

CHAPTER 9

Stewardship

KEY IDEA

I believe everything I am and everything I own belong to God.

KEY VERSE

The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters — *Psalm 24:1-2*

BEGIN BY RECITING THE KEY VERSE AND THE KEY IDEA TOGETHER AS A GROUP.

LESSON

INTRODUCTION:

Typically when we talk about the word *stewardship* in the church, we immediately connect it to putting money in an offering plate for the church and/or a Christian cause or organization.

> Stewardship often connects us to our money.

< Unfortunately for some people this brings a negative light to the work of the church. "They are always asking for money."

While giving money to the church, including the idea of tithing – giving 10 percent – certainly is an aspect of stewardship, by no means does it capture the entire concept. To fully comprehend the biblical belief of stewardship, we have to think much bigger and broader. - Bandy Prazer

God created the earth and the cosmos. Everything belongs to him. But people are given a special role to play in creation. It is both an honor and a great responsibility. This chapter on stewardship helps us understand the reason for God's mandate to us and how we are to live.

Every faculty you have, your power of thinking or of moving your limbs from moment to moment, is given you by God. If you devoted every moment of your whole life exclusively to His service, you could not give Him anything that was not in a sense His own already.

- C. S. Lewis, *More Christianity*

Do you feel that this concept of stewardship—that everything belongs to God, therefore is not ours—is a lost concept on some Christians today?

GOD IS OWNER

Psalm 24 was a processional psalm used by the ancient Israelites to celebrate the entrance of the ark of the covenant, the symbol of the Lord's presence, into Jerusalem and into God's sanctuary. The psalm begins by praising God as the owner of the earth and everything in it — a reality that consequently makes us, in turn, the stewards of the world and its resources.

The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters.

One way that the Lord wanted his people to honor him was through thank offerings, overflowing out of a heart of gratitude for all God has given. But too often the Israelites offered sacrifices but then lived however they wanted, with no sincere thanksgiving behind their actions. They were just going through the motions — like a person today who goes to church on Sunday and then ignores God's commands for living on the other six days of the week. Though God commanded his people to offer sacrifices, and their offerings were pleasing to him, what he was most looking for was their wholehearted obedience in every aspect of their lives.

Psalm 50:7-15

⁷ "Listen, my people, and I will speak; I will testify against you, Israel: I am God, your God. ⁸ I bring no charges against you concerning your sacrifices or concerning your burnt offerings, which are ever before me. ⁹ I have no need of a bull from your stall or of goats from your pens, ¹⁰ for every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. ¹¹ I know every bird in the mountains, and the insects in the fields are mine. ¹² If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is mine, and all that is in it.

¹³ Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats? ¹⁴ "Sacrifice thank offerings to God, fulfill your vows to the Most High, ¹⁵ and call on me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me."



KEYQUESTION: How much does God want of me?

The bottom line is that God wants all of you.

Do you think this concept makes some Christians nervous? Why/why not? Does it make you nervous?

Why would God want all of me? Why does he want *all* I have?

> The answer is that everything is already his anyway.

> Even more important, this is the best opportunity for us, and those around us.

To discover what the Bible says about stewardship, we start with the very first verse: "*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*" (Genesis 1:1).

As the Creator, God has absolute rights of ownership over all things, and to miss starting here is like misaligning the top button on our shirt or blouse—nothing else will ever line up. -Author unknown

The biblical doctrine of stewardship defines a man's relationship to God. It identifies God as owner and man as manager.

> God makes man His co-worker in administering all aspects of our life.

< *"For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building"* (1 Corinthians 3:9)

> Stewardship defines our God-given purpose in the world.

< We are able to accurately view and value our possessions.

< We are able to correctly value human life.

> Stewardship is not God taking something from us; it is His method of bestowing gifts upon His people.

< 2 Corinthians 9:7 states, *"God loves a cheerful giver."*

Why would giving cheerfully bring joy to God?

As Christians in the 21st century, we need to embrace the larger biblical view of stewardship, which goes beyond church budgets or building projects, although these are important; it connects everything we do with what God is doing in the world.

In looking at stewardship, there are **FOUR PRINCIPLES** to look at.

I. THE PRINCIPLE OF OWNERSHIP.

Who is the owner? *The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.* (Ps. 24:1)

> In the beginning chapters of Genesis, God creates everything. He puts Adam in the Garden to work it and to take care of it.

< It is clear that man was created to work and that work is the stewardship of all of the creation that God has given him.

