

Building A Life Of Stewardship

Introduction. In an address several years ago at the National Prayer Breakfast, Elizabeth Dole said, "Life is not just a few years to spend on self-indulgence and career advancement. It is a privilege, a responsibility, a stewardship to be lived according to a much higher calling — God's calling. This alone gives true meaning to life."

Genesis 15:2 is the first mention of steward in the Bible. The word meant someone entrusted with the responsibility of running a household, and in the New Testament it is transferred to the religious realm indicating the process of carefully managing the responsibilities and skills entrusted to Christians for the good of others. To help us find this meaning and hone our abilities, we will examine stewardship today.

I. Principles Of Stewardship

- A. Everything belongs to God (Deuteronomy 10:14; Psalm 24:1; 50:10-12).
 - 1. God gave Israel the power to get wealth (Deuteronomy 8:17-18).
 - 2. God gives us "life, and breath, and all things" (Acts 17:25).
 - 3. There is nothing we have not received (1 Corinthians 4:7).
- B. Our soul and body belongs to God.
 - 1. Every soul is God's (Ezekiel 18:4). God owns our bodies (1 Corinthians 6:19). God made us (Psalm 139:13-16; Isaiah 43:7).
 - 2. He sustains all life (Psalm 104:1-9; Acts 17:25, 28).
 - 3. The body is for the Lord and the Lord for the body (1 Corinthians 6:13), so present your body as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1) and glorify God in your body (1 Corinthians 6:20; cp. Ephesians 5:29).
- C. The responsibility of stewards.
 - 1. We are to be faithful (Luke 16:10; 1 Corinthians 4:2).
 - a) This means giving oneself to the Lord (Matthew 22:37; 2 Corinthians 8:5).
 - b) Accountability is required (2 Corinthians 5:10).
 - 2. We have to exercise proper and considerate use (Luke 16:1-3) because we work for the owner's interest (Luke 19:12-27).
 - 3. We are our brother's keeper (Matthew 16:26; Hebrews 13:17; James 5:19-20).

II. Stewardship Of Our Time

- A. Time is the Lord's (Psalm 74:16-17; 118:24).
- B. Our responsibility in using time.
 - 1. Understand the brevity of time (Job 7:6; 14:1-2; Psalm 39:4-5; James 4:14).
 - 2. Consider God in the appropriate time (Ecclesiastes 12:1).

3. Redeem it (John 9:4; Ephesian 5:15-16; Colossians 4:5).
 4. Act with urgency (Romans 13:11-12; 2 Corinthians 6:2; Hebrews 3:12-13).
- C. Good uses of our time.
1. Hard work (Proverbs 20:13; Ecclesiastes 9:9; 2 Thessalonians 3:10).
 2. Prayer and meditation (Psalm 55:17; 119:97).
 3. Helping people (Ephesians 4:28; 1 Timothy 6:18).
 4. Teaching the Bible (Psalm 32:8; 34:11; 51:13).

III. Stewardship Of Our Abilities

- A. All gifts are from above (James 1:17; 1 Peter 4:10-11).
- B. Our gifts or abilities are diverse.
1. Paul instructs about spiritual gifts, but the principle applies to natural gifts as well (1 Corinthians 12:4).
 - a) Barnabas had a talent for encouragement (Acts 4:36).
 - b) Apollos had a gift for teaching (Acts 18:24-28).
 - c) Dorcas had a heart for benevolence (Acts 9:36, 39).
 2. There should never be jealousy among people over who has what ability (Romans 12:4-5).
- C. The Lord does not always expect extraordinary deeds (Mark 9:41; 14:3-9). However, He will judge us based on what we have (2 Corinthians 8:12).

IV. Stewardship Of Our Wealth

- A. God is the owner and giver (1 Chronicles 29:14; 1 Timothy 6:17).
- B. Examples of good stewardship.
1. Providing for our families (1 Timothy 5:8).
 2. Giving to the needy (Luke 6:38; Acts 20:35).
 3. Liberal giving to God (Mark 12:41-44; 2 Corinthians 8:2; 9:6-7).
 4. Showing hospitality (Romans 12:13).
- C. Warnings about wealth.
1. Remember riches are temporary (1 Timothy 6:7).
 2. Be content with what you have (1 Timothy 6:8).
 3. Do not let care for riches choke out the word (Mark 4:18-19).
 4. Do not trust in wealth (Psalm 49:6-12; 1 Timothy 6:17).
 5. Do not love money (1 Timothy 6:9-10).
 6. Do not forget to be rich toward God (Luke 12:16-21).
 7. Use wealth for your eternal benefit (Luke 16:9).

Conclusion. When we obey the gospel, we become a "new creature" (2 Corinthians 5:17) or a "new man" (Colossians 3:10). When this happens, everything we are and everything we have is reoriented to the glo-

ry of God (1 Corinthians 10:31). The one talent servant was punished for not increasing his gifts (Matthew 25:14-30). God wants us to abound in His service (1 Corinthians 15:58; 1 Thessalonians 4:1; 2 Peter 1:8). This not only pleases God, but as Elizabeth Dole noted, gives true meaning to life.