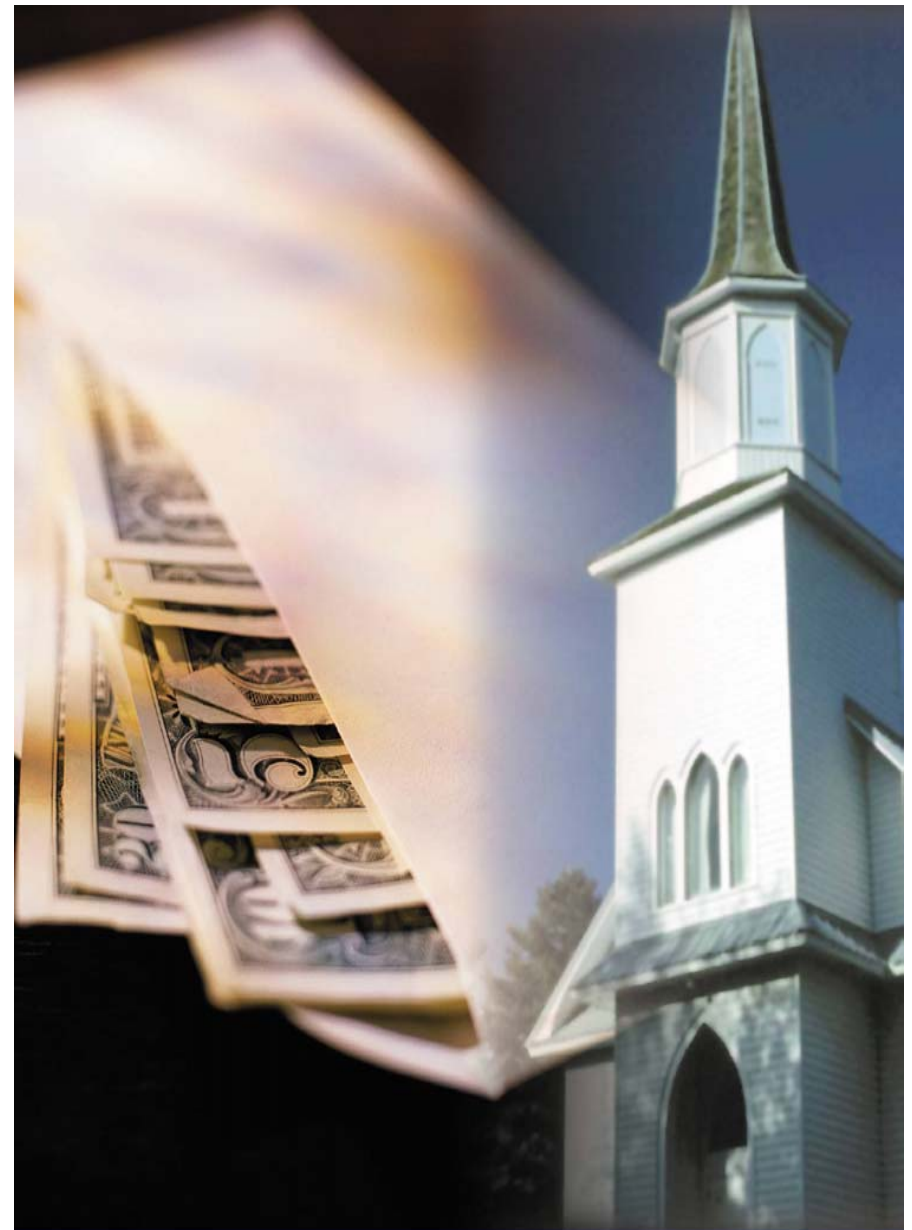


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Stewardship... God's Way

Sermons

The Truth About Our Stuff

Sermon Number One

Luke 19:12-26

Most church members think stewardship is putting money in an offering plate. That's only about 25% right.

Stewardship covers everything we are, have, and do. In the Bible, a "steward" was a servant made manager of his master's entire household, or special investments. Jesus told stories about stewards, and applied their lessons to the entire life of the individual. If we put together everything the Old and New Testaments say about giving or wise management, we come up with an all-inclusive concept, that we can define in this way:

Biblical stewardship is the obedient management of life and all its resources under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to the glory of God and the advancement of His kingdom.

