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WORKER



"We are workers together with Him..." (2 Cor. 6:1)

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A STEWARD OF OUR TIME

John Baker

From the depths of a Roman prison Paul wrote to Timothy, his beloved friend and brother in Christ: "Do your best to come before winter" (2 Tim. 4:21). Paul knew that in the winter, the Mediterranean sea trade all but ceased. Ships would anchor in a safe harbor so as to avoid the violent storms that plagued the Mediterranean during the winter months. If Timothy were to make the voyage from Ephesus to Rome, it would have to be before the ships stopped sailing.

There was an understandable sense of urgency in Paul's writing. Nero was on the throne. Paul himself knew that his death was imminent, "the time of my departure is at hand" (2 Tim. 4:6). Timothy needed to drop everything and get to Rome as fast as possible.

A lesson for reflection: every Christian would be a better steward of time if we appreciated the fact that some things have to be done "before winter," or not at all.

Life is a temporary assignment. Job said, "Our days on earth are a shadow" (Job 8:9). The Psalmist wrote, "So teach us to number our days that we might gain a heart of wisdom" (Ps. 90:12). James says, "Your life is a vapor that appears for a little while, then vanishes away" (Jas. 4:14). In the interest of becoming better stewards of time, consider the following concepts:

Good stewards see time as a gift from God – "This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it" (Ps. 118:24). The time we have given to us is a gift from God Himself. Think about how it must sound in His ears to hear us constantly complain,

"I haven't enough time." Paul wrote, "My God shall richly supply all your needs" (Phil. 4:19). While there will never be enough time to do all we WANT to do, by faith we can believe that God gives us the time to do what we NEED to do. Solomon wrote, "To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven" (Ecc. 3:1). We would be better stewards of our time if we looked at each day as a God-given day.

Good stewards reflect often on how Jesus used His time well – After only 3½ years of ministry, Jesus prayed, "I have finished the work You have given me to do" (John 17:4). Jesus used His time well

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"We are workers together with Him..." (2 Cor. 6:1)

STEWARDSHIP

Cody Westbrook

Stewardship is one of the more challenging principles of New Testament Christianity, not because it is difficult to understand but because of the all-encompassing nature of its application to daily living. Everything we have is entrusted to our care and must be utilized responsibly. Our time, our abilities, our opportunities, our money, our children, and our lives are all gifts given graciously by God to be used for His glory. Such a reality should humble us and compel us to give determined attention to discharging our responsibilities as faithfully as possible. This begins with a proper understanding of stewardship in general. This article is an attempt to study the fundamental aspects of stewardship so that we may faithfully carry out our obligations to the Master.

There are several Greek words in the New Testament that relate to the concept of stewardship but the two most common—*oikonomos* and *oikonomia*—are compound words meaning “house administrator.” In the New Testament world a steward was a servant who was charged with managing the household affairs of his master. He may be responsible for handling business transactions, finances, discipline, banquets, and a number of other items at the master’s discretion. Jesus made the application of this concept to every Christian in the parable recorded in Luke 12:35-48. Notably, He used the word steward (*oikonomos*) and slave (*dulos*) interchangeably in the context. Christians are servants of God (Rom. 6:18; Col. 3:24; etc.) who have been entrusted and must faithfully use all that God has given, to His glory. There are three words that best summarize our role as stewards.

First, stewardship involves measurability. In the parable of the talents Jesus said the talents were given to the servants “each according to his own ability”

(Matt. 25:15). Another stewardship parable ends with this very challenging statement:

For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more (Luke 12:48).

God blesses people with a variety of different abilities, opportunities, and responsibilities and we much each use what we have to His glory. First Corinthians 12:12-31 identifies the varied nature of the body of Christ and emphasizes the fact that every part—every member—fulfills an important role in the overall function of the body. No member is too small or insignificant. Whether one, five, or ten talents, “as each one has received” (1 Pet. 4:10) so we must use.

Second, stewardship involves responsibility. Stewards in the ancient world were entrusted with the care of their master’s property. Consequently, reliability, trustworthiness, and integrity were required characteristics for each one. Our requirements as stewards are no different. Paul said,

Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful (1 Cor. 4:1-2).

Jesus asked, “Who then is that faithful and wise steward...” (Luke 12:42) and later said, “He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much” (Luke 16:10). Fundamental to good stewardship is the faithful use of things entrusted to our care, which are not our property. Every blessing bequeathed to us is on loan.

Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

Responsible stewards recognize that they are entrusted with things that belong to God, and regularly consider whether or not they fulfill their duties in the best way possible.

Third, stewardship involves accountability. Ultimately, every steward will account to the Master for how he has managed the Master’s

goods. The stewardship parables clearly emphasize this point as do a number of other passages throughout God's Word. The Hebrews writer said,

And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account (Heb. 4:13).

