

Stewardship

1. What is a Steward?

Difference between steward, servant, and slave:

New Bible Dictionary: slave is usually considered to be a person (male or female) owned by another, without rights, and – like any other form of personal property – used and disposed of in whatever way the owner may wish. In the ancient biblical East, however, slaves could and did acquire various rights before the law or by custom, and these included ownership (even of other slaves) and the power to conduct business while they were yet under their masters' control.

Modern servant quite unlike slave in ancient times. Greek word doulos translated “servant in KJV, and “slave” in HCSV. Neither is completely accurate, and “bondservant” is maybe best rendering.

Oikonomeo is translated “steward” in NT in many versions, and means “manager (nomeo) of household (oikos)”.

Oikonomia is translated “stewardship” and we get the word “economy” from it.

Introduction of responsibilities of a steward

“How does our modern understanding of responsibility color our understanding of Scripture?”

Modern thought: (get all you can, can all you get) - What's mine is mine, and what's yours is yours.

In modern times, this is becoming: What's mine is mine, and what's yours is mine if I need it.

Kingdom principle: The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it. I am only a steward. This is quite different from “not my responsibility”. A steward still has some responsibility, he just doesn't have ownership.

Example of good steward:

Joseph – for his obedience, he got To do time in the slammer (he was still steward of his honor and character while in prison). Potiphar could have put Joseph to death, but did not, possibly because he suspected Joseph may have been innocent.

Examples of bad stewards:

Denethor – steward of Gondor in “Lord of the Rings – The Return of the King”. Denethor wrongly assumed ownership of Gondor at the end of his life and it ruined him.

Foolish steward in Matthew 24:45, 48-49

"Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, 'My master is staying away a long time,' and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards.

[get input from congregation on areas of delegated responsibility – money, possessions, time, name, honor, mission, other people, children, spouse, sick, needy, poor, ideas, my physical body, my mind, my spirit, believers, etc.]

The only lasting value of material possessions (money and things) is what it can do to build relationships with people.

Dishonest steward in Luke 16:9 ...**use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings**

2. Discussion on stewardship of money

Widow's coins (Luke 21:1-4) Jesus may have said, "Look at this guys – Look!! She gets it!"

As he looked up, Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. "I tell you the truth," he said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."

There is no place for a poverty mentality in the kingdom of heaven. God owns everything, and so, so much more than we will ever need. The purpose of all this is to test our ability to manage resources and build our character.

3. Discussion on stewardship of other possessions

We learn about the future value of possessions in Matt. 6:19-21

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

This is why the servant in the parable of the talents was punished for only bringing back the single talent, even though it was probably now worth less than it originally did.

Law of diminishing returns (utility or satisfaction) A single soda pop given to a thirsty man on a hot day has significant value. Two cans of pop given to the same man has less than twice the value. A case has a lot less than 12 times the value.

But we can thwart this law and get increasing satisfaction by ... SHARING

(example of RF amplifier given to Dan Sturdivant by Jim)

(example of Camry shop manuals given to Jim by Dan years earlier)

Two tunics – Luke 3:11 (John said this) **"What should we do then?" the crowd asked. John answered, "The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same."**

Pastor Danny's challenge to keep an extra coat in our car to give away.

If we give something to a believer that will be regularly used or seen, we can count on being remembered in prayer for a long time. (example of Rob Poindexter's wood used as a floor threshold)

Many of today's problems would go away if we encouraged responsibility and stop subsidizing foolishness. Would the prodigal son have returned in humility and contrition if he had received a regular stipend or welfare check?

Giving what belongs to others – bad idea

How would you feel if someone owed you, and instead of paying you they gave resources away to a third party?

If I give away that which rightfully belongs to another, what am I? (a thief) How about our wanton government spending of that which we do not own? (ballooning debt)

Debt clouds the issue – makes it more difficult to give

Speaking of debt ... I can easily agree to help someone who is in need take care of current obligations .. but how about something like a boat payment? Debt is occasionally useful, but should be generally avoided if at all possible.

