

WHAT IS STEWARDSHIP?

God as Owner. Have you ever known someone who borrowed something for a long time and eventually forgot who the owner was? Or have you ever forgotten who “that borrowed book” belongs to?

In the parable of the wicked husbandmen (Matthew 21:33-41), the owner of a vineyard remained in the far country apparently for a prolonged period without requesting a progress report from the husbandmen. As time passed the husbandmen came to the conclusion that the fruit of the vineyard rightfully belonged to them.

Just as the evil tenants attempted to take possession of the vineyard, we are prone to the same attitude. We become possessive of what God has entrusted to us. Stewardship recognizes God’s ownership of all things. Colossians 1:16b clearly states that all things were created by Christ and for Himself.

Because we are not called on to give a present account of our stewardship, we are in danger of losing sight of the true owner. The longer we use God’s gifts without recognizing His ownership, the more likely we will begin to view them as our rightful possessions.

The parable of the rich man in Luke 12 shows the folly of laying up treasure for ourselves and not being rich toward God. As good stewards we must continually remind ourselves of God’s rightful ownership of all that we possess.

Stewardship is Management. Matthew 21:33-46 Parable of the Tenants. The term steward literally means “to arrange the house.” A steward is a servant designated to manage the affairs of his master. The amount or type of talent is not the question, but the management or use of that talent.

Bertha Adams died a pauper on March 30, 1975, living malnourished, without heat or the necessities of life. Yet she had in two safety deposit boxes nearly \$800,000 in cash plus many valuable negotiable stocks and bonds. She thought in terms of possessions to be saved and hoarded, rather than possessions to be used.

Each believer is a steward. And the Lord has blessed each with the gift or gifts He chose for the believer to manage for His glory. He has amply provided everything needed to accomplish the task as set forth in the provisions for the householder in Matthew 21:33. The steward’s responsibility is to set priorities for the most efficient use of his gifts and to faithfully fulfill his responsibilities for the Master’s good.

Management of Money. Our power to earn money is a gift from God (Deuteronomy 8:18). Both intellectual and physical abilities are God-given. A good steward uses his talents to earn money by honorable methods. He seeks divine guidance in managing that which is entrusted to him. As a good steward he recognizes that all he possesses belongs to God (Genesis 14:22; Psalm 24:1-2; Haggai 2:8).

The *first* essential in biblical giving is the giving of self to the Lord. Personal consecration must come before purse consecration, self-consecration before wealth consecration. This was the reason for the

joyful and sacrificial giving of the Macedonian Christians: "...They first gave themselves to the Lord" (2 Corinthians 8:5). When self is given, it is then logical that one honors God with his possessions. Money is stored-up life, both mental and physical powers converted into dollars.

A *second* essential in biblical giving is giving motivated by love (1 Corinthians 13:3; 2 Corinthians 8:8). Only our giving that flows from the wellspring of love is godlike (John 3:16).

When a Christian meets these two prerequisites, it is not difficult for him to follow the general principles of biblical giving. And the first is putting God first (Exodus 23:19; Proverbs 3:9). Recognition of this rule elevates one's giving to a high level. This does not preclude providing for family and personal needs (1 Timothy 5:8). God has promised to meet our needs if we put the interests of the kingdom of God first (Matthew 6:32-33).

How much should we give? The Old Testament required tithes and offerings. To do less under grace would be a disgrace. The New Testament teaches proportionate giving: "As the Lord prospers" (1 Corinthians 16:2). Jesus said, "From the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked" (Luke 12:48b). Giving "as the Lord prospers" requires more than a tithe under grace.

Management of Time. Hearing the clock strike, Ignatius, remarked, "Now I have one more hour to account for." Solomon wrote, "A time to be born and a time to die." Every individual will give account to God for the interval between these two times (1 Peter 4:5). Life is a period of stewardship, a time of probation. Since one's eternity depends on what is done in time, one should view this present life as preparatory.

Each day is a time of opportunity and challenge. Yesterday is a canceled check; tomorrow is a promissory note; today is the cash you have; spend it wisely. Paul urges us to make it a practice of "redeeming the time" or "making the most of your time" (Ephesians 5:16 NAS). 1 Peter 4 speaks pointedly to the wise use of time. How to live the rest of our time in the flesh is the subject. Notice the two diverse paths. There is a way to be avoided: "living to the lusts of men." The other is the path to follow: "living to the will of God." By avoiding the lustful, unworthy and unprofitable pursuits of the first path, and by following the guidelines for "living to the will of God," we can make the most of our time.

We should live with the constant realization that time is short (Psalm 89:47; 1 Corinthians 7:29) and life is fleeting and uncertain (James 4:14). These sobering facts and our accountability to God should prompt us to pray, "Teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom" (Psalm 90:12).

Summary. Remember, the owner in the parable, though in a distant country, did return to take an account of the husbandmen's stewardship. With responsibility also comes accountability. The rewards of the Lord will be based on management. The Lord rewards the steward who faithfully manages his time, talent and treasure.