The word "account" has to do with providing an explanation, a reckoning, or giving a record of assets and liabilities. Peter used the same word in 1 Peter 5:7 when he said "They will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead." Everyone will stand before the judgment seat and answer for how he discharged his duties as a steward. We are accountable to the Master for how we use His goods.

Stewardship is a challenging and humbling concept. Losing sight of our responsibility to faithfully use what God has given us proves easy in the hustle and bustle of life. As we consider our blessings, may we feel compelled to discharge our duties as faithfully as possible, to the glory of our great God.

CW



STEWARDSHIP OF OUR CHILDREN

Andy Baker

Children are a gift, a joy, a blessing, a challenge, and a responsibility all rolled into one. In a word, they are a stewardship. What makes them unique as a stewardship is that they have their own minds, their own personalities, and their own opinions. Money will not generally talk back to you. Time will not question your decisions. The talents you have will not point out consistency issues in your words and your habits. One man observed that children are the truest test of your spiritual life. You might be able to hide who you really are from your neighbors, from your coworkers, and yes, even from the church,

however, you cannot hide your true character from those little eyes that see you at home. What an awesome responsibility of a parent as a steward to shepherd and lead these young souls. What responsibilities has God placed upon the parents as stewards?

God holds steward-parents responsible for setting spiritual boundaries for their children.

One of the very first things a child learns at home is where the boundaries are. If there is no boundary and correction, there is no love (Pro. 29:15; Eph. 6:4; Heb. 12:5-9). There may be incidental boundaries such as curfews, chores, or other responsibilities, however, in setting spiritual boundaries regarding morality and choices, God wants His word to be the foundation. In fact, read through Deuteronomy 6 and see how many times God "commands" steward-parents in the form of verbs that honor Him and His word (for example: observe (6:1); fear (6:2); hear (6:3, 4); love (6:5); teach, talk (6:7)). God desires that children learn a healthy respect for Him and for His word as the boundary from the stewards of the home.

God holds steward-parents responsible for setting spiritual direction for their children.

One man said, "children are ours for a while that they can be His forever." A wise steward/parent is one who inscribes that saying upon their heart. Solomon wrote many proverbs aimed at his son wanting him to be full of wisdom and integrity when dealing with people and cultivating God-honoring (and parent-honoring) decisions in his life (see Pro. 1:7-10; 2:1-5; 3:1-6). Many parents want great things for their children, however, parents must emphasize godly direction and behavior. "Son, I will support you even if you want to be a ditch digger when you grow up, as long as you're a ditch digger that pleases the Lord."

God holds steward-parents responsible for encouraging spiritual growth for their children.

There comes a time when a child chooses what he or she will do with their parent's faith. For example, see the life of Jacob and how the knowledge of God grew from a tool in the hands of a deceitful child (Gen. 28:20), to a vow of service (Gen. 28:20-22), to a recognition that He was the God of his father (Gen. 31:5, 29), to a fear of the God of his father (Gen. 31:53), to "wrestling" with the God of his father (Gen. 32:24-32), to becoming Jacob's/Israel's own God (Gen. 33:20). Children must grow in their faith in God and learn to put their own trust in Him, however, steward-parents cannot sit

idly by and hope that their children will be what God wants them to be. It begins with growing ourselves, and teaching our children that our family values growing like Christ more than anything else (2 Pet. 3:18)!

God holds steward-parents responsible for giving spiritual counsel for their children. While at home, children are obligated to honor their parents by their obedience (Eph. 6:1-3). Parent-stewards need to cultivate an open relationship where they can offer godly counsel to their children and help them work through their problems in God-honoring ways (1 Cor. 10:31).

However, in God's plan, there comes a time when the children leave father or mother and cleave to their spouse (Gen. 2:24). When that happens, the children are still to honor their father and mother, but there is a difference now. The children are not under their authority anymore because they have established their own home. It should be that when a child comes with difficulty at work, with children, with spouse, or with friend, that the steward-parents, as counselors, not as administrators, are always ready to listen, but ultimately to point them to Jesus and to His example and teaching.

What an awesome responsibility to be a parent! Above all, constant prayer, deep reflection, and the light of God's word will illuminate the task of being a steward-parent. A steadfast trust in God will yield what every parent ought to hope for in the lives of their children: "the peaceable fruit of righteousness" (Heb. 12:11).

CW



A STEWARD OF THE GOSPEL

Tom Moore

In 2 Corinthians 4:1-6 Paul discussed the glorious shining light of the Gospel, and he then declared, But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the exceeding greatness of the power may be of God, and not of ourselves (2 Cor. 4:7).

The treasure of the gospel was put into inspired men by revelation; these men did not design or invent that gospel. Consequently, the exceeding greatness of its power was from God, not from mere men. The apostles and prophets of the first century were agents or instruments for the revelation of the gospel, and not its source. Those who preach and teach the gospel today are but instruments by which God's word is disseminated. We are therefore stewards of the Gospel – the good news of Jesus.

