

Stewardship

Introduction

Christians are encouraged to be good stewards. But good stewards of what? What does the term imply? In this study, we will take a broad look at stewardship.

Our Study

The Bible gives the first glimpse of God's concept of stewardship in the opening chapters of Genesis.

The scripture: Genesis 1:1; 2:8, 15; and 1:28.

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.... The Lord God had planted a garden... and took the man and put him in the garden...to work it and take care of it."

"God blessed them and said to them, 'Fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'"

1. Why did God put Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden? _____

2. What instructions did God give Adam and Eve? _____

God is the true owner of the earth and everything in it, and we are only tenant-managers. Like Adam and Eve, we are guardians of God's property. We are to manage, protect, and take care of it in a way that glorifies God. In other words, God has made us stewards over His earth.

It is not surprising that God teaches us how to return what He has given us. The heart of stewardship is responding out of love for God by freely giving to Him. We do this primarily in three areas of our lives—our time, our talents, and our money and possessions.

Time

Early in history, God made it clear that He expected man to return a portion of the time He had given him.

The scripture: Exodus 20:8-11

"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maid servant, nor your animals, nor the aliens within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but He rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy."

3. How many days a week did God command us not to work? _____

Today Christians honor Sunday, rather than the seventh day, but the principle is the same. God expects us to return at least one day out of seven to Him. On that day, we worship and honor Him and give our bodies a needed rest. Giving this time to God is essential to both our physical and spiritual health.

Personal Questions:

- Are you in the habit of returning one day of the week to God?
- In what other ways do you give time to God?

Talents

The great cathedrals, artwork, and inspirational music of the past are evidence of man's sharing his talents with God. Early in the life of God's people, He asked for their talents in the construction of the tabernacle.

The scripture: Exodus 35:10.

"All who are skilled among you are to come and make everything the Lord has commanded."

4. Whom did Moses call for? _____

Later in this same chapter, craftsmen, designers, embroiderers, spinners, weavers, woodworkers, and building constructors worked together to build the tabernacle.

God gives a variety of talents and skills. He can and will use them all—cooking, sewing, secretarial work, bookkeeping, babysitting, singing, dancing, managerial skills—when we dedicate them for His use in our churches, our neighborhoods, and the church at large.

Personal Questions:

- What skills do you have that your local church could use?
- Have you offered them as a service?

Money and possessions

The third area in which the Lord wants us to be His stewards is in the realm of money and possessions.

Long before God made it mandatory in the Law, the principle of returning a portion of what a person received was established in the hearts of His true believers. One of these was Abram (Abraham).

Scripture relates the story of how Abraham went to war against four heathen kings who had overpowered and looted Sodom and Gomorrah and kidnapped Abraham's nephew Lot.

The Scripture: Genesis 14:16, 18-20

"[Abraham] recovered all the goods and brought back his relative Lot and his possessions, together with the women and the other people... Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was the priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram... Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything."

5. Who was Melchizedek? _____

6. What did Abraham give him? _____

When God gave the Law to the Israelites, He made tithing an important element in it.

The Scripture: Leviticus 27:30

“A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord; it is holy to the Lord.”

7. Whom did the Lord say the tithe belonged to? _____

The tithe became the standard the Lord’s stewards returned to Him in the Old Testament. In addition the Israelites paid two other tithes: a tithe when they held their national feasts and every third year, a tithe to take care of the poor.

Some may argue that tithing does not apply to New Testament people. What did Jesus say about it?

The Scripture: Luke 11:42

“Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone.”

8. What did the Jesus say about the Pharisees’ tithing? _____

Some people believe they can’t tithe because they have no money left after they pay their bills. Leaving our tithe till all other bills are paid is a losing proposition.

In the New Testament, the tithe is considered a minimum standard of giving. In addition to the tithe, we are encouraged to give offerings as well. But what Jesus was after was a heart attitude expressing itself in giving.

The Scripture: 2 Corinthians 8:2, 3

“Out of the most severe trial, their [the Macedonians’] overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity... they gave as much as they were able to and even beyond their ability.”

9. For what did Paul commend the Macedonians? _____

Some experts say that half of the Lord’s parables deal with money. Why do you suppose God put so much emphasis on this subject? The following scriptures give us some idea.

The Scripture: Matthew 6:24

“No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”

10. What did Jesus say about serving God? _____

The Scripture: 1 Timothy 6:10

“The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.”

11. Why shouldn't we love money? _____

The Scripture: Exodus 20:3

"You shall have no other gods before Me."

12. What is God's command? _____

When we place too much attention on money and possessions, they become our god. Such love leads to grief. But when we honor God as the creator and supplier of everything by returning a portion of what we receive, we show we put Him first.

Receiving from God

We are to return to God a portion of what He has given to us in time, talents, and money and possessions. But it is impossible to outgive God. What happens when we are faithful stewards?

The Scripture: 2 Corinthians 9:6, 7

"Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously... God loves a cheerful giver."

13. What spiritual principle does Paul give in regard to giving? _____

Jesus told several parables about faithful and unfaithful stewards. One of the best known, the parable of the talents, concerns a rich man who left his servants in charge while he went away. Two invested his money wisely, but the third buried the portion given to him. When the master returned, he commended the two faithful servants.

The Scripture: Matthew 25:21

"Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness."

14. What did he promise the faithful servants? _____

15. What were they invited to do? _____

However, the master severely rebuked the servant who wasted his money.

The Scripture: Matthew 25:26-28

"You wicked and lazy servant!... Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For everyone who has will be given more and he will have abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him."

16. What happened to this servant? _____

17. What principle did Jesus give? _____

As faithful stewards, we are called to use our time, our talents and our money in the Lord's service. The good news is that God wants to pour His love in our hearts so we can joyfully become good stewards. Then we will be commended by the Lord, invited to share His happiness, and will receive even more than we already have.

The Answers

1. To work it and take care of it
2. To fill the earth, subdue it, and rule over all living creatures
3. One day
4. All who are skilled
5. King of Salem and priest of the God Most High
6. A tenth of everything
7. The Lord
8. He rebuked them for neglecting justice and the love of God but said they were right to tithe
9. Their generous giving even in hard times
10. We can't serve both him and money
11. Love of money is a root of all kinds of evil
12. That we have no other gods before Him
13. Whoever gives generously will receive generously
14. He would put them in charge of many things
15. To share their master's happiness
16. What he had was taken away from him
17. Everyone who has will be given more; whoever has little, even that will be taken from him.

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