

Stewardship

A concept that emerges from Genesis 1 and is implied elsewhere, but that has been lost (except when church leaders need money), is stewardship. We were created to be stewards of God's physical creation. We're to manage for God the resources He has invested in His world and in us. Such resources include all that's in the environment; social justice and order; as well as our money, time, energy, and gifts, in short, our life. I suspect it also involves truth; we're to be faithful stewards of *all* God's truths, not merely the Gospel but especially the Gospel. And stewards are accountable to God for their stewardship. Stewardship necessarily involves responsibility to the owner of those resources. And stewardship necessarily involves investing those resources so that the owner gains a return on the investment.

In the Genesis creation narrative, God built a world to be filled with life. He brilliantly invented life in all its forms as we know it (except for those creatures that have gone extinct, such as dinosaurs). And to climax His work, He made a unique creature who would mirror Him and manage His creation for Him. God loves His creation. And He loves His image-bearers. I understand the command to have "dominion" to mean to manage creation, that is, to be stewards over the created world, on God's behalf. This is a creational responsibility for all humans, heightened now by our status as adopted sons in Christ.

God tests everyone in one way or another. But everyone is responsible to God to fulfill His command to be a steward. Stewardship is a test. That's why this concept is so exceedingly important to us. We must be aware of our responsibilities and be faithful to God, or else suffer consequences. Exactly what those consequences are isn't explicit in Scripture, and God may exact retribution as He pleases in a number of ways. Let's develop this idea further.

Everything – *everything!* – belongs to God. Our lives belong to Him. What we have has been entrusted to us to use to His benefit, for His purposes. Do we get this basic concept? Probably not, it's lost in our culture of private ownership and personal freedom. We suppose we're here to enjoy life, to be happy. No, that's false. Creation is purposeful, and our creaturely life is purposeful. We're here to serve God according to His revealed will. Darwinian evolution steals this essential truth from us, but so does our indifference to His Word, or our failure to think carefully about it.

God has given us life, a certain amount of money, certain freedoms, perhaps certain special talents or skills, and more for us to use to His glory. It's His, and we're only here to put it to use for Him. He's also entrusted us with His Word, with cosmic truths and promises that He wants all His people on earth to know. He's entrusted us with the knowledge of our Savior and the Gospel of salvation. He's entrusted us with freedoms, and with spare time not needed for subsistence. And He's entrusted us (or at least most of us) with good health. What do we do with all these resources? They aren't gifts for us to use as we please. They belong to God, not to us, and He expects us to invest them so that fruit redounds to Him.

At the end of Jesus' work of discipling His followers, to climax His teaching, He told the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14ff). As this is immediately prior to the events of the crucifixion, we should assume that this parable is of great importance to us today. It's all about serving Jesus while He's in heaven awaiting His return. It's all about stewardship. In this parable, Jesus invests [something] in each of us, and He expects us to put the [whatever it is] to work so that His investment is multiplied. Faithfulness is rewarded, and faithlessness (that is, fruitlessness) is condemned. What is it that Jesus invests? It may be the indwelling Holy Spirit. It may be the Gospel. It may be the Word of Christ. It may be all of these, for all of these are given to Jesus' followers. The point is, we followers dare not be passive or indifferent or complacent about our Christianity, but get to work serving God as Jesus has commanded, or else. We have no choice in this matter, no way to opt out.

What's not explicit in this parable, but we should assume it's there, is the matter of love for Jesus. The ones who were faithful loved their Master. The wicked, lazy one, we should assume, had no love for the Master; he loved himself too much. A steward is faithful to the extent that he has love for God. The first and greatest commandment is, **"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy strength."** The word, "strength," means we express our love for God by using all the resources available to us to fulfill the demands of salvation.

Stewardship is elsewhere in the Gospels. It's in Luke 12:42-48, for example, which concludes **"From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked."** The "servant" in the parable in Luke 16:1ff was tasked with stewardship. Paul referred to himself as a steward entrusted with the truths of God (1 Corinthians 4:1-2). And Peter enjoins the stewardship of God's grace on all of us (1 Peter 4:10). Stewardship is "between the lines" of the entire Bible; it's not explicit but it's there for the spiritual person to find. It's why we've been entrusted with Scripture!

Our life belongs to God. And He has the absolute right to dispose of our life according to His holy will. Yes, He loves us, but we dare not presume upon that truth. He gave us life as an investment, to use for His glory and for His purposes. His creational intent was that we serve Him. So we're to be stewards even of our own life! If we're irresponsible, if we refuse to serve Him as He has revealed we're to do that, He may take life from us. God is to be feared.

Dear reader, we need to think afresh about what Christianity is, and jettison all non-biblical ideas as dangerous to our soul. Groupthink is *especially* inimical. It's Scripture that must inform how we're to think and live. Let's get this: The Gospel is loving Jesus. And stewardship is that love being expressed.

Stewardship (servanthood) is loving others out of love for Christ. So, we seek to bless others in some way, using what's available to us (money, energy, knowledge of Scripture, time, etc). We encourage and exhort others, we help them with material needs and we teach them God's will, and we do all these things with humility and in the name of Jesus. The human race is a unity, an extended family, so caring for one another is (or should be) the most natural thing to do – especially for those who are also believers in Christ. We invest our life in the life of others.

But Jesus has specially invested in the Church the Gospel. He expects us all to be sharing it in the expectation that others will believe, and they then in turn will share it with others who will believe, and so on. That's how investment works. But investments depend on the steward's faithfulness. And of course wisdom, biblical wisdom.

I recently heard this statistic from a reliable source: Only 1% of evangelical believers engage in personal evangelism. That means there's no love in the Church, not for Jesus nor for anyone else. This is ghastly tragic. It means that, whatever we may suppose about our personal eternal destiny, we're not stewards, we're not obedient believers, and we're not spiritual. We're in a dreadful predicament that church attendance cannot rectify. What to do?

We need to repent of complacency and indifference. And laziness. And abandon all the interests and pursuits that keep us from obeying Jesus, and seek to be responsible stewards instead. We have only this one life to prove ourselves. There is no second chance. There's probably very little time left to prove ourselves faithful. And we've been warned.