Stewardship

"…the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:4) helps us to see that knowing Him is infinitely more important and valuable than grasping the clock and the dollar for ourselves. It causes us to find spiritual pleasure in using these things to meet the needs of others and to enable them to hear the gospel and turn to Christ. – Donald Whitney

The term stewardship has been heavily used in recent years, but often in limited ways. It is commonly associated with finances and money management, with an emphasis on handling what God has given to us and our responsibility to use it for His Glory. While this is certainly true, the principles of stewardship go far beyond such a simple application. In reality, stewardship should help frame the Christian walk and guide all areas of daily life.

Please take a few moments and read the Parable of the Talents found in Matthew 25:14-30[1], which speaks directly to this idea of stewardship.

In this parable, we find three critical lessons about stewardship:

1. **Stewardship Brings God Glory:** Jesus is the master and owner of everything.[2] There is *nothing* we have that wasn't first given to us.[3,4,5] We are Christ's servants/stewards put in charge of managing His resources for His glory.[6] He will return again and each steward will be held accountable.[7]
2. **Stewardship Witnesses to Our Salvation:** True believers will be faithful managers who humbly acknowledge God's ownership while multiplying what they have been given for His benefit, and to His glory. Their reward is more opportunities to serve. Unbelievers will prove to be unfaithful. They don't hold the Master or His gifts in high regard. Ultimately, what they have, or think they have, will be taken away.[8]
3. **Stewardship Goes Beyond Finances:** This parable is not teaching a financial lesson. The talent is the Gospel, which has been entrusted to believers. It is the greatest treasure anyone can possess.[9] The last command Jesus left His disciples was to preach the gospel to the end of the earth.[10] This is our primary stewardship responsibility.

These lessons are clear in this parable, but consistent throughout all of scripture. Let's take a deeper look into each to gain a fuller understanding of stewardship.

Stewardship Brings God Glory

> *"As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ."* - 1 Peter 4:10-11

God has created us and redeemed us for His glory.[11,12] Ever since Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, man has been enslaved to a rebellious heart[13] seeking to be like God. Because of the grace God

poured out on the cross, the heart of the faithful steward is redeemed and as a result, rightfully displays God's glory to all the world so that He might be known and praised.[14,15]

As we learned in Ephesians 2:10[16], we were "created [redeemed] in Christ Jesus for good works" that will bring glory to God. It is imperative that we do these works as one fully dependent on God's strength with nothing of our own to offer. The moment we begin to think we deserve any credit, we will start to find fault in our Master and perceive Him to be hard.[17,18]

God is offering His children what we need the very most, which is Himself. And, what do we instinctively do when we get a taste of something so wonderful? We celebrate it and share it with as many people as possible. In fact, it is the sharing of this joy that actually makes our joy complete. "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!".[19] As John Piper said, "God is the one being in all the universe for whom seeking his own praise is the ultimate loving act."

God created and redeemed us for His glory. The gift of the Gospel defines stewardship. It is the root of which all other branches extend. From this beginning, we can understand that being a faithful steward goes beyond what and how we spend. It defines who we are as Christians.

Stewardship Witnesses to Our Salvation

"For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." – Luke 12:34

Charles Spurgeon said "Our good works are evidences of grace within us; … that our heart is changed, and that we have been made to love him for whom once we had no affection." For believers, this excitement can't be hidden.

"No one after lighting a lamp covers it with a jar or puts it under a bed, but puts it on a stand, so that those who enter may see the light."[20] Unfortunately, burying the gift is what we see in the actions of the unfaithful steward in this lesson's parable. Note how the unfaithful servant took no issue with being identified as a servant of the master. He wasn't hostile and appears fully convinced of his servant status. This is a picture of the cultural Christian. It isn't until we learn of his lack of service that his true identity is revealed. Any servant with true affection for their master wouldn't have dismissed the chance to serve the one he loves. Instead, they would have gladly used that opportunity to advance the master's cause. Unfortunately, just like the unfaithful servant, there will be those who come before the Lord thinking they are His, but the evidence of their lives will prove they never knew Him.[21]

Stewardship of our resources, including money, is one of the primary branches that grows from the root of our salvation. Jesus emphasized this truth in the Parable of the Sower when He described how the seed that fell among the thorns "is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful".[22] If we see money and the things of this world shifting our affections away from Christ, we should be concerned for our salvation. However, if we are consistently looking for ways to use all we are and all we have in service to the gospel, our life is living proof of a changed heart. Such a heart reflects the life of a person who has truly tasted the sweetness of the gospel.