Let a man so account of us, as of ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Here, moreover, it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful (1 Cor. 14:1-2).

"Stewards" comes from *oikonomos* and is a slave entrusted with the management of the household, but under the authority of the householder. Paul says they were entrusted with the "mysteries of God" - those things which were impossible for man to know without revelation from God. Today the mysteries of God are revealed to us in the New Testament. As "stewards" we are under the authority of Christ.

It is required that stewards of the Gospel be faithful. The word "required" comes from *zeteo* and means demand or require. Thus, we will be lost if we misuse the Gospel in any way. Notice four reasons why we should be faithful stewards of God's word: 1) Because of our relationship to Jesus, 2) Because we answer to Jesus for the use of what we have been given, 3) If we are unfaithful we dishonor Jesus and are lost, and 4) If we are unfaithful we may cause others to be lost.

As stewards of the Gospel, how should we handle its use? The first step in handling the Gospel correctly as stewards is to know its contents.

"Give diligence (study – KJV) to present thyself approved unto God, a workman

that needeth not to be ashamed, handling aright the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15).

“Till I come, give heed to reading, to exhortation, to teaching” (1 Tim. 4:13). “Oh how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day” (Psa. 119:97). A steward cannot use God’s word skillfully or truthfully if he does not know its contents.

Secondly, if we are handling the Gospel correctly as stewards we will believe and obey its teachings.

Know ye not, that to whom ye present yourselves as servants [true also of stewards, TM] unto obedience, his servants ye are whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?

Jesus said,

Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven (Matt. 7:21).

It is impossible to be a good steward of that which you will not believe and obey.

Thirdly, if we are handling the Gospel correctly as stewards we will hold on to no doctrine not taught in its glorious pages. A faithful steward of the Gospel will “handling aright the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). Paul warns in Galatians 1:6-10 that those who teach a doctrine different than what the inspired apostles taught they were to be “anathema” – devoted to destruction. A good steward of the Gospel will stand in “the old paths” (Jer. 6:16), and “buy the truth, and sell it not” (Pro. 23:23). Stewards of the good news must speak only as the “oracles of God” declares 1 Peter 4:11. Speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where it is silent. Call Bible things by Bible names and do Bible things in Bible ways.

Finally, if we are handling the Gospel correctly as stewards we will share the good news of the Gospel with all who will hear.

Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world (Matt. 28:19-20).

The chorus of a wonderful hymn still rings true:

Into our hands the gospel is given; Into our hands is given the light; Haste, let us carry God’s precious message; Guiding the erring back to the right.

CW

A STEWARD OF OUR MONEY

Johnie Scaggs, Jr.

The Bible often speaks about being a good steward. Jesus uses this word at different times when teaching about the duty of those who have been placed in the position of a steward. For example,

So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first (Matt. 20:8).

The word “steward” means, “a person in charge of supervising workers.”¹

Using this word as it relates to our money, it would mean that we have been put in charge of supervising the way we manage our money. V. P. Black wrote, “There is a three-fold duty of a good steward: 1. Make all he can. 2. Save all he can. 3. Give all he can.” Most people like to make all they can, and some are good at saving all they can, but few are good at giving all they can. We must be careful when having a desire to make all we can that we do not let money become our god. As Paul wrote,

For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows (1 Tim. 6:10).

Those who have a love for money will not be good stewards over their money, but they will let their money rule them and it will cost them their soul. Jesus said,

Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth (Luke 12:15).

Then He gave a parable about a certain rich man who had this very problem, he was a covetous

1 (Louw, Johannes P., and Eugene Albert Nida. Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains 1996: 481.)

person or a lover of money. Because of his love for money, his soul was required by God that very night and the question was asked "...whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?" (Luke 12:20).

When learning to be a good steward over our money the first thing we should understand is that all we have belongs to God. James said,

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning (Jas. 1:17).

David wrote, "The earth is the LORD's, and the fulness thereof; The world, and they that dwell therein" (Ps. 24:1). The first century Christians understood this,

And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common (Acts 4:32).

Knowing that God owns everything, and that we wish to be good stewards over our money we must then ask what is the purpose of our money? First; our money is to be used to support our family.

But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel (1 Tim. 5:8).

God expects us to take care of our family with the money He has blessed us with. Second; We are to help the poor.

Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth (Eph. 4:28).

There are special blessings which one will receive when helping the poor. One of the things which offended God during the days of Israel was that on many occasions they did not take care of the poor. We should always be tender hearted to those less fortunate than we are. Third; Give a portion of our money back to the Lord for the work of the church.

Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no

gatherings when I come (1 Cor. 16:1-2).

