

Introduction

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Stewardship is a predominate theme in Scripture. Not only was it one of Jesus' favorite topics, it flows like a river from its source in the earliest verses of Genesis to the concluding chapter of Revelation. Stewardship is a bright thread so thoroughly interwoven into the fabric of Scripture that the failure to see it could only be intentional. The **first sin** of humanity was an abuse of stewardship. The **first murder** was the aftermath of an improper offering to God. The **final act** in the human drama will be the return of the missing Master who comes to claim the world that has always, and only, belonged to Him.

The Lifestyle Stewardship Bible Study Series looks at the topic of stewardship in non-traditional ways. For example, you will find the word "tithe" is not discussed in these lessons. This study assumes the tithe and endeavors to move beyond basic training to other significant questions:

- What does it mean that the first job given to humankind was stewardship?
- What does it imply that we were stewards before we were sinners?
- How and why does the image of the steward in our culture today differ so greatly from its high and esteemed position in Scripture?
- Why is our participation in giving so important to our relationship with God?

Of all the remarkable things Jesus said about money, none may be more astonishing than, "If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?" (Luke 16:11) "True riches," we may assume, refers to wealth that is spiritual and eternal. Consider the statement! Is Jesus not saying that entitlement to "true riches" is contingent on how we use our material wealth? Does this not mean that financial faithfulness is an essential key to spiritual discovery and enlightenment? Could it be that the lives of spiritual enchantment and adventure for which we all long can never be ours until we have mastered mammon?

The Lifestyle Stewardship Bible Study Series is an adventure of discovery for those who desire access to the true riches Jesus promised.

Lesson One: The Biblical Steward

(All Scripture references are the New International Version unless otherwise stated.)

Reflect: Entering the Work Place

Do you remember your first real job? Where was it? How much were you paid? What were your responsibilities?

Most people recall their first job with fond and humorous memories. This is remarkable when you consider most *first jobs* are menial in nature and low in pay!

The First Job:

Genesis 1:26-28 *Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; 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."*

A first job is significant. It is a rite of passage to adulthood and an affirmation of our worth and ability to contribute to society. A first job indicates that someone recognizes our capabilities and potential. It also introduces an authority figure whose directions we are expected to follow.

Humanity's first job was stewardship – a management position. We were placed here not to conquer creation, but to cooperate with it. Humanity's role is not so much to govern the planet, but to garden it; not to kill, but to keep; not to consume the planet, but to cultivate it.

The Job Description:

Genesis 2:15-19 *The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the Lord God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name.*

God's directions were broad. Adam was not presented with a long list of duties to check off every day, but was simply told to *take care of things*. God placed His confidence in Adam's ability to do the job and do it correctly. Adam was **given personal freedom and discretion** in caring for the garden. God encouraged Adam to bring his own abilities, viewpoint, and perspective to his work. An example was the task of naming the animals. As steward of the garden, Adam was not a *hired-hand* but rather served as a manager.

The job of stewardship was a part of God's original and undefiled plan for us. Assigned **pre-sin**, the job of steward was one of privilege rather than punishment.

God made **provision** for Adam's needs. Adam was *free* to eat whatever and whenever he wanted from the abundance! Adam's faithful stewardship of the garden ensured that his needs would always be abundantly supplied. You could say the Adam participated in the first profit-sharing program.

The garden provided the place of **partnership** between God and Adam. While providing for Adam's needs, God also placed limits on the rights and privileges Adam enjoyed as manager. To go beyond the **position** of manager was to violate the principles of his partnership with God. As limits, Adam was told not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

Adam's first job as steward was his first **priority** and his first responsibility. Chronologically, stewardship is our *first* job. While we have been given other important tasks, the job of stewardship was never meant to be denied or disregarded.

React:

Based on your understanding of Adam's job description, write your definition of steward.

Although the word *steward* usually brings to mind an image of a table waiter or a cruise ship employee, it can be defined as "one who acts as a supervisor or administrator of someone else's property." We tend to think of the steward's responsibilities as washing dishes, scrubbing floors or cleaning tables. However, in biblical times, the role of the steward was one of high rank and regard. It was a role of service from a position of power and prestige and was more managerial than menial. The steward was more a leader than a laborer.

In today's church, the role of steward has been maligned. When stewardship sermons are preached, people tend to stay away. Preachers have even apologized for talking about giving. Negative feelings are reinforced when the only time stewardship is stressed is when the church budget is in trouble. Yet stewardship is best understood as a significant, important role within the church and as a lofty position to which to aspire.

Consider:

- If Christians are to rediscover the joy and excitement of giving,
- If the church is to fulfill its mission and ministry, and
- If the Kingdom of God is to grow and "Go,"

Then, the privilege, power and purpose of the steward must be

- Relearned from the Scripture,
- Reclaimed from the past, and
- Reapplied to daily life.

Responsibilities of the Job:

1 Corinthians 4:1-2 *So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God. Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.*

The Apostle Paul used *stewards* to refer to ministers of God's truth. As ministers distribute the Word of God to others, they act as *managers* or *administrators* of truth.

