

STEWARDSHIP

There are numbers of words that that describe our relationship with other people. For example; father, mother, brother, sister, aunt, grandmother, employee, employer, volunteer, policemen, and neighbor. There are also words that describe our relationship to God. For example, last week we saw that when we come to faith in God by Jesus Christ, we are born again into the family of God.

John 1:12-13, "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God-children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God."

To say that we are children of God speaks of our relationship with him in intimacy and in privilege. There could be no greater privilege than being one of God's children. What does the word "servant" tell us about our relationship with God? There is another word that speaks of our responsibility to use those things God has given us for him. What is that word? It is the word "steward."

2 Corinthians 4:1-2, "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."

We don't use that word a whole lot today, but it was a very common word in biblical times. You see the word being used repeatedly. Literally, a steward was a manager of household affairs. People paid stewards to take care of their business for them and even to educate their children. Joseph was a steward in Potiphar's house. Nebuchadnezzar had a steward who was over the young men being trained in his kingdom, like Daniel. Jesus told a story in the book of Luke about an unjust steward who would not forgive someone after he had himself been forgiven.

A good definition of stewardship is, "Utilizing and managing all the resources God provides for the glory of God and the betterment of His creation."

GOD OWNS IT ALL

1 Chronicles 29:11, "Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours."

There is an old song that we used to sing. Some of the words go like this, "he owns the cattle on a thousand hills, the wealth in every mine." It would seem as though we interpret that song as, "he owns all of the unclaimed territory. He owns all of the land, the mountains and the wild livestock, but I own what I possess. That being the case, he ought to be very thankful for whatever I give to him because it is something that he did

not already have. That ought to make me a pretty good guy because I am giving away something that is in my possession, not his.

When we think that way, it is only a reflection of our lack of understanding concerning the uncertainty of our lives.

How much of an owner are you going to feel like if you're lying in a hospital bed hooked up to machines and of not knowing if you're ever going to get out of there alive.

How much of an owner are you going to feel like if you lose everything that you have in some other kind of catastrophe? To say that I am the owner of all that I possess is to not understand the uncertainty of life. Your life can be drastically changed in a moment of time.

GOD OWNS MY LIFE

The thought that I don't own my life is a concept that is so far removed from our thinking that it is hard to really understand it. We have grown up our entire lives thinking about what we believe to be our lives and our possessions.

This is "my car," "my house," "my clothes," "my books." We are asked the question, "What do you want to do with your life? The Bible tells us something entirely different—we belong to God.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20, "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."

We are forever indebted to God because He sent Christ to die for us.

GOD OWNS MY POSSESSIONS

Deuteronomy 8:18, "But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth."

To say that God has given me what I have is another statement that is very hard for us to understand. We operate off of cause and effect. My work is the cause, and my money is the effect.

The truth is God gave you your job, and He gave you the strength and ability to do the job. If you have been promoted in your work, it is only because God has allowed you to

have the promotion. Your hard work would not be possible without his blessing of health, both mentally and physically.

1 Chronicles 29:19, "But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand."

WE ARE TO MANAGE WHAT GOD GIVES US FOR HIM

That is the concept of "stewardship." Jesus gave an example in one of His best known parables-the parable of the talents. We find four characters in this story: a wealthy landowner and his three servants.

Mathew 25:14-15, "Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey."

The wealthy landowner is going away for a long period of time, so he calls his three servants and entrusts them each with a portion of his assets. In English we use the word "talent" to refer to the different skills and abilities we have, but in Jesus' day a "talent" was simply a sum of money. One talent was worth about one thousand dollars in our currency.

So the master gives one servant \$5,000, another servant \$2,000 and a third servant \$1,000, each according to their ability to manage the money.

GOD REWARDS US ACCORDING TO WHAT WE HAVE DONE

The servant who received "five talents" invested the money wisely and made another "five talents," a 100% return. The servant who received "two talents" also made wise investment choices and likewise gained two more talents, again a 100% return. To both of these men, the master said, "Well done, good and faithful servant, you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into in the joy of your lord."

On the other hand, the third servant who had received one talent did not invest it wisely. He did not invest it at all but "dug in the ground and hid his lord's money." It was a common practice in that day without safes and security deposit boxes to bury costly items.

He didn't squander his master's money or waste it selfishly. He simply ignored the stewardship given to him.

When the master returned, he called him a "wicked and lazy servant" and chastised him for not using the money to gain more. In the same way, God has given us responsibility according to our ability to manage it. God knows who can be trusted with much and who can be trusted with little. If I you are a good steward of the little God has given you now, He may be able to trust you with more tomorrow.

I like the story about the wealthy man who died and went to heaven. An angel showed him a palatial mansion where his gardener now lived. He then showed him another huge estate where a missionary now resided. The man said, "Good night! I can hardly wait to see what my eternal home looks like!" Then the angel took him to a little 8x10 shack and said, "That's your place." The wealthy man was appalled. "What gives," he asked, "my gardener and the missionary get palaces, why do I have to live in a shack." As the story goes, Peter said, "We did the best we could with the materials you sent us."

FOUR QUESTIONS CONCERNING MY STEWARDSHIP

1. HOW DO I USE MY TIME?

Time is precious. Thomas A. Edison was right when he said, "Time is the most important thing in the world." Without time, you may have plenty of money, plenty of dreams, and unlimited energy, but you can't use any of it.

