

Being a Good Steward

Imagine a life where there are no responsibilities. In this world, a boy has no chores, no schoolwork, and no bedtime. He does not have to eat what is put before him, nor does he have to brush his teeth unless he wants to. He can leave his bike out to rust, and he can make his cat fend for his own dinner if he doesn't want to feed it. He can leave his toys lie behind his parents' car, and he can place his dirty laundry wherever his heart desires.

This type of life may appeal to an aimless and slothful boy, but an orderly young man on his way to maturity (which probably best describes you) would cringe at the thought of such a world, for he knows that in the absence of responsibility is the presence of chaos.

A *steward* is someone who manages another's property, finances, or other affairs. You may have not thought about yourself as being a steward, but in reality you are. Everything that you possess has been given to you by God, your parents, or other people. And the things that God or others have given to you are not to be squandered. Rather, they are to be taken care of, and the benefits of doing so are many.

Ownership

We encourage you to embrace a Christian worldview in

regard to ownership, and that is *to consider that nothing you possess is truly yours*. It may appear that your muscles, skin, and hair are your own. The fact that some of your favorite tools and toys have your name on them may indicate they belong to you. It may seem as though the things you have earned by way of work or made by way of your talents are yours. But none of these things are truly yours, for if they were, they would also be *solely yours*.

However, nothing is solely yours, for everything you have was at one time allowed into your possession by God, and we should always remember what our Lord has said to this effect: “I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for *apart from Me you can do nothing*.” (John 15:5, emphasis added). So if you can do nothing apart from God, this must include ownership. If you own something, so does God.

All of It

There are some people who don't want to quite acknowledge that everything they have is jointly owned by God. Some resist this simple truth altogether. Such people are not likely Christians, and so we shouldn't expect them to think otherwise. But there are others, who for whatever reason, acknowledge God but want to think they can have some things to themselves.

Some people believe that God is somehow blessed if they recognize a certain percentage of what He gave to them, but the better way is to simply acknowledge God as the giver of *all* good things (James 1:17). And as we have freely received, so we should freely give (Matt. 10:8). Rather than thinking in terms of how much is yours or how much is God's, we admonish you to consider *everything* as His, for Jesus dwells in you, *and apart from Him you can do nothing*.

If you have something that you are not sure is God's, give it

to Him, so that you will have nothing of your own. How do you do this? Simply let it be your sincere heart's desire, and your offering will be done.

If you can get a hold of this view and make it your own, you will go far in protecting yourself and your future family from greed, envy, strife, and a host of other attitudes that will compete for true prosperity and peace. In addition, you will be better able to utilize your strengths and talents and thus be better equipped to love and serve your neighbor. In short, you will be the better man for it.

A Proper Grip

What we are really saying here is that it is useful to have a “proper grip” on the things that you possess. If your attitude is always “Mine, mine!”, then your grip is likely too tight. It's all right to get a bit self-centered if you don't want to share your ankle with a shark, but most of the time “mine” is a sure sign of selfishness.

On the other hand, your grip may be too loose if you don't care at all about your talents or the things you possess. If your attitude is usually along the lines of, “I don't care if my gun barrel rusts; it will still shoot okay,” or “I can do yesterday's chores tomorrow,” or “Somebody else will help the neighbor; I just don't want to,” then you are not being responsible with things given to you.

The Brevity of Life

There was a popular bumper sticker a few years back that said, “He who dies with the most toys wins.” The drivers who sported this bumper sticker were justifying their desires to stockpile things that would bring them fun and pleasure. Shallow-minded readers thought this saying was cute and funny, but anyone who gave it much thought could easily recognize its

depressing conclusion. In time, this bumper sticker gave way to one that attempted to sum the matter up more accurately. It read, “He who dies with the most toys, still dies.”

The Bible provides a more thoughtful statement on this matter: “...you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away” (James 4:14). The psalmist also states, “...Surely every man at his best is a mere breath” (Psalm 39:5).

