

Stewardship Throughout The Bible

Throughout Scripture, the concept of a steward is introduced to us again and again. Stewardship disciplines in Scripture involve much more than the income we earn to sustain our livelihood.

Certainly money is a big part of it, but not nearly all of it. The account of the rich young ruler in Mark 10:17-22 tells the story of a man and all his possessions. He thought that what he possessed belonged only to him. This story was not a lesson on tithing and giving, rather one on stewardship. When the Ten Commandments were mentioned by Jesus, the response from the wealthy young ruler was that he had honored those in his life from a very young age.

If the Lord had asked him about whether or not he was a tither, most likely the wealthy young ruler would have also replied in the affirmative. Next Jesus hones in on the real problem...the man's possessions. Jesus wanted to confront him concerning his priorities, his stewardship and where the real ownership of these things lay. But this was just too hard for the rich young ruler. He had to leave with a countenance full of dismay and a sad heart. One of God's objectives for the church is that we would allow Him to reproduce Himself in us as good stewards of His abundant grace.

A steward is not an owner, but a manager. God is always the owner and we are always the managers of the many and various stewardship roles He has given to us. But in order to fulfill these roles as extenders of His grace, we need to know all of the areas of stewardship for which we are accountable. The areas of good stewardship that He requires of us are almost limitless. They would, of course, include life itself, the gift of children and the stewardship of His creation. Additionally, we would include the stewardship of our communication, the stewardship of time, the stewardship of truth and the stewardship of talents or giftings. Discovering and developing our spiritual gifts and natural talents for the purpose of blessing others and glorifying God is our duty.

Nearly two-thirds of the parables of Jesus deal with stewardship or the proper use of money. In the New Testament there are 38 parables, twelve of which are about money. One out of every six verses in Matthew, Mark and Luke has to do with money and individual fiscal responsibility.

As stewards, it is our responsibility to trust God to supply our needs. We have been given responsibility over the natural resources of the earth according to Genesis 1:28. Matthew 10:8 instructs us that, as we have abundantly received, we are to freely give. The rich young ruler did not understand that the possessions he had been entrusted with had been given to him for a purpose. That purpose was to include sharing his wealth with the poor and needy of the earth.

Stewardship in the Bible deals with more than finance and its proper use. The term stewardship implies that there is a steward—someone who is entrusted with material or spiritual responsibility.

In the story above, the rich young ruler was a steward over great possessions, but failed to act accordingly. According to Scripture, it is required that a steward be faithful to his charge (Genesis 15:2; Genesis 24; Luke 16:1-13).

Stewardship implies a fiduciary responsibility. Fiduciary is a term that means “of, pertaining to or involving one who holds something in trust for another.” A person with a fiduciary relationship is one who stands in a special position of trust, confidence or responsibility in his or her obligations to others.

Speaking To Stewardship via the Old Testament

The word steward appears only once in the Old Testament. Genesis 15:2 says, “And Abram said, ‘Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?’ ” (KJV) The word translated “steward” means “son of acquisition.”

In this generation such a person would also be considered an heir. Eliezer’s role was that of the number one servant or steward in Abram’s house (see Genesis 24).

Stewardship is delegated oversight of another’s possessions. It is delegated authority coupled with accountability. Abram had Eliezer to whom he gave oversight. As a matter of fact, Eliezer was even entrusted with the task of finding a wife for Isaac (the son whom Abram and his wife later had).

The Hebrew Old Testament word for steward is one who oversees another’s house. Eliezer of Damascus was Abram’s slave and trusted steward; he had oversight of all his affairs and was entrusted with important duties. He had charge of the family of his

master as well as his property. Jacob was a steward for Laban. Joseph was a steward for Potiphar until Potiphar's wife lied about him. Later, Joseph was Pharaoh's steward and ruled all Egypt.

Examples from the New Testament

In the New Testament, Jesus uses parables about stewards as examples of God's people and Paul refers to Christians as stewards in the epistles. Stewards in biblical times were very common. All wealthy people and rulers had stewards to whom they entrusted the oversight of personnel and property.

These responsibilities were either as a guardian of the children or administrator of the affairs of the household. According to the International Bible Encyclopedia, "every household of distinction or sufficient wealth had a steward in charge." The functions of this officer seem, at times, to have included the care of minor children as well as property. The Greek word for stewardship is *epitropos*, meaning one who oversees another's possessions, usually having to do with the supervision of personnel. The word for one who oversees another's possessions, usually in reference to property, is *oikonomos*. (ISBE)

Stewards, like many bosses today, had varying degrees of stewardship. According to Scripture, some managed property and some personnel, while others had financial oversight. As is also the case in our society, a good steward was rewarded with increased responsibility and income, while a poor steward was disgraced or fired.

In Luke 16, Jesus told the story of a certain rich man who had a steward. As the parable continues, the rich man required an accounting of his steward. Any individual in a fiduciary relationship must be held accountable to that agreement. We can manage or mismanage the Master's resources.