Benjamin Franklin -- "Dost thou love life? Then do not squander time, for that's the stuff life is made of." If my life belongs to God, my time belongs to God because time is life.

Psalm 90 verse 12 "Teach us to number our days aright that we may gain a heart of wisdom."

There is a definite amount of time that we have in this life, and we must use the days that we have wisely. We must use each day to its fullest for the glory of God.

2. WHAT ARE MY PRIORITIES?

Our priorities determine the things we do, the choices we make. There is an old story about two paddleboats. They left Memphis about the same time, traveling down the Mississippi River to New Orleans. As they traveled side by side, sailors from one vessel made a few remarks about the snail's pace of the other, and they decided to race.

During the race, one boat began falling behind. There had been plenty of coal for the trip, but not enough for a race. As the boat dropped back, a young sailor took some of the ship's cargo and tossed it into the ovens. When the sailors saw that the supplies burned as well as the coal, they fueled their boat with the material they had been assigned to transport. They ended up winning the race, but burned their cargo. That is very much like

many in our world who are running the race very quickly but who are burning up the best things in life in order to do it.

Writing on priorities, someone has said:

Funny how \$100 looks so big when we take it to church and so small when we take it to the store. Funny how big an hour serving God looks and how small 60 minutes are when spent playing golf, fishing or watching TV. Funny how hard it is to read a chapter in the Bible and how easy it is to read 2-300 pages of a bestselling novel. Funny how we can't think of anything to say when we pray and don't have any difficulty thinking of things to talk about to a friend. Funny how we need 2 or 3 weeks to fit a church event into our schedule, but can adjust it for a social event at the last minute.

Our priorities determine how we spend each day. God wants us to wisely invest our time for Him.

3. HOW DO I USE MY MONEY?

People in our society, have their guard up when it comes to money. One winter storm fell especially hard on the Appalachian Mountains. The snow was deep and it became impossible for residents to leave their homes. The Red Cross mobilized helicopters to fly in supplies to remote mountain homes. One crew had worked hard all day delivering much needed relief to snow-bound families. On their way back to their base, they saw a small cabin almost hidden beneath the snow. Because of the steep mountain, they had to land far below the cabin and carry the supplies uphill through waist-deep snow. It was almost dark when they knocked on the front door. A wrinkled old mountain woman opened the door. "Ma'am, we're from the Red Cross," said a crew member." The old lady said, "It's been a hard winter, son. I just don't think we can give anything this year." Unfortunately, that's the same kind of thing many people are telling God. If we are to be good stewards, we must use our money to build God's kingdom.

If there were some way to talk to our checkbooks, what would they say?

1 – Our checkbooks tell us who is really LORD of our life.

The way we spend our money is a good indicator of who or what is truly important to us. Maybe that is why Jesus talked about money so often. He knew that if you and I are not careful, money can become an idol to us.

A few years ago, a book came out entitled, *The Day America Told the Truth*. The book was the result of surveys that were given to one thousand people who were asked to answer a number of moral and ethical questions. One question asked was: What would you be willing to do for ten million dollars?

25% said they would abandon their family...spouse, children, or parents.

23% said they would become a prostitute for a week.

7% said they would be willing to kill a stranger.

It is not the AMOUNT of money that is the problem. The poor can just as easily slip into this idolatry. John Michael Talbot is the General Minister of The Hermitage, a community of monks, nuns, and families belonging to a religious order called The Brothers and Sisters of Charity. Everyone in the group is committed to living a simple life, and has relinquished all but the most necessary possessions.

Talbot writes, taking a vow of poverty is not a cure for materialism. Many people come to this community and go from being selfish with thousands of dollars...to being selfish with a coffee mug. Our problem with money and possessions is not how much we have. It is how much they have us.

2 – Our checkbooks would also tell how wise of an INVESTOR we are.

We are living in a time when our investments are not looking too good. How would you like to make an investment that is a sure thing-one that is guaranteed success? That is what Jesus talked about in

Matthew 6:19-21. He said, “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.”

Ray Steadman once traveled across the country for week of meetings. The only problem was that his baggage didn't make it. He needed a couple of suits, so he went down to the local thrift shop and was pleased to find a row of suits. When he told the salesman he'd like to buy a couple suits, the salesman smiled and said, "Good, we've got several. But you need to know that they came from the local funeral home. Ray said, "no, that's fine," and he bought two. When he got back to his room, he began to get dressed for the evening meetings. When he put one on, he was surprised that there were no pockets, and then it dawned on him. Of course there are no pockets. When someone dies he doesn't need pockets because he won't take anything with him. What you invest here, stays here. What you invest in heaven blesses you both now and throughout eternity.

3. Our checkbook would tell us how much we trust God

God says in His word over and over again that He will provide for our needs.

[Psalm 37:25](#) says, I was young and now I am old but I have never seen the righteous forsaken or his seed beg for bread.”

[Matthew 6:31-33](#), “Do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your Heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

When we don't give our tithes to the church we are saying in essence that we don't trust God to do what He has said He will do. We are choosing to trust me to take care of me instead of God.

4. Our checkbooks tell us how thankful we really are for all God has done.

The greatest gift that we have ever received or ever will receive is the gift God GAVE when He sent Jesus into our world. And giving of our time and our talents and our money provides us a way for us to show God how thankful we are for His sacrifice on our behalf.

As [Matthew 10:8](#) b says ...Freely you have received, freely give.

One day, you and I are going to stand before Jesus and hear him ask the question, "What did you do with one I gave you?"