Perhaps Job had the best attitude toward possessions when he stated succinctly, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I shall return there” (Job 1:21).

Temporal Treasure vs. Eternal Treasure

Knowing that our life on Earth is but a fraction of eternity is useful, for it helps us to put our possessions and talents into perspective. Life is simply too short to be worried about temporary things. We need to practice the admonishment of the Lord, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in or steal, for where your treasure is, there will be your heart also” (Matt. 6:19-21).

This world will often promote the message that the way to riches is through the collection of material things and money. This message will even come by way of religious people. But we admonish you to not believe them. While material goods and money can be a blessing from God, they can also be serious distractions to loving others and doing effective ministry.

King Solomon enjoyed unparalleled wealth at the time of his reign (Eccl. 2:4-9). While he found pleasure in his possessions (10), he nonetheless considered all he had done and all he had

owned as a “vanity and striving after wind” with “no profit” (11). He admonished his readers by saying, “Do not weary yourself to gain wealth; cease from your consideration of it” (Prov. 23:4).

So What Does Belong to Us?

Our discussion of stewardship so far has helped us to understand that what we have is God’s as much as it is our own. But what exactly do we own? Knowing what we own is essential to knowing how to be a good steward, and so we need to know the answer to this important question.

Toys and Tools

Toys and tools constitute a good portion of the things you own. Some of these are not so easy to categorize, like a slingshot. Is a slingshot a toy, or a tool? It’s kind of like a toy in that it is fun to play with, but it is more like a tool in that it is useful in serving certain purposes, like scaring the neighbor’s dog when it gets in your trash.

The same holds true for things like hammers and wrenches. Normally these are considered tools, but a case can be made that they are toys because they are fun to work with. Many moms and just as many wives have not been able to tell the difference between a man’s toys and his tools. We acknowledge there is little difference.

The point here, however, is discussing the importance of taking care of your toys and tools. So we will get right to the point. Toys and tools cost money (we’ll be talking specifically about money in just awhile). The longer your toys and tools last, the better. Simply put: take care of them!

There are few things under the sun that frustrate parents more than having to constantly remind their children to take care of their belongings. If you are the kind of boy who needs constant

reminding in this regard, then you would do well to repent and make an about-face.

When you are playing or working with your belongings, have some sense about you. We hope you would have second thoughts about taking your BB gun into the sandbox to bury for safe keeping from pretend Indians. At best, you will cram sand into the seals and other working parts, and at worst you could forget that you buried it and thus ruin it forever. And we hope you would have second thoughts about setting small components to your bike in your uncut lawn. At best, you will take longer to make your repair, and at worst you will lose one or more key parts altogether.

Consider the boy who left his wagon, full of important tools, behind his father's truck all night long in the rain. You might guess what happened when his father left for work in the morning. This unlucky boy was left with only a few tools worth keeping and nothing to tote them in. The father was left with a flat tire and a loose exhaust pipe. A stupid boy concludes that his father should have looked where he was going. The respectful boy recognizes his own foolish error. But the wise and prudent boy stored his belongings in their proper places the night before so as to avoid this scenario altogether.

Know this: Sand and rain are public enemies to most toys and tools. Keep your belongings from these elements, and you will be over halfway to becoming good stewards of them. The other half involves having a "place for everything, and everything in its place."

We offer two final words on the subject of toys, tools, and good stewardship. The first is this: buy, trade, or otherwise obtain the best available tools within your means. There is something to be said for "getting what you pay for." Do your research, and make wise purchases. A tool that costs one and a half times more than a similar tool is usually worth it if it will

last twice as long.

The second is this: share your belongings with others. Assume that others will be responsible until shown otherwise. Remember, “Mine, mine” is the way of the selfish and immature. In fact, be glad when you share. Enjoy knowing the recipient is using your belongings. Doing so provides an unmatched blessing.

