

Stewardship

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Part One: What is God's is God's. What is Mine is God's.

Introduction

In Genesis 1 God tells Adam and Eve that they are to "subdue" the earth and have "dominion" over every living thing. What does that mean? To be honest, that kind of makes us sound like some villainous ruler from a movie with the world as our henchman. But despite how it sounds, it is actually a very precise way of explaining stewardship. What it means is that we have been given the task to rule over this creation God has given us with great care and love according to the will of God. What does that mean? Well, that is what this study is all about.

To Begin...

1. What is the best gift you have ever received? What made that gift so great?
2. Have you ever let someone borrow or use something that was very special to you? What was it and how did you feel about that?
3. Have you ever had someone else break something that was special to you?

A Closer Look

Read together Genesis 1:28-31.

What does it say about God that He "gives" the plants to Adam and all living things for food?

It says that God is the original owner of creation. You cannot give something that doesn't properly belong to you, so if God is giving the plants for food, then the plants properly belong to God.

Read together Leviticus 25:23-24, Haggai 2:6-9, and Psalm 95:1-5.

What else belongs to God according to these passages?

The land, the sea and its riches belong to God as well.

Why do these things belong to God?

Because He made them. What that means is that everything that God made, including us, belongs to God because He made us and has a rightful claim to us and all things.

What does that mean for the things that you believe are yours?

They all properly belong to God and are given to you as a gift to take care of. Consider a sculpture that you see at an art museum. The sculpture belongs to the artist who created it even though the particular sculpture is located in the museum and other people are taking care of it. In the same way, while we use and enjoy the things that we have, they all properly belong to God.

What does this mean for the way that we should treat our possessions and the possessions of others?

It means that we should treat them with a great deal of care and in accordance with God's will and intention for them.

To use another analogy, imagine it's your first time ever using a toaster. Seeing this strange contraption and not understanding what it does, you notice the two thin slots at the top and figure out that something is supposed to go in to those slots. So you begin looking around the room for things that might go into the toaster. Your eye catches a DVD you have sitting on the counter. Seeing that the DVD is small enough and thin enough to put into the toaster you place the disc in the slot and press down on the lever. What happens? The DVD melts and the toaster is ruined. In the same way, all that God has made was made with a purpose. It is our job as stewards to use these gifts carefully and according to the purpose, and when we don't, things break.

For Your Reflection

Take a few moments, whether in small groups or with the whole group, and have the students make a list of five things that God has given them to take care of. Then with that list have them...

- Choose one item they could do a better job taking care of and explain how.
- Choose one item they feel they are doing a great job taking care of and explain how.

Then take a moment to have them share those items with others in their group.

Close with Prayer

Gracious and giving Father, thank you for all your gifts. Help us all to take careful care of all you have made and to use all your blessings in the way that you would desire us to. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, who redeemed us and made us Yours, Amen.

Part Two: Good or Bad, Everyone Is a Steward

Introduction

If everything belongs to God that means that He is the owner. So, what does that make us? It makes us His stewards. This is an identity that God has placed upon us simply by our creation and even though sometimes we are not the best stewards, that identity doesn't ever go away. In this study we will focus on the identity of the steward and what that means for how we see ourselves.

To Begin...

1. Have each student list and share three things that define their identity.
2. How do those things make you "you"?
3. Have you ever not felt like yourself? When and why?

A Closer Look

The Created Steward

Read Genesis 1:26.

What does it mean when it says that we have the "image of God"?

It means that we have been created in such a way to reflect God on this earth, which is why it says that we were made in His likeness. We were given the skills and abilities to be able to be God's representatives on earth, meaning that we are little lords of THE LORD. In this way, God built a system to care for His creation through human hands and feet. While God Himself could certainly take care of this world all by Himself, He made us as His beautiful creation to care for creation. The image of God means we are God's caretakers; we are His stewards.

If the identity of steward is given to humans before the fall, what does that mean for non-believers? Are they stewards of God even if they don't believe in Him?

Absolutely! All of humanity has been given the identity of a steward, whether they do the task well or poorly. Here it is helpful to go back to the previous study and reference the toaster analogy. For non-believers, stewardship becomes a very difficult task because they do not believe in or consult the maker on how this world and its materials are to be used. In our toaster example, damage could have been avoided had the person consulted the manual on how to use it. In a similar way, we consult God, who speaks to use in His word, on how to use what He has so graciously given.

