



“The earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein,” Psalm 24:1.

Stewardship Defined

Central Truth: Stewardship involves using all that God has entrusted to us in a way that will please Him.

L144. Date: June 1986. **Text:** Romans 12:6-16.

Topic: Stewardship; Money.

A steward is a person entrusted with the management of the possessions of another. The manager of a business who reports to the owner or directors is a steward of the business.

Spiritually, a steward is one who has been entrusted by the Lord with resources which can be used to promote human welfare and the kingdom of God on earth. Life itself, plus all that we have or all we can do, is included in the stewardship principles set forth in Holy Scripture.

We will give fourteen weeks to a study of the biblical doctrine of stewardship [L144 — L157]. The study will be quite inclusive, but not exhaustive, of all the Bible teaches on the subject. The study is designed to help you be a good “house manager” for God. It should be accompanied by the prayer, “Lord, show me what to do and I will do it. I want to be a Christ-directed steward. I am available to be taught Your principles.”

I. THE ESSENCE OF STEWARDSHIP

Stewardship is the practice of partnership with God. We may speak of “my house, my farm, my business, my money,” and even “my life.” But the truth is, none of it belongs to us. It belongs to God and we are privileged to enjoy it for a while.

When David and his peers gave their offerings to provide funds to build the temple in Jerusalem, they accompanied it with the prayer, “*Who am I,*

and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee” (I Chronicles 29:14).

God makes us stewards of His resources as a way of growing us toward maturity. By the practice of true stewardship we learn humility (because what we have does not belong to us), discipline (keeping a portion of our income to return to God), sharing (not spending all on ourselves, but investing also in the lives of others), and values (the temporal is not as important as the eternal). The faithful steward will experience the joy of spiritual growth.

Be fully aware of the scope of real stewardship. It includes all of life, both secular and religious. (That is the theme which runs through Romans 12:1-21.) God does not say, for instance, “Give me the first 10 percent, and then you can do as you wish with the remaining 90 percent.” Never! We are responsible to Him for the full 100 percent of our resources.

II. THE PRINCIPLES OF STEWARDSHIP

There are three basic principles which underlie all Bible teaching on stewardship. The principles apply to all people in all areas of stewardship obligation.

A. All persons and things belong to God. The prior ownership of God is based on creation. *“The earth is the LORD’S, and the fulness thereof: . . . He hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods”* (Psalm 24:1, 2). So the Bible says, *“The heavens are thine, the earth also is thine: . . . thou hast founded them”* (Psalm 89:11). That includes the wild animals, the domesticated animals, and even the fowl of the earth (Psalm 50:10, 11). It includes all the mineral deposits of the earth, including the gold and silver (Haggai 2:8). There is nothing that was mine before it was His. Everything belongs to God.

B. God entrusts portions of His goods to our supervision. Do not say, “My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth.” Instead, *“remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth”* (Deuteronomy 8:17, 18). Ecclesiastes 5:18, 19 teaches that it is right for a person to enjoy the pleasures which his wealth can bring him: “This is the gift of God” (verse 19). Call nothing your own, but look on everything from the viewpoint of God’s ownership and your stewardship.

C. We must account to God for what we did with what He gave each of us. There is no exception, for “everyone of us shall give account of himself to God” (Romans 14:12). Jesus illustrated that truth in telling of a

man who entrusted his goods (five talents, two talents, one talent) to his servants while he made a long journey. Upon returning, he called each servant to give a personal report on what he did with what he had during his master's absence (Matthew 25:14-30). Jesus said that *"The kingdom of heaven"* is like that. He is the Master; we are the servants. He has made a journey and left resources entrusted to our care. He will return and we will account.

Look back over those three principles of stewardship. Think of yourself — all you are and all you have — and evaluate your stewardship in the light of that.

III. THE GUIDELINES FOR STEWARDSHIP

Romans 12:6-16 gives twelve practical suggestions which mark good stewardship. Review them and relate them to your personal life.

A. Be involved (Romans 12:6-8). The Holy Spirit has entrusted a spiritual gift to each Christian. That spiritual gift must be discerned, developed, and deployed in the service of people for Jesus' sake. Be involved! *"Neglect not the gift that is in thee"* (I Timothy 4:14). *"Stir up the gift of God which is in thee"* (II Timothy 1:6). *"As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God"* (I Peter 4:10).

Do not wait to be asked. Do not delay until you are elected. Find a need and fill it. "You ask me what's the will of God and I will tell you true/It's the nearest thing that should be done that could be done by you" (author unknown).