Most of us have said, "If I had a million dollars, I would . . ." But we have xxx.xx dollars right now. What kind of stewardship are we showing with *it*?

Look at a familiar passage of scripture, Luke 19:12-26, a story Jesus told about some servants, stewards of their master's resources. It is a parable He constructed to illustrate how people respond in various degrees of faithfulness to the responsibilities He gives them in management of His creation. (Read the scripture text.)



This story appears also in Matthew, where the details differ slightly.¹ In this version, the master gives a total of ten minas (KJV “pounds”)² to his ten servants — one mina each. Then he went off, telling them he would return eventually. This is an image of Christ’s ascension to heaven and His promise to return someday to end the age. Until then, we are in the position of these servants: stewards of the Lord’s things.

This parable teaches some basic principles of stewardship we must follow, if we expect to be rewarded instead of punished:

God Owns It

The very first thing we need to set in stone and remember repeatedly and always is this: Everything belongs to God, not us.

This is a tough concept. We think of our things, our time, our money, our very lives, themselves, as ours, to do with as we like. The fact that we don’t see some supernatural hand interfering with our use or misuse of things tends to make us think we’re right, and they *are* ours. But we’re wrong.

The parable pictures God as the owner, and us as His managers. What we have we are given, and it is only on loan.

Consider Romans 14:8: **If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.**

God owns everything, including all we are and have, both by creation and by redemption.

Think about it. God created everything (Genesis 1:1). “The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it” (Ps. 24:1). We were put here on earth to enjoy our lives, but more, we were put here to fellowship with God and bring glory to Him. Our lives are not our own. If we serve God with our lives and all we have, we will indeed be fulfilled. But if we squander or misuse them, we will pay a dear price.

¹ While some Bible scholars think that differences in parables from one gospel to another represent variations in the gospel writer’s purpose, or in the sources they used, the evidence often shows that some parables were told on more than one occasion and in varying contexts. Jesus apparently used and reused parables, customizing them to the point He wanted to make on a given occasion.

In the parable in Luke 19, for instance, Jesus included the information in verses 14-15 and 27 as a new feature of the parable as recorded in Matthew 25:14ff. They are elements obviously added to the parable to make an additional point for His hearers on this occasion, who had mounted resistance against Him and who would shortly demand His crucifixion.

² The English translators of the King James Version translated monetary units in the closest possible unit of their own money at the time, which would have been approximately the worth of the English “pound” at the time. Actual values of monetary units change constantly, of course. The value of ten minas is currently estimated to have been about three months wages. The question still arises, “whose wages?” Obviously, we cannot know exactly what value this amount had, but it was clearly a substantial sum to be placed in the hands of servants, and it implied a great responsibility on their part.

³ The KJV, following much later Greek manuscripts, adds “and in your spirit, which are God’s.” The addition of “your spirit” does not seem to relate to Paul’s argument in 12-19, but the phrase, “which are God’s” restates the meaning of having been “bought with a price,” and so is a valuable commentary on the force of the verse. It means that we belong to God because of His purchase of us through Jesus Christ, in addition to Him having created us in the first place.

Zacchaeus was a wee little man, according to the children's song, but he became a giant of a giver when he met the Lord. He said, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount" (Luke 19:8). What are you doing simply to bless the lives of others, especially those who have material needs?

As well as giving things away, just using what is ours for someone else's benefit is a way of sanctifying our things, especially if we use it to benefit others in spiritual things.

The first Christians in Jerusalem "had everything in common" (Acts 2:44). They pooled their resources. Their example is to be applied in every church, and in every life. The lesson is one in sharing and helping.

When people use their gardens to bless families in need or in grief, they are sanctifying their gardens. When a car is used to transport other people to church, or to places of ministry or meeting human need, it is a sanctified car. When your house shelters someone, your gift helps them, these things are being sanctified to the Lord.

Conclusion

God owns it, but God shares it. Therefore we must manage it well. That means using it for holy purposes, including imitating God in His wonderful generosity. How are we doing in our stewardship?