Collectibles

In our culture, we are conditioned to own a vast array of items. There are many men who have moved their families into larger homes simply to accommodate the accumulation of so many items. This habit of collecting things starts when a man is young. Think about it—if most boys had all the birthday and holiday presents ever given to them placed in a pile, it is doubtful that a full size excavator could fit them all in its bucket.

For the most part, the ability to own and collect things can be a privilege, and so we don’t want to make collectibles sound like an evil thing. But we should all pause at the matter occasionally to consider one of Jesus’ most probing questions, “For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?” (Mark 8:36).

Be a good steward of the items you collect. If they are accumulating space, don’t assume that more storage room is your answer. It may be that they need a new home elsewhere. But while they are in your possession, take care of them, and be willing to share them appropriately with others.

Special Gifts

From time to time, you may receive a gift that has a special intended meaning from the giver. Your Aunt Mildred may have given you a rare coin that she never wants you to sell, or

you may never want to part with the cool pocket knife your grandfather gave you. We encourage you to honor the giver by taking special care of these things, but know that it is impossible to keep anything forever. The day will come when it will be appropriate that you pass these things on to someone else, and in doing so you can honor the spirit in which they were given to you.

Your Clothing

The day will come, if it has not already, when you will be buying your own clothes. It will be then that you fully understand why laundry and the care of apparel was ever made an issue in your home.

We wish there was no need to address this seemingly simple topic, but alas. There is something in the heart of many boys (and some men) which gives reason for many moms (and some wives) to think their sons and husbands purposefully *try* to dirty and even ruin their clothing.

Of course, you and I know this isn't true. From our vantage point, clothes just kind of snag on things and collect dirt by being near it. The matter of remaining snag and dirt-free is simply out of our control.

Whether or not we can maintain a perfect wardrobe will likely remain in the realm of wishful thinking until the Lord comes back. But one thing is certain: you and I can *temper* the degree by which our clothing becomes worthy of the rag-bag. For starters, we can at least attempt to stay dry. In case you haven't noticed, dirt likes to cling to fabric more so when water is involved. The exception may be when soap is added, but we will leave a comprehensive laundry lesson for another day. Simply stated, stay out of the mud, unless of course you must track a wounded animal through it. No one should fault you for this exception.

And there are certain things, to be sure, that you have complete control over. For one, there is simply no reason you have to ever lose an article of clothing. When you are taking off your socks to go after a frog, take note so you don't forget them. The same is true whenever you shed a coat or shirt because you get too warm. For goodness sake—return home with the same clothes you had when you left!

Another thing: It is almost a certainty that your bedroom has some kind of hamper. If you are a messy boy, it may be that you will have to find yours. Use it for its intended purpose. And if laundry is part of your weekly chores, then keep up on it! A laundry pile is intended to stay small, not for a potential nesting ground for bedbugs or mice.

You and I live in a country where we are blessed to have good clothing at relatively affordable prices. Be a good steward and respect your apparel accordingly.

Money

The Bible speaks about money frequently, and so we need to know a few things about it. Listen carefully, for if you are not the master of money, it will master you.

The Love of Money

For starters, do not love money, for the love of money is the root of all evil (1 Tim. 6:10). Treat money like it is a necessary tool to do certain things, rather than a means by which to gain riches.

However, you will encounter a number of Christians along the course of life who are in fact wealthy. Are these people sinning because of their state? Not necessarily, for the fruit of the Spirit includes self-control. In fact, some of the most respected Christians are wealthy. While there are several warnings in the

Bible about wealth, there is not a single verse that indicates that being wealthy is wrong. In our country, monetary wealth is often the natural consequence of hard work and ingenuity. You, in fact, may become wealthy some day. Just don't make it your life's goal.

By the way, you should know that the overwhelming majority of citizens living in the United States are in fact wealthy in comparison with the rest of the world. Regardless of your family's economic status, never think of yourself as poor.