Have you ever defined your work as a vocation meant for Christian stewardship? Should this be the way to look at it?

> This is the fundamental principle of biblical stewardship.

< God owns everything, we are simply managers or administrators acting on his behalf.

> Stewardship is an expression of our obedience regarding the administration/management of everything God has placed under our control.

< Stewardship is committing ourselves and our possessions to God for His service, recognizing we do not have the right of control over our property or ourselves.

We may look at Deuteronomy 8:17 and say the same thing, or feel the same way when Moses writes *"You may say to yourself, 'My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.'"*

> But Deuteronomy 8:18 brings us back to the reality of whose power it is that gives us the ability.

"Remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth."

Deuteronomy 8:17 seems to echo what the world says today. Why is it so easy to forget Deuteronomy 8:18?

II. THE PRINCIPLE OF RESPONSIBILITY

Although God gives us “all things richly to enjoy,” nothing is ours. Nothing really belongs to us. God owns everything; we’re responsible for how we treat it and what we do with it. While we complain about our rights here on earth, the Bible constantly asks, “What about your responsibilities?” Owners have rights; stewards have responsibilities. - Bill Peol

Looking at the above quote, what is the difference between “rights” and “responsibilities”?

We are called as God’s stewards to manage that which belongs to God.

> God entrusted us with the care, development, and enjoyment of everything he owns as his stewards.

< We are responsible to manage his holdings well and according to his desires and purposes.

NOTE: Further into the study we will see what God’s people are to manage.

A steward is one who manages the possessions of another. We are all stewards of the resources, abilities and opportunities that God has entrusted to our care.

> One day each one of us will be called to give an account for how we have managed what the Master has given us.

III. THE PRINCIPLE OF ACCOUNTABILITY

This is what is taught in the Parable of the Talents. God has entrusted authority over the creation to us and we are not allowed to rule over it as humanity sees fit.

> We are called to exercise our dominion under the direction of the Creator, managing his creation according to the principles he has established.

GOD’S PEOPLE ARE MANAGERS . . .

If God created everything, including humans, how then do we fit into the created order? What is our role in this reality? The parable below instructs us on the importance of seeing ourselves not as owners but as managers of our lives and gifts. The bags of gold represent any resource God, the master, gives us. He ultimately owns the resource, but we are charged with caring for it and investing it in ways that yield results for the sake of the kingdom.

FROM: Matthew 25:14-30

¹⁴ “... a man ... called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. ¹⁵ To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. ¹⁶ The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. ¹⁷ So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. ¹⁸ But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.

¹⁹ “... the master ... returned and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See,

I have gained five more.’ ²¹ *“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’*

²² *“The man with two bags of gold also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.’* ²³ *“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’*

²⁴ *“Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. ²⁵ So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’* ²⁶ *“His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed?’* ²⁷ *Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. ²⁸“So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. ²⁹ For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. ³⁰ And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’*

Like the servants in the Parable of the Talents, we will be called to give an account of how we have administered everything we have been given, including our time, money, abilities, information, wisdom, relationships, and authority.

> We will all give account to the rightful owner as to how well we managed the things he has entrusted to us.

When you think of Christian accountability, how often has stewardship entered into those thoughts? Do you think Christians are aware of the seriousness of accountability that is held for them when it comes to stewardship?

GOD’S PEOPLE ARE MANAGERS ... OF GOD’S CREATION

God showed great attentiveness in creating the earth, which he entrusted to humankind for its care. Being created in his likeness, we are responsible to be respectful stewards of his precious design and the creatures that are a part of it.

FROM Genesis 1:26-28

²⁶ *Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”* ²⁷ *So God created mankind in his own image....* ²⁸ *God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”*

The news seems to have many stories now that show we are depleting the world’s natural resources and failing to take care of God’s creation.

> It would seem prudent to do what we can to replenish, recycle, and reuse our resources.

Have you given thought as to what you can do in this area of stewardship? If so, what?

In the OT we read of how the people of Israel were to give the land a time of rest by not planting anything every seventh year.

> Leviticus 25:4 *But in the seventh year the land is to have a year of sabbath rest, a sabbath to the LORD. Do not sow your fields or prune your vineyards.*

> This was necessary for the land to replenish itself.