B. Be loving (Romans 12:9, 19). *"Let love be without dissimulation"*; that is, love sincerely, without hypocrisy; make your love genuine. Jesus commands us to love one another as He has loved us (John 15:12). That means we will *"love one another with a pure heart fervently"* (I Peter 1:22).

Remember that divine love is more than emotion. It is the will in action moving in mercy to help one who is in need. You are a good steward of your life when you are related in that way to your peers.

C. Be discerning (Romans 12:9). To be loving does not mean to be permissive with evil. A good steward of life will abhor the evil and cleave to the good.

D. Be zealous (Romans 12:11). May God deliver us from the sin of slackness. Never lag in your diligence or be lazy in your work. Unwearied activity is good stewardship, but a slothful person is promised judgment from God. *"Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might"*

(Ecclesiastes 9:10). Enthusiasm for good is contagious. Be constantly infected with it!

E. Be joyful (Romans 12:12). “Rejoicing in hope” means being full of joy because of your hope in God. What a reason to rejoice! Let your mouth be filled with laughter and your lips with singing (Psalm 126:2). Say, “*I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness*” (Isaiah 61:10). What a reason to “*rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory*” (I Peter 1:8).

F. Be patient (Romans 12:12). To be “*patient in tribulation*” is to be steadfast in suffering, enduring affliction, bearing up under all hardships. The person under consideration is not one who fails in fruitbearing because he has no depth of root (Matthew 13:20, 21). Like the farmer who plants and waits for the harvest, so a good steward is “*patient . . . unto the coming of the Lord*” (James 5:7). Stay faithful and active.

G. Be prayerful (Romans 12:12). “*Continuing instant in prayer*” means persisting in prayer, maintaining the habit of prayer, being ready to pray at a moment's notice. “*Seek his face continually*” is the admonition of I Chronicles 16:11. The New Testament statement is, “*Pray without ceasing*” (I Thessalonians 5:17).

H. Be liberal (Romans 12:13). God gives us stewardship opportunities as we relieve the wants of His people, providing generously for those who are less fortunate than we. That principle applies to friend and enemy alike (Proverbs 25:21). Such an investment is not wasted. God promises, “*The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself*” (Proverbs 11:25).

I. Be forgiving (Romans 12:14, 20). Hold no grudges. Make a habit of blessing those who oppose you. Call down God's blessings on them, never returning evil for evil (I Thessalonians 5:15). Forgiveness is a grace and unforgiveness is a sin. Be forgiving.

J. Be sympathetic (Romans 12:15). It is the Christian's privilege to share the happiness of those who are joyful and to share the sorrow of those who mourn. That is a sign that we belong to God and are members of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:26). We should share their sufferings with an empathy that makes us feel as if we were experiencing what they experience (Hebrews 13:3). That is a true Christian spirit.

K. Be unified (Romans 12:16). Harmony must mark all Christian relations. We share a “*unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*” (Ephesians 4:3). God commands us, “*Be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous, . . . knowing that ye are*

thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing” (I Peter 3:8, 9). By standing fast in one spirit we can promote the faith of the gospel (Philippians 1:27). *“Be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you”* (II Corinthians 13:11).

L. Be humble (Romans 12:16). That may be the most demanding task of all. The admonition *“mind not high things”* forbids all haughtiness, vain ambition, aspirations to eminence, and snobbish attitudes. *“Condescend to men of low estate”* means to associate and accept in fellowship those who have no claims to fame or power. Do not be “too good” to associate with and help any person. *“All of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble”* (I Peter 5:5).

The prophet may have said it best in Micah 6:8: *“He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?”*

Those principles are very demanding. It is no easy thing to be a good steward of the multi-faceted grace of God. It is not easy, but it is rewarding.

Christian stewardship covers the whole of life. No one can be a good person without being a good steward. No one can be a good citizen without practicing those principles of stewardship. No one can be a good Christian without the practice of biblical stewardship.

Let every Christian live with the spirit that is expressed in I Corinthians 4:1, 2: *“Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.”*

Questions

1. What does it mean to be a steward?
2. In what way is stewardship the practice of partnership with God?
3. How does faithful stewardship promote spiritual growth?
4. What does the Bible say about God's ownership of all things?
5. Why is what we have only a “loan” from God?
6. How does Romans 14:12 relate to a study of stewardship?
7. How can you be involved as a good steward?
8. How is zeal related to good stewardship?
9. How do you relate liberality to stewardship?
10. How can you be a better steward of your life and resources?

