

Stewardship

INTRODUCTION

In the Greco-Roman world of Jesus and the apostles, a steward was a servant who was also a ruler. The Greek word for this in the New Testament is *oikonomos*, and it means a manager of the household or certain affairs of the house (from *oikos*, which means “house”). A steward is someone who has been entrusted with the resources of another with corresponding duties to execute. A steward neither owns the resources nor acts according to his own will. He is a manager who is under the authority of the owner who both defines how they must be used and will hold the steward accountable for his usage of the resources which were loaned to him.

PRINCIPLES

1. Biblical Maxims

A. God owns everything (1 Cor 10:26; Ps 24:1; Exod 19:5; Job 41:11).

B. We “own” nothing (1 Cor 4:7 -- We have “received” all things rather than owning them by birth-right or achievement.).

C. We are servants in God’s house (1 Cor 6:19-20).

D. Will be held accountable for how we use the resources which God has entrusted to us (Rom 14:12; Luke 16; Matt 12:36).

E. God’s purposes are for us to multiply/expand those resources to bless others. He desires they be invested for His kingdom (Matt 25:14-30).

2. Resource Categories -- What Is Your *oikos*?

A. Material

- Money and Wealth -- These are the things which are most commonly discussed in discussions of stewardship, and they are rightly included. We are called to use the money which God has entrusted to us to meet the needs of others, especially through our tithes and offerings to our local church (cf. Acts 4:32-37; 11:27-30; 1 Cor 16:1-2). Give where you are fed (1 Cor 9:7-11; 1 Tim 5:17-18) so that we might together, as a gospel-formed family, reflect the generosity of our heavenly Father.
- Home -- One of the most consistent virtues to which God’s people are called to aspire is that of hospitality (e.g., Gen 19:1; Deut 23:3-4; Judg 19:15; Matt 5:43-48, Luke 6:27-36; 10:25-37; 14:12-14; Rom 12:13-14; 1 Tim 3:2; Tit 1:7; Heb 13:2; 1 Pet 4:9). This simply means opening our homes to strangers, and usually implies sharing a meal.
- Any Other Possessions -- Including food, automobiles, books, computers, etc.

B. Immaterial

- Time -- This is one of our most valuable resources. Our whole life is under the authority of God, who is our Creator and Redeemer (1 Cor 4:7; 6:19-20). So we must make the best use of our time (Eph 5:15-16; Col 4:5; cf. Ps 90:12).
- Privilege -- This is a hard one to admit but we all have particular privileges. Privileges are simply unearned advantages. They are like an invisible form of wealth transfer. Through privilege one benefits from the past successes, achievements, and even abuses of one’s predecessors. The challenge is to use these advantages for the sake of others.
- Power -- This is another difficult resource to acknowledge for we are reticent to acknowledge discrepancies in power. We too often conceive of power as synonymous with coercion, violence, and oppression and, therefore, something to be avoided. But power is a gift, a resource to be stewarded in service to others.
- Skills/Knowledge/Spiritual Gifts -- Our natural talents, our accumulated abilities, and our spiritual gifts are never intended to end on ourselves. They are gifts from God for the sake of serving others, especially the body of Christ (Rom 12:3-8; 1 Cor 12; 14). We are called to steward God’s varied grace (1 Pet 4:10-11).
- Gospel -- This is something that does not often come up in discussions of stewardship but which is one of the main gifts we are called to steward in the New Testament. Paul explains that he has been entrusted with a stewardship to preach the gospel (1 Cor 9:17-18). And later he explains that this does not merely apply to him, but rather God has entrusted all Christians with the message of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:19). So woe to us if we do not preach it (1 Cor 9:16)!

PRACTICALS

1. Don’t Hoard

Consider the Parable of the Rich Fool (Luke 12:13-21). This does not mean you should be unwise, frivolous, and not save. You still must take care of your family (1 Tim 5:8). But selfish hoarding of goods in this life might make you a fool for eternity. The desire to hold onto wealth can be a great temptation which draws our hearts to wander from God and His kingdom purposes (Mark 10:21-23;

Matt 13:22; 1 Tim 6:9-10). It is hard to be rich in worldly wealth and rich toward God. When we possess many things they often possess our hearts (Matt 19:16-22).

2. Don't Be Anxious

Read the verses immediately following the Parable of the Rich Fool (Luke 12:22-34). In Jesus' exhortation to lay up treasure in heaven rather than hoarding, He calls us to renounce anxiety and seek the kingdom. We are emboldened to do this because God is our Father, who longs to give us the kingdom and provide for all of our needs.

3. Be Generous

Our giving should be motivated not by guilt, shame, or compulsion but by cheerful generosity, a deep grasp of God's grace, and confident trust in His ongoing provision for us (2 Cor 8-9; Phil 4). Detailed instructions for tithing are not explicit in the New Testament. Therefore 10% of one's income is not the absolute goal for everyone in all circumstances. It is still a good suggestion as a starting place. Consider how you might transition into greater generosity, especially as you earn greater income. Sadly the trend actually works in the opposite direction. As one's income rises the percentage allocated for giving declines. Consider this humbling fact: Mississippi is consistently ranked among the poorest states and, at the same time, ranks among the highest in charitable citizens. Nationally the percentage of income distributed to charitable giving increasingly drops the more money one makes, up until \$250,000/year, at which it starts to rise again (see the 2015 report on charitable giving in America by the National Center for Charitable Statistics). So cut against the grain of American giving and go with the grain of God's kingdom. Apply this principle of generosity to all of your resources. For example: one suggestion for your ministry to neighbors is to tithe your meals. There are twenty-one meals in a week. What if you took two of those and ate with a non-Christian neighbor, co-worker, or friend?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Does the use of my time and money reflect that Christ is the center of my life and that I trust God to provide for my needs?
- If someone looked at my calendar and bank statements, what would they discern my treasure to be?
- Am I pushing myself and my family to take steps of faith in generosity?
- Am I using my resources to bless others?
- How does this shift alter my perspective on giving: from asking, "How much of my money should I give to God?", to, "How much of God's money should I keep for myself?"