

"God's Managers"

What all do you own? Maybe your home (the mortgage is paid off). Your vehicle (you have the title to your car or truck). A closet or closets full of clothing. You own your furniture. You own some jewelry...or tools...or life insurance policies.

I could say Nancy and I own one of our cars (the 2012 van – we bought it new, and it's the longest we've ever kept any of our vehicles). I own the Martin acoustic guitar I play in church, a Fender electric guitar, a Fender bass guitar, and oh....a 900 year old accordion! I could say I own some tools, a drone that I haven't figured out how to fly yet, a gaming computer for Flight Simulator...etc.

Some of us may have a long list of possessions. For others, our list isn't that big. But you know what? None of this is true! I don't own anything. Neither do you.

The Bible says that we don't own anything. God owns everything. Psalm 24:1 says, "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it." There's a word for this: it's the word *stewardship!* You've probably heard that word before – especially in church. A *steward* is a manager, a trustee, a caretaker. Someone responsible for taking care of *someone else's* stuff. There's a difference between an owner, and being a manager, isn't there?

Stewardship is a big deal in the Bible, a really big deal. God is the *Owner*. Everything belongs to God. We only *manage* what He's entrusted to us for our short time on earth. This probably doesn't go over well with the average person on the street! "Don't tell me I don't own this! I'll show you the deed. Here's the title, the receipt. And, oh, by the way, I worked hard for what I own." Maybe this truth hasn't even sunk in for a lot of us *in the church*.

Jesus talked about stewardship. The Scripture reading for today is a parable about "stewardship". Do you know the story? Jesus begins it with these words, "A nobleman went to a distant country to get royal power for himself and then return" (Luke 19:12). A man heads off to a foreign country to receive some kind of kingly power. Before he leaves he gives to each of his 10 servants each a pound. A "pound" was the *mina*. It represented about 3 months' wages for the average laborer. So, it was a decent chunk of money. He instructs them: "Do business with these until I come back" (Luke 19:13).

Time passes, and he returns. He calls the servants together so they could report what they did with what he gave them. The first says, "Here's the original pound. I've made 10 more pounds!" Super! He is commended by the owner: "Well done, good slave! Because you have been trustworthy in a very small thing, take charge of 10 cities" (Luke 19:17). The second servant says, "I've made 5 pounds more from what you gave me." Not bad! He too is commended: "And you, rule over five cities" (verse 19). Then another gave his report. It was a different story. "Then the other came, saying, 'Lord, here is your pound. I wrapped it up in a piece of cloth, for I was afraid of you, because you are a harsh man; you take what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sow'" (verses 20-21). Now it could have been worse. He could have squandered the pound on booze parties and wild women. He could have lost the pound gambling. No, he tucked it away so he wouldn't lose it.

And the reaction of the master is sort of shocking: “He said to him, ‘I will judge you by your own words, you wicked slave! You knew, did you, that I was a harsh man, taking what I did not deposit and reaping what I did not sow? Why, then, did you not put my money into the bank? Then when I returned, I could have collected it with interest.’ He said to the bystanders, ‘Take the pound from him and give it to the one who has ten pounds.’” (verses 22-24). Doesn’t that make you uncomfortable - how harsh the master was?

Do we fit into this story? Yes. Note how the parable begins. “As they were listening to this, he went on to tell a parable, because he was near Jerusalem, and because they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately” (Luke 19:11). People drawn to Jesus were beginning to think He was going to bring in God’s kingdom *immediately*. We now know that wasn’t the case. He went back to the Father in heaven, and it’s only when He returns that He will bring in God’s kingdom, and rule as King of kings and Lord of lords.

In the meantime, while we wait, He has entrusted us with what we’ve been given. And when He returns, like those in the parable, we’ll have to give an account of what we’ve done with what God has placed in our hands. What kind of *managers* are we?

Let’s think more specifically about our stewardship. *On a personal level, how about: the stewardship of time.* Ephesians 5:16 says, “Use your time well, for these are evil days.” Each of us has been given 24 hours a day, 168 hours a week. Are we making most of the time, as Ephesians 5:16 says? Are we wasting time, or spending too much time with trivial pursuits? On the other hand, are we overscheduled, and trying to do too much in our limited time? Are we living a balanced life, with time for work and time for play? Are we investing our time and our life in things that will matter, even when we’re gone?

The stewardship of our body. Am I eating healthy? Getting enough rest? Enough exercise? Remember, if we are followers of Jesus, our body is a temple, or housing place, for the Holy Spirit! We want to provide a good home, a sound body, for God’s Spirit to live!