3. Discussion on other resources spent on people (hospitality)

Matt 25:34-36 (sheep and goats) – hospitality is commanded and expected.

"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

Rom 13:8 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.

1 Peter 4:9: Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.

Cultural differences – what is vitally important to most of the rest of the world is unimportant to us.

New Bible Dictionary: Throughout Scripture the responsibility of caring for the traveler and those in need is largely taken for granted. ... In Rom. 12:13 the duty of hospitality is closely linked with the particular responsibility of caring for fellow Christians. It is a task to be carried out with determination. Christians, literally, are to pursue hospitality, not allowing it to elude them because of selfishness or slackness on their part. ... Christian hospitality is not the grudging performance of a duty but the glad act of a cheerful giver. Furthermore, Peter points out that giving is possible only because we have already received gifts from God. The believer should be constantly aware of the fact that he is in debt to God for all he has; and so the care of others is the discharge of a debt of gratitude.

Word from the Lord while on the plane to Kenya, "Learn the art of hospitality and watch the miracles happen"

Word from Stephen Chege, "You (Jim) are the first mzungu (white person) to stay at my house. I am honored that you would stay with me". But the real honor was mine. That statement brought me to tears

"Mankind was my business" .. Jacob Marley to Ebenezer Scrooge

(Heather Cherry's prayer – having love for others first of all drives us to reach out with the gospel and to help with practical needs)

Luke 16:10-12 again

"Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?"

Matt 23:23 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices-mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law-justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former."

Justice, mercy, and faithfulness are more important than proper accounting of material possessions. Again, the only lasting benefit of being good stewards over possessions is to develop relationships.

4. Which of us are stewards (am I exempt because I'm too poor, etc.?)

Raising the bar on personal expectations: Is this the best I can do, or can I do better? Don't ever try to raise someone else's bar. Concentrate on your own.

JFK quotation – "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country."

Breaking the "cosmic sugar daddy" paradigm

Excuses for not being more involved (too old, young, poor, etc.)

Have you asked the question "what if I cannot give? I either have nothing or what I have I cannot afford to give?"

Example of minister "bless those who give, and those who cannot give ..." If the widow could give all she had, do I have any excuse for not giving anything?

Luke 16:10-12 again

"Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much."

Widow's offering – obedience coupled with sacrifice gets God's attention (example of Stephen) Acts 7:55

But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

Ex. 23:15 and 34:20 "emptyhanded" (unleavened bread and redemption of firstborn)

No one is to appear before me empty-handed.

Example of Oseola McCarty – saved up \$250,000 from just taking in laundry, and gave it all away toward the end of her life.

5. Where do I give when I contribute money, etc.?

The model is in the O.T.

Some offerings were completely destroyed; most were partaken of by the priests and Levites

The sacrifices and offerings were given to someone else - ownership was transferred

Given to the ones who were directly involved with ministry to the Lord and to the community

Chris Cook – "dance with the one who brung you"

Tony Fitzgerald "Who am I? Whose am I? With whom have I been called?"

6. How much do I give?

Gen. 14:18-20

Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand." Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

Abraham set the example for us to follow. Jacob continued. Outlined in Lev. 27. Levites also were instructed to give a tenth of this tithe. Jesus did not change this. If had been important, would he not have instructed differently?

Distinction between obligation and free will offering

Personal example of tithing

Ken Groen's suggestion – Do you want to be blessed on the gross or on the net?

7. Conclusion – It's a matter of faith

Our actions reflect our level of faith – "Lord, speak to me"

We feel wronged when we suffer needs while we are trying to be obedient and generous.

Psalm 37 – righteous will inherit the land, wicked will perish

Not surprised when we have trouble

It's not faith if we can do it ourselves

Be concerned when it gets easy to manage everything as a routine.

Psalm 37 - righteous will inherit the land, wicked will perish

1 Peter 1:7-8 These have come so that your faith-of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire-may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.