The Fallen Steward

Read Genesis 3:17-19.

What happened to creation and stewardship after the fall?

It became very difficult. With sin and evil now present in the world, God's beautiful creation no longer works the same way that it did before. Caring for God's gift now becomes hard labor and humanity must now struggle with it in order to have it produce what it was intended to.

Read Romans 1:18-23.

What happens when we stop acknowledging God as the owner and creator?

We begin to confuse the truth with lies and begin to think that we are the wise and powerful owners of all things. When we don't give God the glory and title of owner, we make ourselves superior to God in our thoughts and actions. Thus we can see that sin, in a large way, attacks our identity as stewards and tries to make us owners.

When we think of ourselves as the owners, how might that effect our stewardship?

When we think of ourselves as owners we tend to redefine how this gift of a created world should be used. This means that we misuse God's gifts for selfish purposes. In other words, when we misuse money, our bodies, and our time in sin, we act against our identity as stewards and in contradiction to God. This is why it is so important to understand our identity as stewards and what that means for our lives.

The Redeemed Steward

Read Ephesians 2:8-10.

What is it that allows us fallen stewards to act as good stewards?

Jesus Christ and the salvation He has so graciously and freely given us. Redeemed in Jesus Christ, we now have the ability, by the Spirit, to live as good stewards. Because of what Jesus has done for us, we have been reclaimed along with all of creation and restored as His "good and faithful servants" (Matthew 25:21 & 23).

How does being forgiven make it easier to be a steward?

Because we will surely fail at times. We are not perfect and that means that we will make mistakes regarding how we take care of what God has given. But when we make those mistakes we can be confident that God will forgive us of those sins, thus strengthening us to move forward, and we continue to strive to be the best stewards we can be.

For Your Reflection

Take a few moments and discuss in small groups or as a large group the following questions:

- Where are some places in my stewardship where I act like the owner?
- Where can I go to be reminded of my identity as a steward in Christ?

Close with Prayer

Gracious God and Father, Owner of all things, help us to remember at all times that we are your stewards. Forgive us in those times when we are poor stewards and help us to remember to give you praise in those times when we are good stewards. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, who redeemed us as your stewards by Your mercy, Amen.

Part Three: Steward Life

Introduction

Understanding that God is the owner and we are the stewards, what does all of this mean for how I live my day-to-day life? What is God's will for my possessions and how am I to act as God's manager when I am only a student? This study will focus on the living out of the steward life in three primary ways: how we care for possessions, how we care for others and ourselves, and how we give back to God.

To Begin...

1. Have your parents ever given you a big responsibility? What was it and how did it go?
2. In regards to stewardship, how has God given you a big responsibility? How do you think it's going so far?

A Closer Look

God Gives Us Possessions

Read Matthew 25:14-30.

What did the Master want the servants to do with what he gave them?

He wanted them to be good stewards with the money. God doesn't give us possessions so that we can hide them and be stingy with them, but to use them for the greater good of others and the kingdom. Being a steward means that we faithfully use what God has given.

What does the reaction of the Master mean for us as God's stewards?

The Master in the parable gives abundantly to the first two men seeing that they will use what he has given faithfully. These men are living according to their identity. For us this means that as we use what God has given us faithfully, God continues to bless us abundantly so that we can continue to steward His

kingdom. God blesses each of us according to His will, some get ten talents, some get five, and some get one. It isn't about how much we have, but what we do with what we are graciously given.

For the man who was afraid and hid the talent, he mismanaged what the master gave. Why?

He was afraid of the master. This means two things: First, the servant did not do what the master asked him to do with the gift. That is to say, he intentionally disobeyed the master regarding his stewardship of the one talent. The second is that the man did this out of fear for himself. In other words, his motivations were selfish. He was looking out for himself regarding his possessions and not using them to their potential according to the master's instructions. He didn't trust the master's words. Poor stewardship comes from a selfish use of what God has given that contradicts the will of the giver.

God Gives Us Life and Others

Read Romans 12.

What does it mean to present our bodies as "living sacrifices"?

