

## "Wise and Faithful Stewards"

Jesus once said, "Who then is the faithful and wise steward" (Luke 12:42). Circle the word "steward". We don't use the word "steward" much today. Labor unions may elect a "shop steward" to represent their union to management. Flight attendants used to be called "stewardesses" or if they were men, "stewards". But the word isn't that common. We are more prone to use the word *steward*, or *stewardship*, in the church.

In the time of Jesus a steward was a person who controlled the affairs of a large household – supervising service at the master's table, directing the household servants, taking control of the household expenses. A steward was the *manager of the household*. The *manager*, not the *owner*! Most of the newer translations of the Bible, in translating Luke 12:42, use the word "manager". The New Revised Standard Version translates it, "Who then is the faithful and prudent *manager*...".

The Bible teaches us about stewardship, and it is one of the most important truths about life. God is the *owner* of everything, not us. We are only *stewards*, or *managers*, of life and its gifts. Everything we have belongs to God!

In the narrative of Luke 12, Jesus is telling His disciples to *be ready for His return*. Jesus says, "You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour" (Luke 12:40). To drive home the point, Jesus tells a story about a master who goes away and leaves things in charge of his steward (the household manager). We are to be like the wise and faithful manager who does his duties and isn't caught by surprise when the owner gets back: "And the Lord said, 'Who, then, is the faithful and prudent manager whom his master will put in charge of his slaves, to give them their allowance of food at the proper time? Blessed is that slave whom his master will find at work when he arrives. Truly I tell you, he will put that one in charge of all his possessions'" (Luke 12:42-44). We are *not* to be like a steward who takes things into his own hands, mismanages the household and lives recklessly – then is caught by surprise when the master suddenly shows up. This unfaithful manager will be punished! "The master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour that he does not know and will cut him in pieces<sup>□</sup> and put him with the unfaithful. That slave who knew what his master wanted but did not prepare himself or do what was wanted will receive a severe beating" (verses 46-47). Jesus then finishes the parable with these words: "From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required, and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded" (Luke 12:48b).

*Stewardship!* Big deal in the Bible! Profound truth in Jesus' teaching! *There's a big difference between being an owner and being a manager!* Suppose you have a friend with a very expensive car. A late model gem! This friend is going away for several months and says to you, "Take my car...drive it so it doesn't just sit in my garage all that time." So you do. But you don't care for the color, so you take it to a body shop and have it painted a color you like. You look at the floor mats and say, "They're not ones I would want", so you throw them out and buy new ones. You are kind of low on cash, so after 5 or 6 weeks you advertise your friend's car online to try to sell it. Can you imagine doing that! Do we have any right to do this with something that we don't even own! *There's a big difference between being an owner and being a manager!*

You own a restaurant. You've worked hard to get the restaurant well established and profitable. You get to the point where you can take some time off. Travel, explore some new business opportunities. So you put one of your long time employees in charge to *manage* your restaurant while you're gone. You entrust your business to him (or her). After several months you come back. You walk into your restaurant and the place is filthy. There are hardly any customers. Your staff is pretty much gone and you have all new cooks and servers, some of whom are sitting, chatting, or talking on their cell phones. You go to your office, check out the books, and see your profits have taken a nosedive. Some friends call you and say, "You know this manager of yours has been going all over town bragging about *his* restaurant." You also find out he's funneled some of the profits into his own pocket, and taken a 6 day cruise to Bermuda *on your money!* Don't you think you might just want to talk to this person and say, "What have you done with *my* restaurant!" *Huge difference between being an owner and being a manager!*

Let's look at 4 words. GOD ME MANAGER OWNER. Now let's pair them up and see which goes with which.

MANAGER - GOD, or ME?  
OWNER - GOD, or ME?

When we get this right, and it's ingrained in our understanding of life – that everything we have belongs to God, and we are only managers or stewards of what's been entrusted to us by God - it will make a difference in how we live! Jesus said, "Who then is the faithful and wise steward" (Luke 12:42).

Think about the challenge to be wise managers of our *time*. We all have been given 24 hours in our day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. I've gone to several "Time Management" seminars over the years, in an effort to manage my time more effectively. You may ask, "Did it help?" "Well, I got some good ideas, but I never found the time to try them." (Just kidding). Seriously, what a precious gift of God – the time of our lives!

Now realistically, not all of our time is our own. If we've got a family with children, we spend a lot of time taking care of them. We have to earn a living, time at work. Even when we get older and retire, we may have obligations to our children or grandchildren, or caring for an elderly spouse or relative, or spending more time than we would like in doctor's waiting rooms! But we all have some discretionary time where we can choose how to spend it. Some of *waste too much time* on trivial things. Sometimes we spend time just on *selfish pursuits*. Life has a way of slipping by quickly, doesn't it! When we're young we think we have forever – and before we know it, we're old! What are we doing to make the most of this precious gift of time?

Ephesians 5:15-16 says, "Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, *making the most of the time*, because the days are evil." We can't undo how we've spent the days that are gone, but we can do something about the days we have left! Can we use this precious gift of time for something more than trivial, self-centered things? To help somebody in need. To try to mend relationships that has been broken. To share with someone what the Lord Jesus has done

in our life? To spend time learning and growing to make us a better human being? Jesus said, "Who then is the wise and faithful steward?" (Luke 12:42).

