the family in the beginning, took on flesh and become part of an earthly family for us.

What we celebrate at Christmas and Easter is God uniting all mankind back into one family. The cross forgave sins, the empty grave removes death, and the waters of Baptism take what was many and unite us into one heavenly family forever. So that in Christ, Paul's words can become a reality, *“For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another” (Romans 12:4–5).*

Discussion Questions:

What are some things that a family can do to help protect it from those things that may try to pull it apart?

How can your church family show it cares for each other and the community?

Closing Prayer: We pray for our families. That the Lord may forgive the things that pull us apart from each. May, the Spirit continue to us in draw us together in the true faith, uniting us as one family in His name. May our forever family, the Church, send us forth to live lives of love and charity to all the world. In Jesus' name, amen.

3.3 FINDING OUR LIFESTYLE IN TIMES OF CHAOS: LIVING COUNTER-CULTURALLY

Opening Prayer: O Lord God, open our hearts by your Holy Spirit that we may not be conformed to the world, but stewards with minds transformed in Jesus Christ. Amen.

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:2).

In our previous “Leading Through Chaos” devotions we have heard about what it means to be a steward. We have learned about our identity and purpose as baptized children of God, and how to live a steward’s lifestyle. In this devotion we conclude the series with the reality that a steward’s life will always be counter cultural. What do we mean by ‘counter cultural?’ Simply put, the goals and purpose of the Christian steward are not the same goals and purpose of the world without Christ.

The challenge that is put to the Christian steward is to live in the world without being conformed to the world. This is no easy task. The pressure to adopt the values and life-choices of the peer groups that we must join is strong and unrelenting. How is the Christian steward to resist this day-to-day pressure to conform?

St. Paul’s advice to the Christian steward is transformative ... literally! He calls us to be transformed by the renewal of our mind. Transformed means to be changed and that change comes through making our minds think in new, changed ways. This is the goal of the Christian steward: to change our minds to think like stewards of God’s love and grace. The steward sees everything as a gift from God, that God is the owner of everything, and that we are caretakers of what He gives to us.

This kind of changed living is never going to be in-step with a sinful world. The world believes everything belongs to us, while the Christian steward believes that everything belongs to God. The world believes that they can do what they want when they want. As Christian stewards, we seek to love God above all and use what we have to love and bless others. There is no way that these two ways of thinking will ever mesh or agree; consequently, we will always be living a counter-cultural life, and that is a good thing! The world will see that we are different, and they will wonder about it. The peace and kindness of the Christian steward in the midst of a chaotic world will call others to wonder and ask how we can be that way, and then... then we can share the best news the world has ever heard, the Good News of God’s love for the world in Jesus Christ! That’s Christian stewardship, and it’s the best! Who knew? Now you do!

Discussion Question:

How do/can we resist the weight of worldly peer pressure?

Closing Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, help us be faithful stewards of your merciful love. Give us your Spirit, that we may embrace the life of a counter-cultural Christian steward, and give us a chance to share the Good News of Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.



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