The position of *steward* was of great value and was difficult to obtain. To lose the position would have been devastating. For instance, in Luke 16:1-4, Jesus tells of an unfaithful steward in danger of losing his position. Panic stricken, the steward asked, "What shall I do if the Lord takes away my stewardship? I cannot dig and am too ashamed to beg."

The position was also held by individuals who demonstrated dependability, wisdom, and faithfulness. Jesus emphasized the steward's importance when he asked, "*Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants...?*" (Luke 12:42) It was more of a reward than responsibility to receive the assignment of *steward*.

A Greek word study of *steward* provides an understanding of the responsibilities that went with the job. Synonyms and phrases which describe these responsibilities are:

to arrange	to put in order
to order the house	governor
chamberlain	overseer
administrator	house-manager

Consider the role of the house manager. The house manager was responsible for overseeing all household operations and all work of other personnel on the master's staff. He would control the purchase of products and services related to the household and sometimes supervised the care and education of the household's children. The household included the principal residents and their children, extended family members and their families, and the service personnel and their families. Obviously, the steward was responsible for a large number of people. As the master's right-hand-man, the steward represented the owner, spoke for the owner, and, with some limitation, carried the authority of the owner. The steward was indeed a trusted servant.

React:

How do you view the role of the steward? Pick the word from each pair that describes your personal thoughts about stewardship.

menial	or	managerial
obligation	or	opportunity
labor	or	leadership
burden	or	blessing

The words on the right describe the biblical understanding of the steward. Do your thoughts about stewardship match the biblical understanding? Does scripture support the use of any of the words on the left to describe stewardship?

A Prime Example:

Genesis 39:2-6 *The Lord was with Joseph and he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. When his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord gave him success in everything he did, Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned. From the time he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the Lord blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph. The blessing of the Lord was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field. So he left in Joseph's care everything he had; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate.*

We all remember the life of young Joseph. The favorite son of Jacob, Joseph was resented by his brothers for the favoritism and coddling he received. In truth, Joseph's own attitude and behavior was not above approach and only added to their resentment. Although his brothers planned to kill Joseph, they instead sold him into slavery to a passing caravan of traders. Joseph was taken to Egypt and sold to Potiphar, a high ranking officer in service to the Pharaoh.

Joseph began as a servant, but he quickly climbed the ladder of success to the high and honored position of steward to Potiphar. Joseph was recognized as a successful man, a requirement for any steward. He *found favor* in Potiphar's sight as Potiphar recognized not only Joseph's

successes but the qualities of leadership and management as well. Joseph was so successful that he was eventually promoted to the position of domestic steward, becoming responsible for managing everything related to Potiphar's household.

As Joseph proved himself to Potiphar, he was given more and more responsibility. Eventually he was entrusted with everything Potiphar owned. His responsibilities included business affairs as well as the household concerns. In fact, Joseph was so trustworthy and effective that Potiphar no longer concerned himself with his home or business affairs. Potiphar knew they were in good hands.

Joseph realized that while he was in charge of everything Potiphar owned, he owned nothing himself. When Potiphar's wife became enamored with Joseph, he could have become entangled in a web of deceit and irresponsibility. However, recognizing the limits of his position, Joseph refused to violate the owner-manager relationship. His refusal won him the title "good and faithful steward."

React:

Joseph's management of Potiphar's resources parallels Adam's management of the garden. Review the following statements. Place a **B** beside each statement that describes both Adam and Joseph, and **A** beside those that are unique to Adam, and a **J** beside each one unique to Joseph.

- Held a lofty position of manager.
- Had great freedom.
- Faced great temptation.
- Respected the limits of his position as steward.
- Moved beyond the limits placed on the position as steward.
- Maintained the trust with his master.
- Broke the trust with his master.

What word would you use to sum up Joseph's example of a steward? Adam's? What caused one man to be successful, while the other failed? What lessons can be applied to our role as stewards?

More Than Just a Job

Reviewing the examples of Adam and Joseph provides us explanations for our role as stewards. Our appointment as stewards recognizes:

- God has confidence in our abilities, management skills, and wisdom. Demonstrating His confidence, God has entrusted a measure of His wealth to each of us.
- God has given us great freedom in our stewardship. He has not issued a long list of "do's" and "don'ts" as a part of our job description. God allows us to make management decisions without His specific instructions.
- God sees us as partners rather than servants. God treats us as responsible adults and partners in His work. He works as Owner; we work as His managers.

Respond:

How do you feel about appointment to stewardship? Has stewardship been a blessing or a burden to you in the past? How does your attitude toward the assignment of stewardship reflect your partnership with God?

The Assignment of Stewardship is.....

- **A primary relationship with God.**
The relationship is not optional, but it is as much a part of the human condition as breathing or eating.
- **An Eternal Partnership with God.**
We are partners in managing His resources on earth.
- **A Privileged Position.**
It is one of our greatest glories that we have been invited to partner and participate in with God.
- **A Gift from God.**
It enables our personal involvement in God's World and Work.
- **A Priority.**
Understanding the privileges given us as stewards of God in our "first" job helps us give it the priority of our "only" job.
- **A Pure Relationship with God.**
It is the opportunity to serve God in a way intended from the beginning.

Notes from Lesson One