***We can be good managers of our talents and abilities.*** 1 Peter 4:10 tells us: "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace." "Gift" here refers to a gift of the Spirit, but the principle applies to using our talents and abilities to serve others, and glorify God. An elderly lady took a faded photograph of her late husband to a portrait studio. She asked the photographer, "Can you make an oil portrait from this snapshot?" "Yeah, that's possible" the photographer said. "And could you curl his mustache?" "Yes, I could do that" the photographer replied. "Could you remove the wart from his nose?" "Yeah, that's pretty easy to do." "And when you're touching it up for the portrait, could you take the hat off his head so more of his black wavy hair shows?" the elderly woman continued. "Well, I guess that's possible, ma'am, but which side did he part his hair on?" "Oh my, I can't remember!" she countered. "But you'll find out when you take his hat off!"

Well, we may not have an ability to do magical things with old photos, but we all have talents, skills, abilities God's given us. *Something* we're good at! We can use these just for selfish purposes, or we can use whatever talents we've been given to bless people and glorify God. On many of Bach's music manuscripts there are certain Latin letters. At the beginning of a manuscript are often the letters "J.J.", and at the end, "S.D.G." "J.J." stands for *Jesu juva* ("Jesus, help me") – and "S.D.G." at the end of the score stands for *Soli Deo gloria* ("To God alone be the glory"). The world needs people with these words stamped on our talents and abilities and gifts – "to God alone be the glory".

We may not think we have much to offer, we're not that talented or gifted, but we can use whatever we have for the benefit of others and the glory of God. In the foyer of a Baptist Church in Minneapolis is a cardboard box with a sign on it: "Tim Lindbloom's Prayer Ministry". On the box is also a picture of a young man in a wheelchair, wearing a helmet, because he has cerebral palsy. There's a slot in the top of the box for people to insert prayer requests. There's also a note that says, "I only ask that you let me know what happens." What can a young man with cerebral palsy do for the Lord and others? His illness places limits on him. But he found something he could do: pray. The late comedian George Burns is hardly one you could go to for spiritual advice, but I like something he said, "When you stop giving and offering something to the rest of the world, it's time to turn out the lights." Jesus said, "Who then is the faithful and wise steward" (Luke 12:42).

***There is the stewardship of our body and mind.*** Our *human bodies* are an amazing gift of God. Now we may not look in the mirror and think what we see is an amazing gift of God, but it is! Psalm 139:14 says, "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made." If we are followers of Jesus and saved the Bible says that our body is a temple or dwelling place for God's Spirit! Wow! I should respect my body because God's Spirit lives inside me!

Today's emphasis on healthier diet, exercise, taking care of our bodies, is good! A man wanted to invite two of his pastor friends from the Lion's Club to come to his house for dinner, but only

one of them was able to come. Before the wife went out to shop for the meal she asked her husband, "Now I know one of your friends is a Baptist pastor and the other is an Episcopalian priest. Which is the one you said was coming? I need to know." "What difference does it make?" he responded. "A lot," the wife replied. "If it's the Baptist pastor he'll eat too much, and if it's the Episcopal priest he'll drink too much!"

We can neglect or even abuse our body. Harry Reasoner was a respected TV journalist. He died, partly from years of chain smoking. Andy Rooney paid tribute to his friend on "60 Minutes", but not without admitting his anger toward Reasoner for his bad health life choices, "angry that you were so careless with our feelings about you."

*Our mind is a wonderful gift of God that He's given us to manage.* We can use our mind for good or evil. A lot of smart people aren't very spiritual. The Bible distinguishes between "worldly wisdom", which is often at odds with God, and on the other hand "godly wisdom", which is wisdom that God gives. For instance, people who *scam* others can be smart people – they manage to stay one step ahead of the law – but they are a menace and plague to society.

We can squander this amazing gift of human intellect on trivial pursuits. Many thoughtful observers worry that we have become a nation of people who've lost the ability to *think* - deep, creative thinking. We can be a nation of couch potatoes, soaking up hours of TV, or a people who spend half of our lives on the computer or with our nose in our cell phones.

We can fill our minds with that which is trivial and trashy. Instead, Philippians 4:8 tells us this: "Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable...think about these things." In fact, the Bible says if we're followers of Jesus we are to strive to have the mind of Christ – to think like Jesus, to view life and people as Jesus did.

*The stewardship of our body and mind.* Romans 12:1-2 sums it up well: "I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your *bodies* as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your *minds*, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect."

Jesus said, "Who then is the wise and faithful steward" (Luke 12:42). In the parable Jesus told that follows, the servant who misused his master's property was dealt with harshly! He got a severe beating and was put with the unfaithful! Everything we have belongs to God, and is only loaned to us for a little while. And each of us will all have to give an account before our Creator of what we do with what's been entrusted to us!

If we faithfully use what we've been given to bless others and glorify God we can hear the words of our Lord, spoken in another parable about stewardship: "Well done, good and faithful servant...enter into the joy of your master" (Matthew 25:21).