FROM BIBLEGATEWAY.COM

All labor was to cease in the seventh year, as much as daily labor on the seventh day. These statutes tell us to beware of covetousness, for a man's life consists not in the abundance of his possessions. We are to exercise willing dependence on God's providence for our support; to consider ourselves the Lord's tenants or stewards, and to use our possessions accordingly. (Le 25:8-22)

GOD'S PEOPLE ARE MANAGERS ... OF THEIR CHILDREN

In the story of Hannah (1 Samuel 1:1-28;2:18-21 – BELIEVE pgs. 146-148) we see a good example of how our children belong to the Lord. He gives them to us to raise according to his instructions and purposes, but ultimately, they belong to him. Other passages edify this concept.

Deuteronomy 6:1-7 } *These are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, ² so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. ³ Hear, Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, promised you.*

⁴ Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵ Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. ⁶ These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. ⁷ Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

God instructed the Israelites to be accountable teachers to their children.

> Verse 7 tells the people to “impress” the law of God on their children.

< Below are some dictionary definitions of “impress”

^ To affect deeply or strongly in mind or feelings; influence in opinion.

^ To fix deeply or firmly on the mind or memory, as ideas or facts

^ To urge, as something to be remembered or done.

^ To impose a particular characteristic or quality upon (something/someone)

^ To apply with pressure, so as to leave a mark.

After reading through the list of definitions for “impress” which one(s) do you think best fit the idea of Deuteronomy 6:7?

> The Spiritual stewardship of our children is very important. It should not be left up to the child to “decide.” Without proper instruction, a good decision cannot be made.

Psalm 127:3} ³ *Children are a heritage from the LORD, offspring a reward from him.*

Children are a heritage from the Lord, therefore His gift.

> Yet parents must do something in bringing the children into the world and in raising them to be faithful members of God’s people.

Every baby born is God’s vote for the future of humankind and our opportunity to help make some new beginnings. -Warren Wiersbe

Luke 18:16} ¹⁶ *But Jesus called the children to him and said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.*

Jesus’ attitude toward children contrasted significantly with that of other religious leaders in Judaism.

> In most ancient cultures children were regarded as a burden until they were physically strong enough to contribute to the family.

> Jesus saw the value of children and encouraged them, rather than “put up with them.”

Ephesians 6:4} ⁴ *Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.*

Paul addresses the responsibility of fathers in particular, though this does not diminish the contribution of mothers in these areas. (See Proverbs 31).

> Parents play a crucial, God-ordained role in the discipleship of their children.

Christian instruction for children must come from parents and the church, it’s a mutual ministry.

They need to hear the words, they need to see the examples of faith in parents and congregation as they demonstrate the unification of the entire body of Christ.

Do you feel that a few, some, or most parents leave Christian instruction of their children entirely to the church? Why?

GOD’S PEOPLE ARE MANAGERS ... OF THEIR CALLING

Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:1} *As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.*

> In every age the call of God has been the governing factor in the life of every believer, who has accepted it. Therefore it is the Christian’s responsibility to learn about the nature of the calling God has given us, and to walk in it with consistency and perseverance.

What is that Christian calling?

> We know that "God's gifts and his call are irrevocable (Rom. 11:29). God never changes his purpose. What he established in His calling, always stands forever.

The first occasion when God's call appears is in Genesis 12:1, where we read that, "The LORD had said to Abram, 'Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.'"

> The New Testament comment on this is, "By faith Abraham, **when called** to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going." (Heb. 11:8).

< With Abraham's calling there is an important feature, which marks the call of God throughout Scripture, whatever the nature of the call may be. It involves *separation*.

^ This separation can involve individuals severing ties from family and country.

^ This separation can involve nations separating from the nations around them.

^ This separation can involve an assembly of people called out from their nation.

> Out of this call of Abraham there sprang the call of Israel as a nation, which separated them not only from Egypt but from all other peoples.

We have been called to live a holy life separated from the distractions of the world around us. "He has saved us and **called us to a holy life**—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time," (2 Tim. 1:9).

FROM MY UEMOSE FOR HIS NIGHNESE by Oswald Chambers

The call of God can never be understood absolutely or explained externally; it is a call that can only be perceived and understood internally by our true inner-nature. The call of God is like the call of the sea—no one hears it except the person who has the nature of the sea in him. What God calls us to cannot be definitely stated, because His call is simply to be His friend, to accomplish His own purposes. Our real test is in truly believing that God knows what He desires. The things that happen do not happen by chance—they happen entirely by the decree of God. God is sovereignly working out His own purposes... As we grow in the Christian life, it becomes simpler to us, because we are less inclined to say, "I wonder why God allowed this or that?" And we begin to see that the compelling purpose of God lies behind everything in life, and that God is divinely shaping us into oneness with that purpose. A Christian is someone who trusts in the knowledge and the wisdom of God, not in his own abilities. If we have a purpose of our own, it destroys the simplicity and the calm, relaxed pace which should be characteristic of the children of God.

