

# BIBLICAL STEWARDSHIP

## WEEK 1: STEWARDSHIP FOR THE NEW TESTAMENT BELIEVER

### INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

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- The goal of this series is to consider the unique calling of believers to steward their lives for the glory of God and of Christ. For the believer, our whole lives (our skills, bodies, time, money, and so on) ultimately belong to God. Everything we have is on loan to us from our Lord, and we will give an accounting for how we used it. Over the course of these lessons, we hope to bring biblical principles to bear in our everyday lives, so that we might manage what God has entrusted to us in a way that is distinctly Christ-centered.
- Here is a breakdown of the lessons we plan to teach.
  - **June 2<sup>nd</sup> – Stewardship for the New Testament Believer**
  - June 9<sup>th</sup> – Our Talents, Gifts, and Service to the Lord
  - June 16<sup>th</sup> – Our Bodies
  - June 23<sup>rd</sup> – Our Time and Relationships
  - June 30<sup>th</sup> – Our Money and Other Resources, Part I
  - July 7<sup>th</sup> – No Class
  - July 14<sup>th</sup> – Our Money and Other Resources, Part II

### A DEFINITION OF STEWARDSHIP

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- A definition: “A steward is simply someone charged with looking after something on behalf of someone else” (Rose, *Redeeming Productivity*, 23).
- Passages pertaining to “stewardship” often use the following vocabulary: οἶκος (household); οἰκονομος (steward, manager); οἰκονομία (stewardship, administration); κυριος (lord, master); δουλος (slave).
- The difference between the believer’s stewardship and other stewardships: The Master, The Values, The Content, The Mission, The Reward.
- **Question:** What kind of attitude or outlook do these kinds of words convey?

## THE MASTER OF OUR STEWARDSHIP

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- “Steward” is a *relative* role, not an *absolute* role. All kinds of positions of people can be labelled as a steward in the secular world: a city official (Rom 16:23), a slave set over a household (Lk 12:42), a rich man’s treasurer (Lk 16:1), the guardian of an heir (Gal 4:2)
- Similarly, all believers, regardless of specific ministry gifting or vocational calling, are equally stewards of what God has given them: apostles (1 Cor 4:1), elders (Tit 1:7), believers (1 Pet 4:10)
- Christ is the Master who determines our pursuit in life. He is the “Lord” (Phil 2:11).
  
- Stewardship for believers is not a matter of who you are (compared to others) or the specific position you have. It is not ultimately defined by our relationship to other people.
- Competing with other stewards → coveting their stewardship from God.
  - Jn 21:21-22: “So Peter seeing him said to Jesus, ‘Lord, and what about this man?’ 22 Jesus said to him, ‘If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? **You follow Me!**’”
- Living for other masters → fearing people more than God.
  - Gal 1:10: “For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? **If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ.**”
  - “Or perhaps you are still in that successful career, but serving wholeheartedly in your local church. The prestige and status given you by that career matter to you more than perhaps you realize. The wholehearted local-church service you squeeze into a busy life gives you very little affirmation and praise from others. It is tempting to pitch our energies into the activities that result in praise from others” (Ash, *Zeal Without Burnout*, 87).
- Serving myself → pursuing riches rather than God.
  - Matt 6:24: “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. **You cannot serve God and wealth.**”
- Stewardship is a matter of whose you are: God’s. It is ultimately defined by our relationship to God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ (the Master)
  
- **Question:** When do you tend to find yourself living for a different master, rather than God?
  - Thankful, or Jealous?
  - Focused, or Distracted?
  - God-centered, or Selfish?