Stewardship Goes Beyond Finances

"This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful." – *1 Corinthians 4:1-2*

Stewardship requires faithfulness. We have been entrusted with varying quantities and types of talents in this life. God may have gifted us with health, money, skills, relationships, and more. It's important to remember that the quantity of our talents is not correlated to our faithfulness. Regardless of how much has been entrusted to us, we should be seeking ways to use each of these gifts to share the gospel. We want to "spend and be spent" for the souls of others.[23] On the day He returns and we are called to give an account for our labors, what a sad day it will be if we're found to have been using our time and resources for our own purposes and not for His.[24]

Sin would have us looking for ways to use these gifts from God for temporary enjoyment in the present age without any consideration for eternity. By contrast, faithful stewards will see each gift as a tool to create joy that will last forever and an opportunity to share Christ with those who have never heard. As Augustine said, "He loves thee too little, who loves anything as well as thee, which he does not love for thy sake."

When we pray for earthly things, we pray for them so we can be better equipped to serve God. If we pray for health, it should be for strength to serve for His glory. If we pray for money, it should be so that we are not faced with the temptations of poverty[25] or so that we can be generous with that money to care for those in need. We should never pray so that we can spend it on our own evil passions and lusts.[26] This is the opposite of faithful stewardship.

If you find yourself feeling unworthy or burdened by the responsibility of true stewardship, remember that the Lord is not a harsh taskmaster. He encourages us to "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."[27]

Just as the master praised his servants for their faithfulness, not their results, our sovereign God is only concerned with our faithfulness because it is Him who produces the growth.[28] Our primary responsibility is to take the gospel to the nations, because we have been assured that God's Word will not return empty and will accomplish all His purposes.[29] We can take confidence in knowing that as His children, He will equip us with everything we need to accomplish His work.

True stewardship is not just about finances. It is the response to the eternal gifts we have been given. Do we hide our treasures and disobey the God who commands us to share them with the unbelieving world? Or do we bravely move forward in gratitude for the gifts we have been given, seeing each as a tool to be used for His purposes and with confidence they will bear fruit? The answer is obvious and should be applied to all aspects of our life.

> *Lastly, brethren, with what infinite delight will Jesus fill our hearts if, through divine grace, we are happy enough to hear him say, 'Well done, good and faithful servant.' Oh, if we shall hold on to the end despite the temptations of Satan, and the weakness of our nature, and all the entanglements of the world, and keep our garments unspotted from the world, preaching Christ according to our measure of ability, and winning souls for him, what an honour it will be! What bliss for him to say, 'Well done.'"* – Charles Spurgeon

Endnotes: Scripture References

1) Matthew 25:14-30 – “For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. **15** To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. **16** He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. **17** So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. **18** But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. **19** Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. **20** And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me five talents; here, I have made five talents more.’ **21** His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’ **22** And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me two talents; here, I have made two talents more.’ **23** His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’ **24** He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, **25** so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours.’ **26** But his master answered him, ‘You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? **27** Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. **28** So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. **29** For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. **30** And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

2) Psalm 24:1 – The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein,

3) 1 Corinthians 4:7 – For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

4) 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 – Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, **20** for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

5) Romans 14:8 – For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.

6) 2 Thessalonians 1:10 – when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.

7) Revelation 22:12 – Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done.

8) Luke 8:16-18 – “No one after lighting a lamp covers it with a jar or puts it under a bed, but puts it on a stand, so that those who enter may see the light. **17** For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light. **18** Take care then how you hear, for to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away.”

9) Matthew 13:44-46 – “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. **45** “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, **46** who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.

10) Acts 1:8 – But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

11) Isaiah 43:7 – everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.

12) Matthew 5:16 – In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

13) Genesis 11:4 – Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.”

14) Isaiah 43:21 – the people whom I formed for myself that they might declare my praise.

15) Ephesians 1:6 – to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

16) Ephesians 2:10 - For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

17) Matthew 25:24 – He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed,

18) Luke 19:21 – for I was afraid of you, because you are a severe man. You take what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sow.’

19) Psalm 150:6 – Let everything that has breath praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!

20) Luke 8:16 – No one after lighting a lamp covers it with a jar or puts it under a bed, but puts it on a stand, so that those who enter may see the light.

21) Matthew 7:21-23 – “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. **22** On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ **23** And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’

22) Matthew 13:22 – As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.

23) 2 Corinthians 12:15 – I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls.

24) Matthew 24:48-51 – But if that wicked servant says to himself, ‘My master is delayed,’ **49** and begins to beat his fellow servants and eats and drinks with drunkards, **50** the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know **51** and will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

25) Proverbs 30:9 – lest I be full and deny you and say, “Who is the Lord?” or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God.

26) James 4:3 – You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

27) Matthew 11:29-30 – Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. **30** For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

28) 1 Corinthians 3:6-8 – I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. **7** So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. **8** He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor.

29) Isaiah 55:11 – so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.