Many have difficulty in finding the call of God on their life. Do you think they are searching too narrowly? Does Oswald Chamber's thoughts help to explain that the call of God is very broad and there are many avenues of each call?

GOD'S PEOPLE ARE MANAGERS...OF THEIR MONEY

During the prophet Malachi's day, at the end of the Old Testament era, the Israelites were failing to follow the requirements for offerings and gifts outlined for them. God, through Malachi, challenged the people to honor him with their material resources as they were commanded.

Malachi 3:7-9

⁷ Ever since the time of your ancestors you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. "Return to me, and I will return to you," says the LORD Almighty. "But you ask, 'How are we to return?' ⁸ Will a mere mortal rob God?" Yet you rob me. But you ask, 'How are we robbing you?' In tithes and offerings. ⁹ You are under a curse—your whole nation—because you are robbing me."

Have you ever thought of failure to give as "robbing God?" What are the ramifications of this?

The only passage of Scripture in which God invites us to test him is Malachi 3:10 – 12:

"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it. I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not drop their fruit before it is ripe," says the Lord Almighty. "Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land," says the Lord Almighty."

> This passage offers powerful promises of blessings for those who are obedient and honestly give to the Lord. He shows us what he is able to do in the life of a faithful steward.

> Jesus also taught about this part of our Spiritual growth and stewardship. Luke 6:38 says:

"Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

Because everything we have is ultimately from the Lord, when we fail to return to him a portion of what he has provided us, we rob him. In a rather unusual parable, Jesus explained a powerful principle regarding how we are to manage the money God has entrusted to us. Money has a lot of power and can be used for good or for evil. We are to look for "shrewd" ways to use God's resources, not to help ourselves, but to help others and serve God.

LUKE 16:1-15 (pgs. 150-151 in BELIEVE)

THE VOICE

16 Here's a parable He told the disciples:

Jesus: *Once there was a rich and powerful man who had an asset manager. One day, the man received word that his asset manager was squandering his assets.*

² The rich man brought in the asset manager and said, "You've been accused of wrongdoing. I want a full and accurate accounting of all your financial transactions because you are really close to being fired."

³ The manager said to himself, "Oh, no! Now what am I going to do? I'm going to lose my job here, and I'm too weak to dig ditches and too proud to beg. ⁴ I have an idea. This plan will mean that I have a lot of hospitable friends when I get fired."

⁵ So the asset manager set up appointments with each person who owed his master money. He said to the first debtor, "How much do you owe my boss?" ⁶ The debtor replied, "A hundred barrels of

oil.” The manager said, “I’m discounting your bill by half. Just write 50 on this contract.”⁷ Then he said to the second debtor, “How much do you owe?” This fellow said, “A hundred bales of wheat.” The manager said, “I’m discounting your debt by 20 percent. Just write down 80 bales on this contract.”

⁸ When the manager’s boss realized what he had done, he congratulated him for at least being clever. That’s how it is: those attuned to this evil age are more clever in dealing with their affairs than the enlightened are in dealing with their affairs!

⁹ Learn some lessons from this crooked but clever asset manager. Realize that the purpose of money is to strengthen friendships, to provide opportunities for being generous and kind. Eventually money will be useless to you—but if you use it generously to serve others, you will be welcomed joyfully into your eternal destination.

¹⁰ If you’re faithful in small-scale matters, you’ll be faithful with far bigger responsibilities. If you’re crooked in small responsibilities, you’ll be no different in bigger things. ¹¹ If you can’t even handle a small thing like money, who’s going to entrust you with spiritual riches that really matter? ¹² If you don’t manage well someone else’s assets that are entrusted to you, who’s going to give over to you important spiritual and personal relationships to manage?

¹³ Imagine you’re a servant and you have two masters giving you orders. What are you going to do when they have conflicting demands? You can’t serve both, so you’ll either hate the first and love the second, or you’ll faithfully serve the first and despise the second. One master is God and the other is money. You can’t serve them both.

¹⁴ The Pharisees overheard all this, and they started mocking Jesus because they really loved money.

Jesus (to the Pharisees): ¹⁵ You’ve made your choice. Your ambition is to look good in front of other people, not God. But God sees through to your hearts. He values things differently from you. The goals you and your peers are reaching for God detests.

