

FORWARD Devotional Guide

THE BIBLICAL STEWARD

Do you remember your first job? How did it feel to be hired?

HUMANKIND'S FIRST JOB: GENESIS 1:26-28; 2:15-19

1. God's first assignment to Adam was "take care of it." What does this imply?
2. Was the job of stewardship given to Adam before or after the fall into sin? Why is this significant?
3. What freedoms did Adam have in the garden?
4. How were Adam's personal needs met?
5. Describe the partnership between God and Adam?

DEFINING STEWARDSHIP:

The New Testament word for "steward" is "house manager." The steward does not own the house, just as Adam did not own the garden, but manages it on behalf of the owner.

1. Identify and list the responsibilities of a manager and those of an owner.
2. Describe how an effective partnership between an owner and a manager might work. What would that look like? How would they communicate and cooperate?

A PRIME EXAMPLE OF STEWARDSHIP: GENESIS 39:2-6

1. How was Joseph an effective manager?
2. How did Potiphar demonstrate his trust in Joseph?
3. Describe Joseph's freedom as a steward.
4. What made this an effective partnership?

CONCLUSIONS:

1. Our first God-given responsibility is stewardship.
2. We have been given great freedom with which to exercise our stewardship.
3. God retains ownership of all; we manage God's resources.
4. Stewardship is our privilege of partnering with God in God's work on earth.

RESPONSE:

1. Do you see yourself as God's trusted partner in the management of God's resources?
2. How do you exercise the freedoms God has given you in your partnership with Him?
3. How does it make you feel to know that God trusts you in God's work?

THE FAMILY BUSINESS

Imagine yourself as a partner in a family business. Your father owns the company but you, and all your siblings, participate as managers by providing your best and cooperative efforts to achieve the company's goals. This is God's invitation and intent for God's children.

MANAGING THE FAMILY BUSINESS: MATTHEW 25:14-15

1. Notice who "owns" the talents (money).
2. How did the master demonstrate his confidence in each steward?
3. How much freedom was each steward given to practice his stewardship?
4. What was the master's intention for each steward?

MATTHEW 25:16-23

1. Notice that the same commendation was given to each responsible steward regardless of the amount of resources being managed. What does this indicate?
2. Discuss the relationship between the freedom and the accountability of a steward.
3. What was the master's expectation of these stewards and were the stewards aware of it?
4. Consider your personal response to the Master's question, "What did you do with what you were given?"

THE PURPOSE OF STEWARDSHIP: WHY GOD WANTS US TO GIVE? EXODUS 35

1. In this first biblical record of dramatic generosity, God calls God's people to give for the construction of the tabernacle.
2. God could have miraculously provided the tabernacle but called the people to give as God's partners in the family business. Explain how God was building a people more than a place.

CONCLUSIONS:

1. God invites us to work in the family business by managing God's resources to fulfill God's work on earth.
2. We have been given great freedom with which to exercise our stewardship.
3. We are ultimately accountable for the resources entrusted to us.
4. Great achievements in God's work are the result of a generous Owner in partnership with faithful managers.

RESPONSE:

1. As a boy of twelve Jesus said, "I must be about my Father's business." How might this apply to us?
2. Do you view your material resources as your opportunity to participate in God's business in the world?
3. How does it make you feel to know that God trusts you and is counting on you to be an active partner in accomplishing God's will and work on earth?

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THE SYMBOLISM OF GIVING WHY MONEY MATTERS

Of all we do in church services today, nothing is more historically and biblically worship than when we present our gifts to God. Giving is pure worship and its symbolism is significant.

2 SAMUEL 24:18-25

1. Why did King David refuse Araunah's generous offer?
2. Was David's gift more valuable because he paid for it?
3. What was God really seeking from David?

MATTHEW 6:21

1. Why does Jesus link purse and person so intimately?
2. What makes money such an emotional topic?
3. Discuss the statement, "Where I spend my money is where I spend my life?"
4. How does our spending reflect our life and values?

MARK 12:41-44

1. Why was Jesus unimpressed with the larger gifts in this story?
2. What made the widow's gift so valuable?

MARK 14:3-9

1. The perfume was valued at a laborer's annual income. Scholars have suggested this must have been Mary's marriage dowry. If so, then what was the real value of her gift?
2. Why did Jesus so value this offering?

CONCLUSIONS:

1. The value of a gift before God is not determined by its dollar amount.
2. God seeks gifts that accurately reflect our life, labor, and love.
3. One of the ways we invest our lives is by investing our financial resources.
4. Our values are reflected through our generosity.

RESPONSE:

1. Have you considered that your giving and generosity should touch your lifestyle as well as your bank account?
2. Do you see a correlation between investing your life in a worthy cause by giving generously to it?
3. Why does God value generosity as part of the Christian lifestyle?
4. How has God in Christ demonstrated generosity in giving?
5. How does it make you feel to know that God trusts you in God's work?

THE PRACTICE OF LIFESTYLE STEWARDSHIP

Have you heard of extreme examples of generosity such as one friend donating a healthy kidney to another? Sacrifice is when one person gives up something of value to achieve a greater good or goal. Lifestyle Stewardship is giving at a level that touches one's life. The Journey into Lifestyle Stewardship requires a Reassessment of Lifestyle, a Reordering of Priorities, and a Reallocation of Resources. The Perfect Example of Lifestyle Stewardship is Jesus.

REASSESSMENT OF LIFESTYLE

1. This is not about judging lifestyles; it is about recognizing that our lifestyles can consume a vast portion of our resources.
2. Name some factors that encourage a consumptive lifestyle.

REORDER PRIORITIES

1. Discuss: We spend our money based on our priorities.
2. How can tracking our expenses reveal where we are spending our lives?
3. How can we align our expenditures with our true spiritual values?

REALLOCATE RESOURCES

1. Recall some occasions when you reduced spending in one area to invest more in another area that became more important to you.
2. What are some ways we might reduce spending in one area to give more to another?

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-8:THE PERFECT MODEL OF LIFESTYLE STEWARDSHIP

1. Jesus assessed His lifestyle: "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in the very nature of God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped."
2. Jesus ordered His priorities: "But made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!"
3. Jesus allocated His resources: "though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich." (2 Cor. 8:9)

CONCLUSIONS:

1. Christianity was birthed in the sacrifice of Jesus.
2. Christ calls us to a lifestyle that allows us to invest in greater good and higher values.
3. To deny oneself in order to benefit others is to follow the example of Christ.
4. To give to godly causes is to partner with the Father in the family business.
5. To faithfully manage God's entrusted resources is to fulfill the first job God gave to us—stewardship.

RESPONSE:

1. Are you aware of greater causes in which you would like to invest your life by giving?
2. Can you identify expenditures in your lifestyle that could be reordered so you could give to those higher causes?
3. Have you ever adjusted your lifestyle and priorities in order to give to something you strongly believed in?
4. Can you find ways to "let this mind (attitude) be in you which was in Christ Jesus"?