It means that we recognize that our bodies are not our own (1 Corinthians 6:19-20) and that they should be used in connection with what God desires of them. It may be different to think of how you use your body as an issue of stewardship, but it most certainly is. Along with the identity of steward, God gave you a body that displays that identity. It is a part of who you are. And when we abuse our bodies, either through drug/alcohol use, inappropriate sexual actions, or cutting/self abuse, we are dealing with an issue of poor stewardship. God desires us to treat ourselves in accordance with how He sees us and made us to be, that is, beautiful and wonderful works of His creation. (Psalm 139:13-14)

How does the rest of Romans 12 describe our stewardship?

We are called to take care of others. Not only do we belong to God, but so does everyone else. Because we are all beautiful and wonderful creations of God, we are all called to be stewards of other stewards. This means that we are to speak well of others and build each other up. We are to care for the needs of others, to "rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep" (ESV). Being a steward means that we are part of the steward community which includes every person alive. And being part of that community means living in that identity and holding others accountable to that identity as well.

Does being a steward of others mean letting them do what they want?

No. Being a steward of others might sometimes mean we have to hold other stewards accountable for poor stewardship. The key is that we always do that in love. (Ephesians 4:15-16) Remember being a steward is not about taking care of what is around us, but doing that according to GOD's will. If someone is stewarding something, but counter to God's will, then for their sake and the sake of God's gift we have the responsibility to lovingly guide others to right stewardship.

God Gives and We Give Back

Read Malachi 3:8-10.

How do we rob God?

When we believe that we are the owners we tend to focus only upon our needs. As a result, God is pushed further out of the picture and we end up using His gifts only for the purpose of satisfying our desires. When we take something that doesn't properly belong to us and use it for our own personal pleasure that is stealing. When it comes to money or material possessions, we must always keep in mind that those gifts come from a great giver. By remembering that we then, in turn, become involved in giving those resources to God as He needs them to accomplish His purposes. That might mean giving a percentage of your income to the church to do the work of the ministry in your community, or it may mean the donation of an item to a charitable foundation to support the feeding of the hungry. The key is not the amount (although 10% giving is a good, biblical directive) but that you are giving to the Lord to accomplish His work.

Does God bless us when we give?

Yes, but God is not an investment plan. It isn't as though we give a certain amount so that we get a great return on our money from God and get rich. Rather, God gives in proportion to the work He desires you to do. And what God gives in return is not always what you expected. Sometimes it is a growing and thriving faith community, sometimes it is a closer relationship with friends or family, and sometimes it may even be financial. But whatever way God decides to use your gift, know that it is always used in the blessing of others as God actively works in and through these gifts.

Read Exodus 36:1-7

What does Moses tell God's people regarding the building of the sanctuary?

He tells them to WHAT?! Stop giving! That can't be right... In fact, it is. The people of God had the task of building a sanctuary to the Lord using the contributions of God's people. But as the offering came in, they saw that they had more than enough to accomplish the work they had been tasked to do. So Moses restrained them from giving. Now, that may sound odd, but that is true stewardship. God asks that you give in accordance with fulfilling the task established for the building of the kingdom of God. But when there is an abundance, we are called, as stewards, to ENJOY GOD'S GOOD GIFTS!!!! He gave them to us so that we might have an abundant life and enjoy them. Once we have given to the Lord to accomplish His work, we are free to enjoy the blessings He so lovingly gives to us.

So, is it okay to be rich?

YES! It isn't how much you have, but what you do with what you are given. God loves to bless His people in many ways. If God has decided that He is going to bless you with wealth, then He has given you the blessed task of using that wealth to build His kingdom and proclaim His name. And if not financial wealth, maybe you have spiritual wealth and use that in ministry. Or maybe you have emotional wealth and use it in human care and social services. Maybe you have intellectual wealth and use it to teach or create cures or machines that make people's lives better. In all these things we find great wealth given from God for us to use as He has created us to use them. That is what it means to be a steward.

For Your Reflection

Take a few moments and discuss in small groups or as a large group the following questions in each of the three areas discussed above:

- How can you live as a steward at school?
- How can you live as a steward at home?
- How can you live as a steward at church?

Close with Prayer

Holy Father, thank you for the numerous gifts that you give to us everyday. Help us to be good stewards of your gifts all the time, and continue to teach us what it is you would have us do with the good gifts you give. Through Jesus Christ, who gave so much for us, Amen.