

Christian Stewardship

Part 2 – Principles (Part 2)

Let's quickly go over what we've learned so far.

Definition: Steward – a person entrusted with the management of estates or affairs not his own

Premise 1 – Everything belongs to the Lord

Premise 2 – We have no rights

Premise 3 – God has the final say

Premise 4 – We will all one day give an account of everything

Principle 1. Authority + responsibility + accountability = stewardship.

Principle 2. We are blessed to be a blessing

Principle 3. Our character must be equal to or greater than our stewardship responsibility.

Definition: character – the level of our personal integrity

Today, we're looking at some more important stewardship principles.

Principle 4. What we are given is God's responsibility; what we do with it is our responsibility

What we are given is God's responsibility.

So think of this list we've been looking at: talent, intelligence, money, status, power, possessions, our body, time, spiritual gifts, our looks.

The level we have of whatever is on this list is God's responsibility.

We have to understand this or we'll end up with a distorted perspective that'll make our life miserable.

For a start, we'll be forever wondering why we can't do just about everything.

Some things I am good at, some things I am not.

You can't sit there fretting that you don't have the same abilities that I have.

Paul says, (1 Cor 12:11) But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.

God gets to do what **He** wants and distributes to each person according to **His** plan and purpose.

We have to recognise that God "distributes to each person according to His plan and purpose" because He needs lots of different kinds of people.

You might be a successful lawyer or a great politician, but you still need your garbage removed. You might think: Who'd want to be a garbo? But just ask yourself the question: What would life be like if **nobody** wanted to do it?

Pastors often have to learn this truth the hard way, and so do their congregations.

Because traditionally – notice I said traditionally, not Biblically – traditionally, the people sit in the pews and the pastor does everything.

The result is that the pastor becomes a performer, and the congregation become spectators.

But this is not the Biblical plan.

God's plan is (Eph 4:12) the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,

Pastors are limited, finite human being – they can't possibly do everything – so it's their job to equip the people and train them to do the work of the ministry.

Anything less than that ideal results in a church with stunted growth and a pastor with burnout.

We're all different for a reason.

Understanding this truth that what we've got is God's responsibility, will make us realise that we have no cause for pride.

1 Cor 4:7 For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?

There's nothing uglier than pride.

Just remember that God gave you your looks – you might spend an hour making the best of what you've got, but you can't take any credit for it.

It's God's gift to you – the question is: How are you going to use it?

If we understand clearly that the raw materials we have is God's responsibility we'll also realise that there's no room for jealousy.

When I was a boy, if my mother was pouring out soft drink for me and my brother, we would watch like hawks. And if there was cake and one of us got one crumb more, "It's not fair. He's got more than me." It must have driven my mother nuts.

You might laugh, but God's got the same problem.

No one's ever happy with what they've been given.

In Singapore / Malaysia there's a surprising number of ads for skin lightening lotions. You might ask, "Why are they so obsessed with being lighter?", but we might just as easily ask a different question: Why are white people so obsessed with getting a tan? Short people want to be tall, tall people sometimes want to be shorter, blondes want to be brunettes, curly-headed people want straight hair, brown-eyed people want blue eyes.

Who'd want to be God? No matter what He does, no one's ever satisfied.

This discontent is a great source of sibling rivalry, as brothers and sisters compare their various abilities and try to compete.

Sibling rivalry is very often nothing more than good, old-fashioned jealousy.

Jealousy affects marriages too as men sometimes hold back their wives because they feel jealous or threatened by their success – and don't think it's just men either – we've seen it the other way round too.

There's jealousy in ministry too.

Pastors are jealous of the success of other pastors; or worse, they compare themselves with others and get proud.

2 Cor 10:12 For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.

Don't ever go looking at someone else's life and wondering why God chose a totally different path for them.

It's God's choice.

Jn 21:18-22 – When Jesus predicted Peter's death, he looked around, saw John, and said, "But Lord, what about him?" Jesus replied, "What is that to you? You follow Me."

So when you're tempted to say something like, "But God I didn't get the opportunities he got. But God You didn't give me the same gifts you gave him."

"What is that to you? You follow Me."

