

Stewardship

By Peggy Lively

Core Verse: “Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.” **1 Timothy 6:17-19**

Creed: “I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.”

Part One: What does it mean?

Most of us automatically think of money when we think of the word stewardship, but it includes much more than just money. Stewardship is “supervising or managing something that is entrusted to one’s care.” Furthermore, a steward is “one employed in a large household or estate to manage its concerns” (Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary). As God’s children, we have been entrusted with God’s “estate”; we are stewards of the things he has left in our care. This includes my house, my family, my job, my ministry, my relationships ... everything. Everything we have really belongs to God, and he has allowed us the privilege of managing it in a way that seems best to us.

We will examine how being a good steward involves more than just managing money, but then we will examine the importance of managing money as well. Stewardship is taking care of, and investing wisely, all that God has put under our care. A great example of stewardship in the Bible is Joseph. Even in prison, Joseph was a great steward or manager of what God had placed before him.

Joseph

Read Genesis 39. In this chapter, we first see Joseph as a steward in Potiphar’s house. “Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned” (Genesis 39:4). I imagine that Potiphar, one of Pharaoh’s officials and the captain of the guard, had an enormous estate and countless numbers of people under his authority. Yet he entrusted it all to Joseph.

1. What happened from the time Potiphar entrusted everything into Joseph’s care?
2. What was the only thing that Potiphar concerned himself with?
3. What was the one thing that was not entrusted to Joseph’s care?

As we read on about the events that took place, we see that Joseph is falsely accused by Potiphar's wife. As a result, he is thrown into prison. At this point, we would all probably be willing to excuse Joseph from having to be a good steward, since everything he had has been taken away from him. Yet, once again, he rises to the top of his circumstances. "So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there" (Genesis 39:22).

4. Why did the warden not pay attention to anything under Joseph's care?

We have all been given something, and God calls us to be good stewards of that which he has placed in our care. It doesn't matter how much or little you have – it's how you use it to glorify God.

Bring it home:

*What has God entrusted to me?

*Am I being a good steward of those things he has placed in my care? Explain.

Part Two: What Does it NOT Mean?

Stewardship does not mean that we simply hold on to and protect that which God has given us. It is about giving and investing what he has given us in order to multiply the blessings and further his kingdom. Jesus tells two different parables teaching this principle.

A. The Parable of the Talents

Read **Matthew 25:14-30**.

5. List what each servant was given and what they did with it.

6. How did the master respond to each servant?

7. What did he do to the lazy servant? (verses 28-30)

That's pretty scary, isn't it? This response seems pretty harsh, but it shows how important stewardship is to our Master. What we need to remember is that everything really belongs to Him, and we are just taking care of it. "[He] called his servants and entrusted his property to them" (Matthew 25:14). The Master had a right to be angry with the servant because it was *his* money. We often forget that our stuff really belongs to God, and we fail to consult him on the way that he wants us to manage it. Job learned through very difficult circumstances that "the Lord gives and the Lord takes away" (Job 1:21). It can all be gone in an instant if the Lord chooses to take it away.

Bring it home:

*How am I investing the "talents" that God has given me in order to multiply them for my Master?

B. The Parable of the Rich Fool

This next parable reveals how Jesus condemns those who hide, hoard, and store up what they have been given only for themselves. It is important to note that some of the words used to describe the men in these two parables are: wicked, lazy, worthless, and fool.

Read Luke 12:13-21.

8. What had the rich man decided to do with his crop?

9. What did God say to him?

When I read what the rich man thought to himself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry" (Luke 12:19) I thought, "This sounds like retirement." Is saving up for retirement wrong? Then I went back to verse 15, before Jesus even began telling the parable.