A pastor told of a speaker one Sunday morning who said before the service, "I'll just sit on the front row, and come up to the platform during the inventory — I mean, offertory!" But the word was already out, and the pastor's brain whirred, and he wrote later that she really had it right. The offertory is an inventory. It tells us how much love we have for God.

What kind of love does your stewardship say you have for God — right now?

Not only are we God's by creation, but the Christian is God's by redemption. 1 Corinthians 6:20 says, "**You were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.**"³ Jesus paid with His life for us to be saved. You and I belong to Him.

One of our missionaries in South America was preaching that more than giving money in the offering plate, people should give themselves to God. When he gave the invitation, a woman came to the front, took an offering plate, and stood in it. She was trying to say that she was giving her whole life to God.

Stewardship begins by realizing that everything we are and have belongs to God. We just use it, and must use it for Him.

God Shares It

If God owns everything, then everything we have came from Him. He owns it all, but He shares it. This is our second principle: God is our source.

In Jesus' parable, the servants had nothing to invest except what the master gave them. But he gave them significant amounts. Luke's version of the parable says "a mina," which was about three months' wages. Matthew's version is much larger. It was enough for the time they had to use it. They were entrusted with everything they needed to manage his household and invest and make profit as well, while he was gone. In the same way, God supplies our need, and gives us enough to profit the kingdom as well.

Many Christians love to quote Philippians 4:19: **And my God will meet all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus.** This wonderful verse assures us that God is not stingy with what is His. *God is the ultimate source for all our needs, including the energy and ability by which we appear to be sustained.*

Parents have an illustration in their own lives of God's providence. Parents provide for their children's every need.

When a child develops the idea that he doesn't need his parents, in his parent's grief they understand something of what God feels when we act as if we didn't need Him.

Some people — most, probably — believe that while there may be a God, He isn't involved in people's lives much, and that whatever they do or become or acquire, they may credit largely to themselves. This is the "self-made man" idea. But the Bible says it is God who is responsible for any person's ability to succeed. Deuteronomy 8:17-18 says that God gives the power to get wealth. Jesus said the weather itself is a testimony to God's grace upon all people, whether righteous or unrighteous. If you experience good, it's from God: **Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father** (James 1:17).

It's sad that many people really believe that God does not have the resources to personally help anyone and everyone, whether in critical need or not. In fact, He *does*. That's why He's God.

Applying the Principles

We Must Sanctify It

If everything belongs to God, and it does, and everything comes from God, and it does, we cannot escape the conclusion that we must treat everything in our lives as borrowed. In fact, we need to plan on returning it, ultimately, if not sooner. We could call this plan "sanctifying our things." It means we make everything holy, set apart unto God, because everything is God's.

This is not just a technicality. God intends for it to be a very practical reality in our lives.

The Christian must acknowledge Christ's Lordship of everything, and constantly seek ways to use possessions to serve Christ's purposes.

To sanctify our things means to reserve them for godly purposes and keep them from being expended for unholy purposes. Essentially it means that there shouldn't be anything completely secular in our lives: it should all be sacred. What this means will differ for each of us. There is a great "personalization" of stewardship that must take place for everyone. No one from church will come to your house and tell you what to do with your things. Probably you will have no angelic appearances to tell you how to use your car, your house, your TV, your computer, your golf clubs, your baking pans, or whatever. You are personally responsible for disciplining yourself to use them in a way that will glorify God and serve His purposes in your life.

There are two elements to sanctifying your things:

First Avoid Materialism

The greatest danger posed by things is that they will interfere with our relationship with God. Don't let your things separate you from God! This is the essence of materialism. Materialism is not *having* a lot of things, but being in love with things and serving them and the cause of obtaining them. In essence we can come to worship things, if they come to have a position of highest importance to us.

Here's a guideline for protection against materialism. It comes in two parts:

1. Do not acquire so much by debt or credit that you cheat God of time or money that is rightfully His.
2. Do not possess what will by its very nature tempt you to be unfaithful to Christ or His church.

Secondly Accomplish A Spirit Of Sharing

Seek to accomplish a spirit of sharing as we sanctify our things.