

Stewardship

Life is a gift from God. As it's a gift, we live solely according to God's grace and holy will. He can end life by revoking the gift at any time by any means. We are, after all, His property. Our response to this gift should be to honor and thank the Giver, regardless what circumstances surround the gift or what particular abilities (or disabilities and burdens) come with the gift.

When God originally made us, He intended that we should enjoy this life He created. We were to live it at peace with one another and with Him, that is, in His holy presence. We were to exult in all the splendor of God's beautiful and wise creation. Life was to be a prolonged joyous experience. Yet, God also gave us responsibilities. We were given work to do. It was not intended to be onerous or risky, but it was work, to be done on God's behalf. Well, evil entered God's very good creation and distorted everything. Worse, God had to curse His lovely creation to thwart humans from using their considerable God-given powers to promote and spread evil. So we now inhabit a dysfunctional and dangerous world that has only a faint resemblance to the very good creation it originally was. We live our lives weighed down by a sin nature, surrounded by invisible evil beings who tempt us to sin, in a cursed world that deliberately frustrates us at every turn. It's in this sad and grievous milieu that we have the gift of life. And we're still to pursue it according to God's will and purposes.

The gift of life is not disinterested. Rather, it is purposeful. That is, God gave the gift for certain reasons, namely to accomplish something of supreme importance to Him. So another way to understand life is, it's a stewardship. We usually think of stewardship in terms of money. I'm arguing that life itself is a stewardship. Life is entrusted to us to use in a way that fulfills the purposes God intended. And He has revealed that in the Bible, which is His Word. We do not have the gift to squander on selfish pursuits or in ways that don't honor Him, the source and giver of life. Because it's a stewardship, we'll be held accountable at the end of life for how we used it. A day of reckoning awaits every person, when we'll have to render an accounting of what we did with the gift while we had it. God is good, but He is dangerous to those who ignore Him.

The Book of Job was written before any Mosaic revelation. Job had an awareness of God and spiritual insight received in some way at creation. In this narrative, Job suffered the loss of everything except his life. Yet Job remained faithful to God. That was his responsibility, and he fulfilled it in spite of fierce pressure to abandon it from those who pretended to know God's ways. And at the end he was rewarded by being blessed with a personal encounter with the Creator. (Interestingly, he received no explanation of why he had to be so tested.) We're all to be like Job: faithful to God according to the light we have, in spite of circumstances, because that's our *creational* obligation. It's the responsibility that comes with the gift of life.

Because life is a stewardship, it's also a probation. It's a (relatively brief) period during which we may demonstrate to God our character, our love for Him, our obedience to His will. There's a post-mortem existence awaiting every human, at which there will necessarily be a judgment and a determination of one's ultimate destiny. What this means is, the great existence for which we were made is that which is to come, the one on the other side of death. This present temporary existence, what we call life, is a period of testing. Are we living for the things that matter to us, or that matter to God?

Of course we all fail. We don't and can't live according to God's perfect character, the standard to which we're held. But God loves His human creatures! Believing in Christ, God's gracious provision for our greatest need, results in forgiveness of sin and a new and precious relationship with God. And the resurrection of Christ makes a radically new life available to us. Again, it's a gift of life, but it's one now that involves the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to fulfill God's expectations, empowerment to obey His revealed will.

So if we've trusted in Christ, stewardship *again* confronts us. Because of the great privileges that come with salvation, we have an even *heightened* responsibility. God doesn't take us away to heaven the day we trust Christ. He leaves us here to serve Him. We are not here as spectators! We've been given tasks, and responsible believers are engaged in them. The parable of the Ten Minas (Luke 19:11-27) exemplifies this stewardship. Christ warned, "**From whom much has been given, much is required**" (Luke 12:48; see also 16:10). Paul understood that he was entrusted with a stewardship (1 Cor 4:1-2), and he had to be faithful in fulfilling his responsibility. And Paul repeatedly (8x) exhorts us to imitate him as he served Christ. Peter likewise exhorts all believers to be stewards of God's grace (1 Peter 4:10).

God has clearly stated His purposes for us in His Word, and the Christian life is to fulfill those purposes. We're here to grow in maturity and holiness, by which we glorify God and anticipate our glorification and future state. As the Body of Christ, His hands, feet and mouth, we're here to continue the mission of the Incarnate Son: As the Son was sent, so are we; the mission of the Church is "Go." And as priests, we intercede for others and we mediate God's blessings to others. These are a few of the ways we serve God. If we don't serve God in the way He's instructed, unfaithful to what was entrusted to us, we're irresponsible stewards.

A glorious future awaits us, so we need to take *exceedingly* seriously our responsibilities now, while we can. "**Faith and love . . . spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the Word**" (Col 1:5) and, "**set your hearts on things above**" (Col 3:1) mean that the blessings that await us who believe in Christ are to motivate us to living the kind of new life that God expects of us.

Let Paul have the last word: "**Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord**" (Romans 12:11).