10. What was the warning Jesus gave in verse 15?

11. What does Jesus say after concluding the parable in verse 21?

It isn't wrong to save or prepare for the future, but it is wrong to be greedy and selfish, and not rich in our relationship with God. Our core verse reminds us to, "Be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share" (1 Timothy 6:17-19). As we are generous

and share with others, we are trusting God to provide for us as well. Jesus goes on in the next few verses in Luke chapter 12 to say, “Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds!” (**Luke 12:24**) Our tendency as humans is that the more self-sufficient we think we are, the less we depend upon God. Saving for the future is not wrong as long as we remember that everything we have is a gift from God. Our sufficiency is in Him and not ourselves. We must lay up treasures in heaven by investing what God has given us for eternal purposes that give him glory and bring others into the kingdom of Heaven. *“The greatest cause in the world is joyfully rescuing people from hell, meeting their earthly needs, making them glad in God, and doing it with a kind, serious pleasure that makes Christ look like the Treasure he is ... Using our possessions in a way that makes the most needy glad in God would save us in more ways than one. It would confirm that Christ is our Treasure, and thus keep us on the path to heaven.”* John Piper, Don’t Waste Your Life, page 114 and 122

Bring it home:

*How can I be rich toward God?

Part Three: Money

We have looked at how stewardship involves more than just money, but now we need to focus specifically on money. Nobody likes to teach, preach or hear a message on money, but it is a very important issue addressed in the Bible. Our pastor, Randy Hageman, spoke this last Sunday on money and pointed out that one out of ten verses (2300) in the Bible are about money. So you really can not avoid the issue when reading the Bible. John Piper notes, *“The issue of money and lifestyle is not a side issue in the Bible. The credibility of Christ in the world hangs on it”* (Don’t Waste Your Life, page 109). *“Fifteen percent of everything Christ said relates to this topic – more than his teachings on heaven and hell combined”* (Randy Alcorn, The Treasure Principle, page 8). So how do we honor God with our money? Jesus says in **Malachi 3:10**: “Bring your full tithe to the Temple treasury so there will be ample provisions in my temple” (The Message). Our tithe is 10% of our money, and that is what God asks us to give back to him. If I keep the perspective that 100% of it is really his, then I realize what a blessing it is that I get to keep 90%. Yet if I believe that it is all mine, because “I’ve earned it,” then it will be very difficult to let go of that 10%. Our offerings are everything that we give in addition to that first 10%.

Read **Malachi 3:6-12**.

12. How did the descendants of Jacob rob God?

13. What was the result?

This is the only place in the Bible that Jesus says “Test me.” He wants us to trust him with our money and be faithful to give back to him what is rightfully his.

14. What does Jesus say will be the result of faithful tithing?

When the bills are stacked up on the counter, it is harder to give up that 10%. That’s why it is important to tithe *first*. Don’t wait until you see what’s left over to give to God. Give to him first, trusting him to provide for your other needs.

Read **2 Corinthians 8:1-5**.

15. What resulted from the Macedonian churches’ most *severe trial* and *extreme poverty*?

In extreme poverty, they gave generously with overflowing joy. “They gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints” (2 Corinthians 8:3-4). They “urgently pleaded” for the privilege to share in the service of the saints. Do I consider it a privilege to share in the ministry of others? That is how we lay up treasures in Heaven. How did the Macedonian’s “extreme poverty well up in rich generosity?” I think the answer is found in verse 5. Read this verse and fill in the blanks below.

16. “And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to _____ and then to _____ in keeping with God’s will.” (**2 Corinthians 8:5**)

When we give our money and ourselves first to God, we will discover the joy found in honoring him and trusting him to bless what we have offered. He won’t disappoint us.

Bring it home:

*Write your commitment to tithe here. Commit to give 10% to God and see how he will bless your life in some way.

*If you have been faithful to tithe, how have you experienced God’s blessing in your life as a result?

Lord, help me to trust you with my finances. Constantly remind me by your Spirit that none of it belongs to me; it all belongs to you. Thank you for entrusting me to be a steward of all that you have given me. May I honor you in the way that I manage your “estate.” In plenty and in poverty, may I be content in all circumstances, rejoicing and trusting in you. Every good and perfect gift comes from you. May I return to you what is rightfully yours for the work of your kingdom and the glory of your holy name. Amen