## THE VALUES OF OUR STEWARDSHIP

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- Values of productivity and performance in the world miss the mark: the key questions that these values seek to answer are “What do I want?” or “What’s in it for me?”
- Convenience: The world tends to trust in comfort to keep work at bay instead of trusting God with work.
- Efficiency: The world tends to aiming for ease instead of aiming for integrity in their work.
- Output: The world tends to settle for anything that might pass as completed work, rather than settling for excellence in their work.
- Peace: The world tends to burn-out by overworking in order to cope with the anxiety of feeling out-of-control, rather than working hard and resting peacefully knowing that the good God is in control.
  - Ps 127:2: “It is vain for you to rise up early, To retire late, To eat the bread of painful labors; For He gives to His beloved even in his sleep.”
  - Matt 6:25-34: For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 26 “Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? 27 “And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life? 28 “And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, 29 yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. 30 “But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith! 31 “Do not worry then, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’ 32 “For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. 34 “So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.
- **Question:** Can you think of any other values that the unbelieving world prioritizes?

- Values of biblical stewardship honor the Lord: the key question that the believer must ask about every area of life is “What honors my Lord?”
- Faith: Where the world aims for self-preservation and comfort, we must instead trust the Lord.
  - “What the world calls productivity in our work is merely a byproduct of something much deeper going on in us” (Rose, *Redeeming Productivity*, 77).
  - Jn 15:4-5: “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it **abides** in the vine, so neither can you unless you **abide** in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who **abides** in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, **for apart from Me you can do nothing.**”
    - Abide → Faith
    - Connection to Christ → Key to honoring Christ.
  - Gal 2:20: “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and **the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God**, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.”
- Faithfulness: Where the world aims for corner-cutting efficiency or requires riches, we must aim for humble faithfulness.
  - 1 Cor 4:2: “it is required of stewards that they be found **faithful.**”
  - Lk 16:10: “he who is **faithful in little** will also be **faithful in much**; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is also unrighteous in much”
    - Faithfulness is a character quality.
    - Faithfulness serves with whatever the Lord provides.
    - Faithfulness is a pre-requisite for larger responsibilities.
  - While faithfulness calls the lazy to a higher standard, it does not require absolute perfection: “Following Jesus takes time and effort, but we don’t have to be time-management gurus or monastic ascetics to walk with him in faithfulness and fruitfulness” (DeYoung, *Impossible Christianity*, 50).
- Fruitfulness: Where the world settles for anything that meets a quota, we must aim for true, quality fruitfulness.
  - Matt 13:23: “And the one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; **who indeed bears fruit** and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty.”
  - Jn 15:8: “My Father is **glorified** by this, that you **bear much fruit**, and so prove to be My disciples.”

- “We are called to be productive like a tree, not an assembly line” (Rose, *Redeeming Productivity*, 71).
  - Biblical fruit = Organically (spiritually) produced, not humanly engineered.
  - An additional component to the opening definition: Stewardship does not merely maintain the status quo, but produces fruitfully with what the master entrusts.
    - “Repent of your non-improvement of talents. Health is a talent; estate is a talent; wit and parts are talents; and these God has entrusted you with to improve for his glory. He has sent you into the world as a merchant sends his factor beyond the seas to trade for his master’s advantage, but you have not done the good you might. Can you say, ‘Lord, thy pound hath gained five pounds’ (Luke 19:18). [sic] O mourn at the burial of your talents! Let it grieve you that so much of your age has not been time lived but time lost...” (Watson, *The Doctrine of Repentance*, 76).
- **Question:** In what ways are we infected with the world’s values?

## THE CONTENT OF OUR STEWARDSHIP

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- Our stewardship includes all the physical stuff of the world: Money, Physical Resources, Time, Talent/Skill, Relationships, and more!
- Our stewardship is **total**. As a purchased soul, we must spend and invest our whole life. Nothing should be held back
  - 1 Cor 4:7: For who regards you as superior? **What do you have that you did not receive?** And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?
  - 1 Cor 6:20: For **you have been bought** with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.
  - 1 Cor 10:31: Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, **do all to the glory of God.**
- Our stewardship also includes spiritual resources: The Gospel of Jesus Christ, The Scriptures, The Fruits of the Spirit, Faith in Christ, Spiritual Gifts, Prayer, and more!
- Our stewardship is **sufficient**. As a blessed soul, we must recognize that everything we need to be good stewards has already been given to us in Christ!
  - Eph 1:3: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, **who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing** in the heavenly places in Christ”
  - Col 2:9-10: “ For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, 10 and **in Him you have been made complete**, and He is the head over all rule and authority”