Let me just give you a little indicator here to see if you are experiencing jealousy: The Bible says, (Rom 12:15) Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.

Do you know that it's often easier to weep with others when they're hurting, than it is to rejoice genuinely with others when they're experiencing blessing?

Because what happens sometimes is they share their good news with us and we say, "That's great. I'm so happy for you." And walk away muttering, "Idiot! How come he gets all the breaks? Why doesn't God do it for me too?"

That's envy or jealousy.

Technically there's a difference between jealousy and envy.

They're not the same.

Vine says "envy is the feeling of displeasure produced by witnessing or hearing of the advantage or prosperity of others¹".

He says, "The distinction lies in this, that envy desires to deprive another of what he has, jealousy desires to have the same or the same sort of thing for itself²."

In other words, jealousy says, "I should have had that too." Envy says, "I should have had that instead."

But our natural and spiritual endowments are God's responsibility, and if we don't understand that, we'll never really experience contentment.

1 Tim 6:6 Now godliness with contentment is great gain.

The second part of our principle says "what you do with what God gives you is your responsibility".

What we need to understand here is that it doesn't require great faith to **have** a lot.

For instance, the faith movement in the West has brainwashed us into thinking that if you have lots of money, that's a sign of great faith.

Now it may be an indication of your faith, but you can be a person who doesn't know God – therefore without true Biblical faith – and still be very wealthy.

God's more interested in what we do with what we've got.

He's more interested in what we give than what we've got, and that leads us to:

Principle 5. To whom much is given, from him much will be required

Luke 12:48 For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.

With great blessing comes great responsibility – the more we've been given, the more we have to give an account of.

The more talent, intelligence, money, the higher the status, greater the power, more possessions, better physically endowed, the greater our spiritual gifts, better looking – the more we have of anything, the more we are answerable to God to use them for the glory of God and the extension of His kingdom.

Now sometimes when you begin to talk about this principle – to whom much is given, from him much will be required – and especially if people think you're aiming it at their hip pocket, they respond by saying, "But everything is relative".

There's a certain amount of truth in that statement.

In many places in the world, I wouldn't ever have to wear a suit and tie – I could wear shorts, even to preach in church. I could build a house any old way I want, wouldn't have to meet any standards or worry about building codes.

So the standard of living is higher in our country, the expectations are higher, and it costs more to live.

That's not something I should try to change.

So there's a measure of truth when we say, "Everything is relative".

But there's also a furphy – smokescreen.

Because people often use the "everything's relative" excuse to absolve themselves from any responsibility towards those who are less fortunate.

But remember: To whom much is given, from him much will be required – the principle still stands.

We're going to look at lots of different areas in this series, but we'll look at this principle more in depth when we talk about abilities and money.

Principle 6. Faithfulness = fruitfulness

If we are truly faithful with what God has given us, we will be fruitful with what God's given us.

Let's take a look at how Jesus taught this principle.

Matt 25:14-30

Several things stand out to me in this parable.

1. The man delivered his goods to his servants – but they were still **his** goods.

He never relinquished ownership to his servants.

Now remember that this is a parable and that these goods are representative of our list that God has made us stewards of: talent, intelligence, money, status, power, possessions, our body, time, spiritual gifts, our looks.

2. He shared out his property to his servants according to their ability.

Did you know that the vast majority of people who have won large sums of money in Lotto etc, have lost every bit of it within five years?

There's no point in having lots if you can't handle lots.

3. The master came back to settle accounts with his servants.

4. The servants who were fruitful were rewarded.

5. The servants who were fruitful weren't commended for being fruitful, but for being faithful.

Faithfulness = fruitfulness.

Principle 7. He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much

Luke 16:10-12 He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much. (11) Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? (12) And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own?

If we want God to increase what we've got, we have to be faithful [fruitful] with what we've got.

If a child has an acoustic guitar and refuses to practise, no parent in their right mind is going to waste their money buying them an electric guitar.

He first has to prove himself faithful with what he already has, then the parents will consider an upgrade.

¹ Vine, W.E. *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words Vol 2 p 37*

² Vine, W.E. *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words Vol 2 p 37*