The stewardship of our mind. What am I reading? What am I feeding my mind on as I view TV or social media? Am I trying to stay sharp mentally, learning new things, or am I mentally lazy? The Bible says we are to have the mind of Christ! “Let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5). “We have the mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16). How’s that for a worthy goal! How will I live if I think like Jesus, if my attitudes are like His? If thought processes are Christlike?

The stewardship of our talents. Each of us has been given certain talents and abilities. These are gifts God has entrusted to us. We may feel that our talents and abilities are limited, but whatever talents we have are God given, and important! Are we using them? Not just for self, but to serve others, and to bring glory to God?

But stewardship goes beyond just the personal level. *How about the stewardship of the natural world, the stewardship of the planet?* The earth is the Lord’s, as Psalm 24:1 says. I’m sure we

realize that planet earth is all we've got! There's no other alternative if we render the earth uninhabitable! In the Book of Genesis it says God created the world, then He created us humans, and we're to have dominion over all the living creatures. And He put us in charge of caring for this gift of the natural world that is our home. So how are we doing?

In some ways, very well. In other ways, not so much. I'm sure we've all seen videos of how we pollute our rivers and streams and oceans with waste materials. Beaches littered with all kinds of plastic items. Oceans where natural life is being killed by our dumping waste into the oceans. The air we breathe is being polluted with industrial waste and burning of fossil fuels.

I realize that this is a divisive political issue. Some are pushing a "Green New Deal" that to many seems too radical: banning fossil fuels, stopping the sale of gas stoves, investing billions of dollars in unproven wind and solar technology. But the other extreme is to completely ignore our present practices that threaten the future of our planet: to continue to waste our natural resources, to destroy the environment with man-made pollutants. Thank God for environmentalists and scientists who are working to make our planet safer, and to preserve the good earth for generations to come.

Then too, for Christians, there is another type of stewardship God has entrusted us with: that is the stewardship of the gospel. In 1 Thessalonians 2:4 the Apostle Paul says he has been "entrusted with the message of the gospel". In 1 Corinthians 4:1 he says we are "stewards of the mysteries of God". If we've received Christ as our Savior and been saved, we have found Jesus! How is this message going to get out into the world unless those of us who've discovered it are willing to share it?

Every Christian is called by God to bear witness to Jesus as Savior and Lord! We do this by loving people – even the hard-to-love individuals. We do this by serving, helping, showing mercy and compassion to those in need. We do this by talking with others about our faith, and Jesus, when the opportunity presents itself. Suppose in the next 5 years *no one* answers the call to preach the gospel, *no one* is willing to teach the Word of God in a Sunday School class or small group setting, *no one* dares to talk about the Lord with their neighbors or coworkers or unsaved friends? How would others come to believe in Him? The stewardship of this wonderful message of the gospel!

So, back to the parable of the pounds. It's important to remember that Jesus' parables inherently have *one main point*. The people who heard Jesus's words and teachings didn't have cell phones to videotape Him, or even pens and notepads to copy down notes! The parables were designed to drive home one main, memorable point. And the thrust of this parable is: Each of us must give an account of what we do with what God has placed in our life to manage.

It really does make a difference whether we see ourselves as owners, or just managers and caretakers of life and its gifts. This parable is good news for those of us who doing our best to use the things God has entrusted to us. Notice Jesus says, "Well done!" to those who took the

pound and made more pounds from it. *And Jesus gave them more responsibility!* He said to the faithful servant who made an additional ten pounds, “Because you have been trustworthy in a very small thing, take charge of ten cities” (Luke 19:17). I think God does trust those of us who are good stewards, who manage well the small things of life, with more opportunities and more responsibilities. God honors and blesses those who manage well what He has entrusted to them.

On the other hand, the outcome is surprisingly brutal for the servant who did nothing with the pound he had been given. “Take the pound from him and give it to the one who has ten pounds” (verse 24). “I tell you, to all those who have, more will be given; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away” (verse 26). I mean, if I ask someone to come into my house and water a few plants while I’m gone for a week or so, and the plants are dry and dying when I get home, do you think I’m going to trust to take care of my dog, or cat, or child? If they haven’t been faithful taking care of a small thing, why would I trust them with more responsibility?

It’s kind of scary how the parable ends. “But as for these enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them – bring them here and slaughter them in my presence” (verse 27). Now the temptation would be to try to soften Jesus’ words! But I think I’ll just let them sink in. It’s not a trivial thing to reject Jesus as sovereign Lord, and to ignore His claim on our life and possessions.

When we realize that God owns everything we have, and someday we’ll have to give an account of our life before the Almighty, it makes a difference in how we live.

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