

LEADERSHIP AS TAUGHT IN THE BIBLE FOCUS 32; STEWARDSHIP

#1 STEWARDSHIP and The Principle

Read Matthew 25:14-30

Consider for a moment that everyone on earth has the same amount of time in every day.

President or paper boy, housewife or executive, farmer or financier -- they all have exactly twenty-four hours in each day.

What differentiates people isn't the amount of time available to them but the manner in which they exercise their gifts and talents within the available time. That's what stewardship is about: faithfully developing and using our gifts, talents and resources within the amount of time God has allotted to us.

Within every stewardship relationship there are two parties involved: the master who hands out the resources and will one day ask for an accounting; and the steward who is entrusted with the resources and must eventually answer for how they were invested.

When Jesus taught about his second coming, he drove home one important lesson: Only faithful stewards will be prepared for his return. The parable he used to make this point involved three servants who each received a sum of money from his master before that master departed on a long journey. Upon his return the master discovered that two of the servants had invested the money and that one had buried it.

When the servant who had buried the money began offering excuses, the master refused to accept them. Instead, he rebuked the lazy servant and punished him severely. Meanwhile, the faithful servants enjoyed the rewards they had received for their diligent labor.

Leaders are stewards. They manage multiple resources because they direct others in using their own resources. Reread Matthew 25:14-30 and consider ways of investing the multiple resources God has placed under your trust. Have you found opportunities?

#2 STEWARDSHIP and Who God Is

Read Psalm 104:1-35

This rich poem extols the manner in which the created order displays the beauty and glory of the

living God. It's filled with expressions of praise, wonder and adoration. All things find their origin and nourishment in the mind and power of the personal and inexhaustible God. **"Who is like the Lord our God, the One who sits enthroned on high, who stoops down to look on the heavens and the earth?" (Psalm 113:5-6).** The Lord's splendor and majesty are displayed in the heavenly bodies, as well as in the clouds, winds and lightning. God formed the earth with its oceans and mountains, and the water he provides sustains the beasts of the field and the birds of the air. Earth's stately forests and lush vegetation sustain humans and animals, and the sun and the moon differentiate day from night and mark off the seasons. The incredibly rich diversity and abundance of creatures both large and small are a continual source of awe and amazement. All things look to God for their existence, and when he takes away their breath, they die and return to the dust.

Paul employs parallelism for emphasis when he states that "For us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live" (1 Corinthians 8:6).

He further addresses the Corinthian believers: "You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Jesus owns us both by virtue of creation and of redemption. He is the source of both our biological and spiritual lives. What are the practical implications of this truth for your life?

#3 STEWARDSHIP and Who I Am

Read Genesis 1:28-30

This passage contains God's stewardship mandate for the newly created man and woman, whom he had formed in his own image. His command to "fill the earth and subdue it" (v. 28) has been realized to a far greater extent during the past century than ever before. For the first time in human history, we face the crisis of global pollution and wholesale destruction of irreplaceable resources (e.g., the rain forests). Much of this is due to human greed and presumption; people have assumed that the supplies of earth are inexhaustible and that we are free to use them for personal gain. But Scripture cautions us that we

really own nothing, that “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it” (Psalm 24:1). Again, God reminds us in Psalm 50:10 that “every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills.”

A steward manages the possessions of another. We are all stewards of the resources, abilities and opportunities that God has entrusted to our care and each of us must one day give an account of the manner in which we have used them. The basis for reward is faithfulness: “Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful” (1 Corinthians 4:2).

It is humbling to realize that nothing we are or possess is really our own. The time, talent, material possessions and relationships we have been given are merely consigned to us by God for a few decades. To what degree are you conscious of God’s ownership of everything which you call your own? Have you developed a “stewardship mentality” -- a growing awareness that you will one day give an account of how you have used the trusts you have been granted?

#4 STEWARDSHIP and How They Work

Read Luke 16:1-9

This perplexing parable appears at first glance to encourage dishonesty. But Jesus enjoins us to mimic the steward’s shrewdness, not his dishonesty. No parable can be interpreted correctly until its purpose has been identified. Before asking what a parable means, the reader must ask why it was told. The situation which prompted this parable is recounted in Luke 15:1-2. The Pharisees were attacking Jesus for eating with the wrong people. His answer to their charge came in the form of four separate parables, the first three of which are recorded in the previous chapter (15:3-32). In the parable of the steward (16:1-9) Jesus drew his conclusion. Stewards work hard and “smart” to please their master. But some go the extra mile and work “shrewd”! While it appeared to some that Jesus was working contrary to the Father’s wishes, he and the Father both knew that Jesus was working judiciously and discerningly (synonyms for shrewdly) on precisely those things which the Father wanted accomplished (notice the first sentence of 16:8).

Jesus made it clear that we are his stewards. We manage his resources on earth.

Since leaders manage multiple resources, the stewardship role is especially applicable to them. Verses 8-15 contain the application of this extended passage. Read carefully from the standpoint of your role as a steward of God’s resources. The point of stewardship is that we manage what God owns (and he owns everything). He expects maximum return on his investment. Stewards work hard and smart. The best stewards are also shrewd. They look for the “extra” possibility to serve God well. **Examples?**

#5 STEWARDSHIP and What I Do

Read Genesis 39:1-41:57

Joseph was put “in charge” (Genesis 39:4; 39:22; 41:41). **From Potiphar’s house to Pharaoh’s Egypt, Joseph built others’ fortunes by managing their resources. That’s what stewardship entails; and that, according to Matthew 25 (look at the #1 article in Focus 32), is what leadership is all about as well. But of what, exactly, are we stewards?**

Peter Drucker asserted in *Post-Capitalist Society* that knowledge is fast becoming our most valuable asset. Karl Albrecht (*The Northbound Train*) tells us that, in this emerging post-capitalist society, **“one of the main jobs of leadership is to help people understand the contributions they can make.”** Leif Edvinsson and Michael Malone’s book *Intellectual Capital* is subtitled, *“Realizing Your Company’s True Value by Finding Its Hidden Brain Power.”* In Stewardship, Peter Block consistently equates stewardship with a leader’s commitment to develop the human resources placed in his or her charge. This representative, and by no means exhaustive, listing demonstrates that today more than ever before leaders-as-stewards must cultivate their human resources. People are a leader’s major stewardship focus.

Joseph, Jesus, and contemporary leadership gurus tell that as leaders we are stewards of our greatest resource -- people. A view of leadership that is consistent with the Bible will focus on what God deems important. And that again is people. Whatever else Biblical leaders feel responsible for in the name of stewardship, they must accept responsibility for the people God has entrusted to their care. **Who will you mentor or encourage?**