Avoiding Debt

The Bible admonishes us to not spend more than we make. This is simple, common sense. But in our country, going into debt for non-essential stuff is normal. Resist the temptation to do so. Work on the principle that "cash is king," and you will be better for it.

However, the Bible does not indicate that going into debt is always wrong. It simply says that the "...borrower becomes the lender's slave" (Prov. 22:7). If you do borrow, you should know that you have put yourself into a position where someone (or something, like a bank) may be your master.

In all regards, we admonish you to resist borrowing for depreciable items. Depreciable items are items that go down in value shortly after they are purchased. For example, a new truck costing \$25,000 will be worth less than ninety percent of its value after only a couple of days. The same is true for a new bike. If you spend \$250 for a new Schwinn, you will be lucky to get even \$199 for it the next day. Buying new products is not necessarily a bad idea, but it is usually best to pay cash for them.

Lending

If the Bible cautions against borrowing, then you can bet it has something to say about lending. Indeed it does, for Jesus said, "...lend, expecting nothing in return" (Luke 6:35). So it's all right to loan, but make sure you are really doing the recipient a favor. And it's all right to accept terms for repayment, but just do so with a very loose grip. It is better that your friendship is maintained rather than harmed due to a loan that someone was not able to pay back. In fact, you may want to consider letting the recipient know your intentions and attitude in this regard.

Giving

Of all the things in this lesson, this one is the most important. In short, be a life-long, habitual giver. It has been said many times by wise, godly men that "you can't out-give God." This saying is true. Jesus Himself said, "Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return" (Luke 6:38).

However, we should warn you about certain religious people who teach that you can "give to get." These people recognize the principle of "give and it will be given," but they practice this principle for the wrong reasons and teach others to do likewise. But you should never give so that you will get. Rather, give because it is an act of love for others.

We encourage you to read the ninth chapter of 2 Corinthians. This chapter wonderfully summarizes the New Testament's attitude and approach toward ministerial giving. It tells us that we should purpose to give often to the needy as we are able, and that we should do so not out of compulsion, but out of a cheerful heart.

Too many Christians are preoccupied with trying to appease

God by giving a certain amount. We encourage you to resist worrying about such matters. Give, and give often, and the rest will take care of itself.

We shall close this topic with an important word of testimony: We have witnessed hundreds of Christians, and we have heard about and read about hundreds of thousands more, who by way of giving to others and trusting God, were *never without* a sufficient degree of food, shelter, clothing, and a few niceties to boot. In fact, the more these Christians gave, the more they had in the way of provisions.

Your House

We do not blame you if up until now you considered the house you live in as something that only your parents owned. But as a young man, you should in fact be thinking of your house in terms of something you also own, rather than simply a place where you hang your hat and store your things.

Your family may either rent or own its home. But in regard to stewardship, the two are the same. If a person rents, he should treat the rented property as though it were his own. So understand that your parents are stewards of the house you live in, and the fact of the matter is *they need your help* in being a good steward of it.

Trust us: you will make your parents proud if you consider yourself as part owner of your house. And don't worry—they won't be charging you rent at this point for simply thinking this way.

Take a good look at your house. It may be a grand piece of work or a humble abode. Regardless, take pride in it. How much pride should you take? If you exercise the same degree of pride as does your father, you will be doing well.

Some boys are afraid of exercising pride in their home because they innately know that they will recognize the work that needs to be done around the place. The truth is that your home needs maintaining regardless of whether or not you take pride in it, so you might as well enjoy it. Pride is an easy thing to capture; it's the kind of thing that likes to stay in you once it is there.

We'll offer a few tips about stewardship and your house: For starters, the outside of your house is the first thing people see. Just as you would not want anyone to see you with a huge spaghetti stain on your chest, neither would you want others to see an unkempt lawn. So keep it trimmed and picked up (this means completely). If large things must be stored outside, line them up neatly in a way that looks orderly from the road.