Luke records for us this very unique parable that is sometimes difficult to understand. This is one of the few times where someone’s dishonest actions seem to be praised by Jesus.

> The master, when he finds out what this unrighteous, dishonest manager did, praises the dishonest manager.

< But notice that the manager is not praised for being dishonest. The manager was praised for acting “shrewdly.” Other translations say “astutely/clever.”

< Verse 8 gives understanding to Jesus’ teaching: “For the sons of this age are more shrewd in relation to their own kind than the sons of light.”

> Jesus simply points out that people of the world can sometimes act smarter than the people of God.

> In Verse 9 Jesus draws a parallel to what the people of the world do.

< He states that we are to make friends through money. Many of the versions use the phrase “unrighteous wealth” or “dishonest wealth” which leads to confusion. The Greek word is “mammon.” Jesus is speaking about physical money.

^ He is talking about our possessions, wealth, money, and all that we have gained physically.

< We are to use our wealth to “make friends” or influence people to the goodness of God. Jesus is not saying to make friends on earth with money in order to use people selfishly, rather to make friends in heaven using our money to minister the gospel of Christ.

< Jesus may also be speaking about us becoming friends with God.

> Jesus stated the principle very plainly: showing faithfulness with the riches of this world will show our faithfulness for the true, eternal riches.

So, how do you handle your wealth and possessions:

- > Are we selfish or selfless? Do we spend money on ourselves when it could be better spent for others?
 - < We need to think about how God would want us to use the wealth we have received from Him.
- > Do we hoard or cheerfully give? Do we think of our wealth as “mine” or as God’s?

GOD’S PEOPLE ARE MANAGERS ... OF THEIR HOMES

Hospitality was highly valued during Old Testament times, by the Israelites as well as by other peoples. Our homes — no matter how large or small, how simple or fancy — belong to God and can be used by us to accomplish his purposes. In the New Testament believers are instructed, commanded and commended in regard to practicing hospitality.

Romans 12:13 *Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.*

Hebrews 13:2 *Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.*

1 Peter 4:9 *Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.*

3 John 2-8 *Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well. It gave me great joy when some believers came and testified about your faithfulness to the truth, telling how you continue to walk in it. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.*

Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers and sisters, even though they are strangers to you. They have told the church about your love. Please send them on their way in a manner that honors God. It was for the sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans. We ought therefore to show hospitality to such people so that we may work together for the truth.

Hospitality offers fellowship. Fellowship offers unity. Unity brings us together to do the work of God.

- > Hospitality offers comfort. A place to eat and a place to sleep can do great good.
- > Hospitality offers refreshment. Sometimes it’s just simply good to get together.

GOD’S PEOPLE ARE MANAGERS ... OF THEIR BODIES

Paul challenged the members of the church at Corinth to honor God with their bodies. Why? Because, like our resources, our bodies belong to God. We are mere managers.

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

¹² “I have the right to do anything,” you say—but not everything is beneficial. “I have the right to do anything”—but I will not be mastered by anything. ¹³ You say, “Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy them both.” The body, however, is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. ¹⁴ By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also. ¹⁵ Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! ¹⁶ Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, “The two will become one flesh.” ¹⁷ But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit.

¹⁸ Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. ¹⁹ Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.

FROM THE TRANSFORMATION STUDY BIBLE

There was a great deal of sexual laxity in the city of Corinth. It was a permissive society with a philosophy similar to that which the world has today. Sex is a normal physical function, so why not use it as you please? Paul pointed out that God created sex when he made the first man and woman, and therefore he has the right to tell us how to use it.

FROM THE ESV STUDY BIBLE

Some of the Corinthian Christians were... theorizing that bodily appetites were matters of indifference for Christians just as they apparently were for everyone else. Paul reminds them that the bodies of Christians are one with the resurrected Christ and, in risen form, the Christian's body will be eternal. What they do with them now, therefore, is important.

I think we can also determine that taking care of our bodies by doing what we can to be healthy is another aspect of this stewardship.

God is serious about our stewardship/management of his creation. This brings us to our key idea:



KEY IDEA: I believe everything I am and everything I own belong to God.

[Paraphrased FROM *THINK, ACT, BELIEVE LIKE JESUS* by Randy Frazee]

If we believe that 100 percent of all we own comes from God we ought to have an attitude that follows that belief.

2 Corinthians 9:6-8} *Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.*

There are two important points about this passage with regard to stewardship.