As we give to the Lord through the church on the first day of the week we are being involved in the greatest work on earth, the saving of lost souls.

We are to use our money here on earth in such a manner as to lay up treasures in heaven and not on earth (Matt. 6:19-21). If we are not good stewards over our money in this life, we will not be worthy of the blessings of the treasures that are in heaven.

Remember, no matter how much money or how little money we might have, we are to be good stewards over that which God has blessed us with. Use it wisely and God will bless you in ways that you cannot imagine.

CW

THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS

Bobby Burris

One of the most eye-opening revelations mankind faces when coming to the Bible is exemplified in the parable of the Talents; namely, that we are accountable to God. The Parable of the Talents casts a great light on the varied elements of our faithfulness towards the Lord. Let us be reminded of four practical lessons of our stewardship reinforced in this parable.

First, the Parable of the Talents teaches us that we will be held accountable for our lives. The overarching theme Jesus provides is that we have been entrusted. Everything we possess is given to us by Almighty God. Often we see the word "possess" and recognize ourselves as owners. But in reality we are mere stewards. Do we recognize ourselves as stewards or owners? Our answer makes all the difference. A steward is one whose life consists of taking care of something for someone else and waiting for the day such things will be returned to their Master. An owner possesses things and is entitled to do anything he wants with them. And yet all we have, our material belongings, our opportunities, and even our very lives—belongs to God. We are simply entrusted with them until the day of reckoning. Some believe on that final day we will show our faithfulness but the truth is we are showing our faithfulness now by the way we use these entrusted endowments, just like the servants in this parable.

Second, the Parable of the Talents shows us that

we do not have identical opportunities or talents. Notice that each steward was entrusted with unequal amounts of money, “Each according to his ability.” (Matt. 25:15) All are entrusted with something, but each receives a different amount. In our age of equality we are tempted to begrudge the varying degrees of allocation and opportunity we see. We sometimes want to compare ourselves and our talents. Yet we must remember two things: we are responsible for what we have and we are able to work with what we have. Jesus reminds us, “After a long time the master of those servants returned.” (Matt. 25:19) The parable parallels a sure return of Jesus to judge us, and a sure accounting of our faithfulness with that which he has entrusted to our care. The return will consist of our own accounting of our faithfulness to God.

Third, the Parable of the Talents shows that God has given us everything we need in order to be a good steward. Due in large part to the modern day doctrines of equality, we are tempted to feel sorry about the servant who was only given one talent. Yet our faithfulness is not contingent on anyone else’s relationship with God and we will be judged by our own merits. The Biblical teaching found in Luke 12:48, reminds us that whatever we are given is required back to God, whether a little or a lot. “...For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required...” The one talent man was not given too little to accomplish his faithfulness toward the master. He was given more than enough to meet the master’s expectations. Likewise whatever we possess is sufficient enough to produce an increase for our God. But it will always take our effort of faith to achieve that increase. This brings us to our final point.

Fourth, the Parable of the Talents teaches us that our success is contingent upon our work or effort of faith. Go back to the beginning in the book of Genesis and you will see that God’s purpose for man was to work the garden and to keep it. Man has always been made to work. God cares about our efforts and pursuits. This is why God has included the efforts of man in his plan for salvation. Our labors and deeds matter to God. And He expects an increase for whatever we have been given. God expects growth and increase to be the outcome of our efforts in faith for Him.

Regardless of whether we are reading this parable for the first or the fifty-first time, the conclusion is unmistakable: we are personally held responsible for our lives to God. Jesus shows us in the Parable

of the Talents, our calling as Christians and our responsibility to use what God has given us to glorify and honor to Him. May we ever be thankful to Him for giving us opportunities to serve and glorify Him.

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by loving and investing in people (Mark 10:21). He used His time well by giving Himself to the ministry of prayer (Mark 1:35). He used His time well by demonstrating daily dependence on God (Matt. 6:11). He used His time well by remembering that much would still need to be taught and accomplished even after His crucifixion (John 16:12). Most importantly, Jesus used His time well by seeking the glory of God in everything He did (John 8:29; 1 Cor. 10:31). We would be better stewards of our time if we saw time and opportunities more like our Master.

Good stewards of time realize the need to depend on and yield to God – James says that when we make plans without considering God’s will, we are arrogant and proud (Jas. 4:15-17). Paul planned to go work in places like Asia and Bithynia on one occasion, but Scripture states that God had other plans in mind (Acts 16:6-7). We will be better stewards of time when we remember the possibility that some of the inconveniences, interruptions and changes of our plans might in fact be intended by God to help make us more like Christ (Rom. 8:28-29).

Time can be spent, wasted or invested wisely to the glory of God. Everybody struggles with being a good steward of time, but with God’s help and wisdom we can grow in this area. May He truly be glorified in how we choose to use the time He has given us.

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