Also, it will likely be that you will have friends over to either play or work. So think before you do so. Make provisions to hit the baseball *away* from the house, and make sure that not a drop of motor oil gets on your garage floor. Few things discourage a father more than creating unnecessary repairs.

Do you want to increase the degree of respect your parents have toward you? If so, we can offer an almost instant way of doing so, and that is by offering to fix or improve something around the house without being told. If you have not done so before, both you and they will experience a subtle but very real blessing.

This part of our discussion has focused on your house, but you can include the other things in and around your home as being relevant to this topic. Take care of your cars, appliances, and furniture. Treat them as though they were your own.

Other Things

Of course, everything in your possession that you can see,

hear, or otherwise sense is part of your belongings. These are the obvious things, like your clothes, your books, your goldfish, and your piggy bank. But there are other things that you own that you may not normally consider as such. Let's explore some of these:

Your Body

Your body is certainly something in your possession, but it is something that you do not wholly own. The Bible indicates quite clearly that "...your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and...you are not your own" (1 Cor. 6:18).

What an amazing thing—the Holy Spirit actually *resides in you!* So it should go without saying that we need to be good stewards of our bodies. Appropriately, the Bible places an emphasis on admonishing us to refrain from immoral or impure thoughts and actions (17). Simply stated, God wants us to respect our bodies and use them for good.

There are numerous ways to respect your body, some of which involve the promotion of good health. But be careful, for there are all sorts of faddish ideas about taking super vitamins and avoiding certain kinds of food. Indeed, it seems that there is a new diet offered by the so-called "experts" every week. You will do well to simply listen to the advice of your parents in regard to what you eat. But don't limit the care of your body to food. Make sure you practice good hygiene (including a good bath or shower every other day or so), and get adequate sleep as well. If you are having trouble rising out of bed in the morning, something is probably out of kilter. Figure out what is wrong and make proper remedy.

We assume that you already know to avoid distractive habits—like cracking your knuckles or peeling away scabs. At best these only serve as irritations for others to see, and at worst

they may be causing undesirable, long term side effects.

As a young man near or in his teens, we probably don't have to encourage you to stay physically fit. It is likely that you are already interested in some kind of physical activity like lifting weights or jogging. While activities like these are useful, we admonish you to embrace a lifestyle that makes physical activity commonplace. Work hard around your home and for others, and learn at least a few basic trade-related skills.

You may also want to take up an individual hobby or sport like swimming, rock climbing, or hunting. In all regards, explore the great outdoors, and your body, soul, and spirit will all be the better for it! But in all of this, know that your body is the house of God. Respect and treat it accordingly.

In our lesson "Treating Ladies Properly," we discussed the importance of keeping our minds pure. We want to reiterate this point. Your body belongs to the Lord, so you should not give way to sexual immorality in either thought or deed. One day, you will likely be married, and you will be presenting your body to your bride. Stay pure for her. You should be encouraged to know that many godly men have gone before you who have honored the Lord and their wives in this regard. Your parents or group leader can encourage you further if ever you feel the need.

In our estimation, the best means of stewardship of our bodies is to follow this wonderful biblical admonishment: "I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship" (Rom. 12:1).

Indeed, there is a wonderful, beautiful ease to worshipping God, and that is to simply offer your body to Him. How do you do this? By having the simple attitude which says, "Here I am, Lord; from my head to my toes, have Your way with me...."

Your Talents

Everyone has certain skills, and you are no exception! As you know by now, these skills are co-owned by God, for He is the one who enables you to work and to express your skills.

So what are you going to do with your talents? The answer should be plain, but too many people don't even consider the question. In short, you must use your talents for good.

What does using your talents for good mean? It means keeping a humble spirit about yourself and what you are able to do. Don't be too much of a show-off (except toward your mother—you can probably never show off too much to her). And your talents, as they are used, should in some way better your fellow man.

Perhaps the matter of talents can be summed up by Paul's admonishment, "Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father" (Col. 3:17). "In the name of the Lord," means you are representing Him, so do so accordingly.