> First, Paul's teaching parallels God's challenge in Malachi. Sow sparingly, and you reap sparingly; sow generously, and you reap generously.

< If you give generously, God can bless abundantly.

> Second, the decision of what we should give is made in the heart.

< Jesus said, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Matt. 6:21)

< Interestingly, it is also true that where your heart is, there your treasure will be also.

As we have already read, the biblical idea is that through a relationship with God, we move from the title of owner to the position of manager. A steward is simply a manager.

> We deed over to God ownership of all things in our lives — external and internal — and we then take on the management of all he gives.

< This means the physical — money, house, cars, resources

< This also means our gifts, talents, personality, and intellect.

All we are and all we own belong to God. He now decides what we receive, what we do with what we have, and what we give.

"One of the growing trends in business over the past twenty years is this scenario: A corporation takes notice of a smaller company that has a similar business and decides that this smaller company might benefit the larger firm. The corporation approaches the company owner and says, "We want to buy your business, take over your debt, offer you our resources, and hire you and your staff to run it for us, but you'll now belong to us." For the small business owner, the thought of shifting the constant strain of dealing with finances to someone else and concentrating on the work at hand is attractive. This method of growth for large companies has become commonplace. Obviously, there are a multitude of challenges in making these ventures work, but many succeed quite well, and when they do, everyone wins.

This is exactly the concept of stewardship in a modern-day example. You "own" your own life, but your "business" is quite dysfunctional and deeply in debt. Christ comes to you and says, "I'm offering to buy you out. Redeem your life. Pay off all your debt that you could never repay. I will give you all of my resources, and you can then manage what I give you." In this transaction, what do you "owe" him in return? As stewards, we give back our lives and resources for others' good and his glory. Love him; love neighbor — with all we are and all we have." -- Randy Frazee



FROM THINK, ACT, BELIEVE LIKE JESUS by Randy Frazee

KEY APPLICATION: What difference does this make in the way I live?

We move from owner to manager.

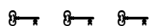
My central question now becomes, "What does God want me to do with all the resources he has put into my care?"

We approach every day as a living sacrifice to God.

Romans 12:1 provides an explicit answer to this question of what God wants us to do with what he has given us: "*I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God — this is your true and proper worship.*"

At first read, this verse may be a bit confusing. After all, isn't a "living sacrifice" an oxymoron? A sacrifice is a living thing *killed* as a substitution for another. Once a sacrifice is made, how can it then keep on living?

Here's how: The only way is for the sacrifice to actually live on the altar 24/7 — staying alive, yet always prepared to die. Ever-present in the state of offering, but continuing to live and serve as the sacrifice. So we place ourselves on God's altar and live there in "view of God's mercy." Christ's own sacrifice for us is the only way this is made possible. ... by our remaining a living sacrifice, we will be the proper stewards of all God gives.



We come to our last **principle**

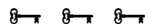
IV. The principle of reward.

In Colossians 3:23-24 Paul writes: "*Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.*"

- > The Bible has shown us that faithful stewards who do the master’s will with the master’s resources can expect to be rewarded incompletely in this life, but fully in the next.
- > We all should long to hear the master say what he exclaims in Matthew 25:21: *Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!*

The **closing questions** are these: “Have I deeded my life to God and then accepted stewardship of all he has given me? Am I 100 percent his?”

Are you? If so, write your commitment below.



A LITTLE SOMETHING EXTRA FROM GODQUESTIONS.COM

As stated in the beginning, more often than not, when we think of good stewardship, we think of how we manage our finances and our faithfulness in paying God’s tithes and offerings. But as we’re beginning to see, it’s much more than that. In fact, it’s more than just the management of our time, our possessions, our environment, or our health. Stewardship is our obedient witness to God’s sovereignty. It’s what motivates the follower of Christ to move into action, doing deeds that manifest his belief in Him. Paul’s stewardship involved proclaiming that which was entrusted to him—the gospel truth.

Stewardship defines our practical obedience in the administration of everything under our control, everything entrusted to us. It is the consecration of one’s self and possessions to God’s service. Stewardship acknowledges in practice that we do not have the right of control over ourselves or our property—God has that control. It means as stewards of God we are managers of that which belongs to God, and we are under His constant authority as we administer His affairs. Faithful stewardship means that we fully acknowledge we are not our own but belong to Christ, the Lord, who gave Himself for us.

The ultimate question, then, is this: Am I the lord of my life, or is Christ the Lord of my life? In essence, stewardship expresses our total obedience to God and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.