- 2 Pet 1:3: “seeing that **His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness**, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence.”
- **Question:** How are you using all of these resources (and more!) for God’s purposes?
- The rest of this series will consider more thoroughly the content of our stewardship
- For this lesson we’ll consider the specific content of our stewardship that should control all other resources and provisions in our life: the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

## **THE MISSION OF OUR STEWARDSHIP**

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- Though managing the “physical stuff” is important for faithful stewardship, our primary mission in the world does not depend on those natural resources available to believer and non-believer alike.
- **The chief stewardship of New Covenant believers is the message of Christ crucified for sinners and raised again.**
- Remember the vocabulary of “stewardship” from the beginning of the lesson: οἶκος (household); οἰκονομος (steward, manager); οἰκονομία (stewardship, administration)
- The apostolic preaching was a “stewardship” (οἰκονομία) of the gospel,
  - Col 1:25: Of this church I was made a minister according to the **stewardship** from God bestowed **on me for your benefit**, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God
  - Eph 3:2: if indeed you have heard of the **stewardship** of God’s grace which was given **to me for you**
- The people of God are an “administration” (οἰκονομία) and “household” (οἶκος) of the gospel.
  - Eph 3:9-10: and to bring to light what is the **administration** of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.
  - Heb 3:4-6: For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God. Now Moses was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later; but Christ was faithful as a Son over His house—**whose house we are**, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end.

- **Question:** Is the gospel having its intended effect in your life? In the life of our church?
  - Your hope (for salvation)
  - Your treasure (for boasting)
  - Your growth (for holiness)
  - Your investment (for resources; all other stewardships should conform to this!)

## THE REWARD OF OUR STEWARDSHIP

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- The worldly location of our hope: Retirement
  - “Finishing life to the glory of Christ means resolutely resisting the typical American dream of retirement. It means being so satisfied with all that God promises to be for us in Christ that we are set free from the cravings that create so much emptiness and uselessness in retirement. Instead, knowing that we have an infinitely satisfying and everlasting inheritance in God just over the horizon of life makes us zealous in our few remaining years here to spend ourselves in the sacrifices of love, not the accumulation of comforts” (Piper, *Rethinking Retirement*, 6).
  - Ps 71:18: “And **even when I am old and gray**, O God, do not forsake me, **Until I declare Your strength to this generation**, Your power to all who are to come.”
  - Psalm 92:12–15: “The righteous man will flourish like the palm tree, He will grow like a cedar in Lebanon. 13 Planted in the house of the LORD, They will flourish in the courts of our God. 14 **They will still yield fruit in old age**; They shall be full of sap and very green, 15 To declare that the LORD is upright; He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.”
- The biblical location of our hope: Christ’s return and our resurrection
  - 1 Pet 1:13: “Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, **fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ**”
  - Lk 14:12-14: “And He also went on to say to the one who had invited Him, ‘When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, otherwise they may also invite you in return and that will be your repayment. 13 ‘But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, 14 and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; **for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.**’”

- How will we be repaid/rewarded? **Communion with the Master Himself.**
  - Matt 25:21, 23: “His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; **enter into the joy of your master.**’”
  - Lk 12:37: “Blessed are those slaves whom the master will find on the alert when he comes; truly I say to you, that **he will gird himself to serve, and have them recline at the table, and will come up and wait on them.**”
  
- **Question:** Is Christ the joy of your labor even now?
  - The crown of your completed tasks?
  - The prize of your pursuits?
  - The delight of your diligence?