The Fruit of the Spirit

In an upcoming lesson, you will learn a good deal about the fruit of the Holy Spirit. You probably already know a few things about it, and so we should discuss this topic in light of stewardship.

As you know, the Holy Spirit resides in you. But He doesn't do so just to "hang out." He does so to guide you, convict you, and to have fellowship with you. And in doing so, He intends to grow and "bear fruit" in your character. Galatians 5:22-23 describes the fruit of the Holy Spirit as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

As it develops, this fruit comes into your possession, and you are to be a steward of it. Beautiful, ripe fruit is not meant to be stored in a hot, musty warehouse. No, it is to be available for the delight and betterment of others.

Be proud of the Lord and thankful to Him for developing a fruitful character within you. Doing so is an act of stewardship in its own right. And proper pride and thankfulness will allow Him to bear the fruit even more.

Your Potential

No man could be a good steward of his potential if he didn't know he had it. What is "potential?" Your potential is *your capability to do things*, even when you aren't doing them. Just as a match has the potential to start a fire, so you also have the potential to do certain things.

Do you recall our lesson entitled "Being Strong and Courageous"? If so, you know that as a Christian, you wield a great and wonderful strength. Part of being a steward of this strength is having a constant, never-ending awareness that this strength is yours. Even when you seem weak, you have an amazing potential to exercise God's power that is within you. Here are some key Bible verses that will help you to understand this vital concept:

*...you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has
come upon you...* Acts 1:8

*I can do all things through Him who strengthens
me.* Phil. 4:13

*...I have written to you, young men, because you are
strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have
overcome the evil one.* 1 John 2:14

“...greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.”
1 John 4:4

To be sure, you have tremendous potential—potential to learn, grow, love, and exercise power. Be a good steward of your potential by always recognizing you have it so that you can use it when the time is needed.

Time

Time is a very valuable and precious commodity. If you lose a sock, you can buy a new one or bribe your sister to knit you a replacement. If you lose your piggy bank, you can go to work to replenish its contents. But you can never get back even one second of your life.

It is no wonder the Bible admonishes us to “...be careful how you walk, not as unwise, but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil” (Eph. 5:15-16).

So, being a good steward involves using your time wisely. Seize opportunities to accomplish whatever is at hand, and make opportunities when there are none to be found.

Heirs With Christ

Being a good steward involves using wisely all that is in your possession. So far we have explored some of the obvious and some of the not-so-obvious things. We will now go one step further into the not-so-obvious:

The Bible declares that as sons of God, we are *heirs* with Christ (Romans 8:17, Eph. 3:6). An heir, if you do not already know, is someone who inherits something, usually by way of someone else’s death. If we have inherited everything that Jesus has, then we have much in our possession that we are responsible for. We make mention of this not to overwhelm you, but rather

so you know what is in your possession. If Jesus owns it, so do we!

While some Christians get excited about owning the earth and all that is in it, there is something even more exciting in the way of being an heir with Christ. Perhaps this can best be summarized by Peter's revelation to us: "... His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence" (2 Peter 1:3).

Let that sink in for a moment. And after it sinks in, let it stay there. You have *everything pertaining to life and godliness!* That pretty much sums up all you will ever need. Let your prayer be that you will know how to be a good steward of it.

The High Calling

You now know what you possess, and you know the importance of being a good steward of it all. So it is appropriate to leave you with this pointed admonishment:

You *must* be a good steward. You cannot afford to be lax about this. Neither can you shirk from fear. You would do well as a follow up of this lesson to read the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30. You will see there the truth that God puts things into your possession so that in the end, you will give back to Him an increase. While this is an awesome responsibility, we know it is one that you are equipped to handle. In fact, it is the way of blessing for yourself, for others, and for God who is the giver of all good things.

So we admonish you in the name of the Lord: Be wise with all that you have all the days of your life!