

Good Word Schedule

Stewardship: Motives of the Heart

January, February, March 2018

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Introduction:

The lessons this quarter are focused on what is commonly known as Stewardship. The word “stewardship” is an old word that has much the same meaning as the word “manager” or “management” today. A steward is a manager, one who does not own the things he or she presides over but, rather, manages them to the benefit of the owner.

It does not take much thought to bring to mind that a good steward, or manager, will need to have a number of characteristics that are well developed. The first characteristic would have to be the realization that what they manage is not theirs. The cardinal error of a manager, one that would get him or her summarily fired (or worse), would be for them to take the prerogatives of an owner, to begin to act as if what they care for or presided over, was their own. The development of an owner-like attitude, would very quickly render a steward useless. They would no longer be able to do their job.

A second characteristic that a good steward would need, would be honesty. Because they would be managing the assets of another, a steward must be honest, able to be counted on not to deceive or be devious, else the owner would be running the risk of not knowing whether things were going well or poorly to say nothing of knowing what their assets looked like. A dishonest steward would also be more likely to steal, to take from the owner what was theirs but to do it in such a way that the owner would not know.

A third characteristic of a good steward would likely be that of faithfulness, being trustworthy in terms of being responsible, and at all times. To borrow an old saying, with a steward, “the buck” has to “stop here.” The owner must be able to know that the steward is faithfully and reliably taking care of the business entrusted to them.

A final characteristic we will mention – no doubt there are not a few more – is that a steward must have what might be called a “service” attitude. They must understand that they are working as servants, working with an attitude that what they do is a service for the benefit of others. Of course, they derive some payment and some non-tangible rewards, but the basic nature of being a steward is that you are a “servant” of others. Let a steward, or manager, forget that, and the whole process of stewardship breaks down.

The characteristics listed above are but some of the chief ones that need to be present in the life and experience of a good steward. As we progress through this quarter, our thoughts will be focused on, and expanded around, the subject of what it means to be stewards for God.

The Influence of Materialism

Read for This Week's Study: *1 John 2:16, 17; Luke 14:26–33; 12:15–21; Deut. 8:10–14; 1 Tim. 6:10; John 15:5; Gal. 2:20.*

Memory Text: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (*Romans 12:2, NKJV*).

As an initial lesson on stewardship, the lesson today focuses on the dangers of materialism, that idea and practice of linking value and success to the acquisition of various possessions. The initial text reminds those who are followers of Jesus that they are not to be conformed to this world but to be transformed by the renewing of their minds. Put another way, we are to be in the world, but not of the world, meaning that we who follow Christ are not to be driven by the agenda that drives society around us.

For whatever reasons, humans have long been fascinated by things they can acquire, whether it be houses, or lands, or flocks and herds, or gold and silver, or jewels, or whatever else tends to capture our fancy. We almost instinctively think that acquiring lots of things will bring us happiness and security, neither of which is actually true. Wealth does bring privilege with it, and it may bring fame, and it certainly allows for lots of options that poverty would not allow, but it does not bring joy and safety. And from a Christian perspective, it does not bring devotion with it. In fact, those who are fascinated with the acquisition of things face a great temptation to drift away from God. In Deuteronomy, there is a very old admonition to be found, a caution that believers ought to keep in mind:

- **Deuteronomy 8:10-14** - *“¹⁰ When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. ¹¹ Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. ¹² Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, ¹³ and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, ¹⁴ then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.”* (NIV)

Notice that there is no hint that having a lot of possessions is wrong in itself. The material world is not evil. The truth is that a person with lots of possessions can actually do a great deal of good if they so choose. The danger comes from our possessions causing us to forget God, that they might bring us subtly to the point where we feel we have no need of God because our possessions provide all we need.

There is another injunction in the Bible that ought to be kept in mind also. It is from late in the New Testament:

- **1 Timothy 6:10** – *“¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.”* (NIV).

Notice again that there is no hint that having money is a bad thing for money is something we have in order to engage in transactions that are so necessary to life. What is spoken of here is the love of money, the inordinate desire to acquire money then to hoard it. This inordinate desire not only tends to lead people away from God, it also has the potential to bring many griefs into life. Truth is, the more money you have, and the more possessions you acquire, the more you are slave to them. There is a certain joy that comes with simplicity.

Having pointed out that wealth has a certain danger that comes with it, let us note that the opposite of wealth – poverty – does not have virtue inherent in it. In other words, there is no virtue in poverty. Being poor does not necessarily indicate great devotion to God. It certainly brings great hardship with it that the Bible calls on those who have possessions to help relieve.

Safety for the believer can be found in two other texts, **John 15:5**, and **Galatians 2:20**:
⁵ *“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”* This text reminds us that a continual connection to Christ is essential to Christian living, and the Galatians one reminds of the on-going self-sacrificial attitude that ought to pervade a believers life: ²⁰ *“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”*

This week we begin our discussion and thoughts with several different passages from the Bible. At the core of the discussion is the question of what it is that lies at the center of the mandate to be stewards.

- Why is stewardship necessary?
- What provides the best mandate for Christian stewardship?
- What is the deepest motivation toward being a good steward?
- Where does the power to be a good steward come from?

The main passages of Scripture we will look at are these:

- **Colossians 1:16-18** – *“¹⁶ For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.”* (NIV)
- **Philippians 2:4-11** – *“⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,^[a] ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality*

with God a thing to be grasped,^[b] 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of

a servant,^[c] being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (ESV)

- **1 Peter 1:15-16** – “¹⁵ But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; ¹⁶ for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.” (NIV)

Several things essential to the concept of stewardship emerge from these verses:

- The creatorship of God, or Christ. There is a very clear indication that all things were created by God and, as we would expect, creatorship conveys ownership. God has a right to all things as he originated them.
- The Philippians passage conveys a rather astonishing truth, that the God who made all things did not consider the retention of his place in heaven to be of more importance than the redemption of those who were lost, so he humbled himself, all the way from heaven to the ignominy of a cross.
- The third passage indicates a mandate for humans to be like Christ, like God. The actions of God, the nature of God, provide a mandate for human emulation. Because God is holy, and giving, and because he made us, we ought to be like him. In other words, because Christ is at the center of things, we ought to aim to be like him. Prominent in his work is the stewarding of God’s resources for the benefit of others.

I See, I Want, I Take

Read for This Week's Study: *2 Cor. 8:1–7; Matt. 13:3–7, 22; Gen. 3:1–6; Isa. 56:11; Matt. 26:14–16; 2 Pet. 1:5–9.*

Memory Text: “ ‘Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful’ ” (*Matthew 13:22, NKJV*).

The lesson this week invites us to reflect carefully on the human penchant to obtain as many material possessions as we can, then to hoard them. The lesson is titled, “I See, I Want, I Take,” a title that reflects a very common human trait driven by the notion that the more possessions we acquire, the better and more secure life will be. This belief is everywhere present in human life, including in some branches of the Christian faith. In fact there are some preachers who actually teach that wealth is a sign of God’s blessing that can be enabled, no less, by the practice of giving generously to their causes. This “prosperity gospel, as it is called, is nothing more than a reflection of the human penchant to obtain possessions that is given an overcoat of scripture to “sanctify” it. It is not hard to debunk this collection of ideas. All one has to do is look for examples of those who are faithful and yet poor, and also to look for those who are not faithful yet are rich.

In the face of this is the admonition found in **Matthew 13:22** where the Bible speaks of something called the “deceitfulness of riches.” Here is pause for thought. What could this be, the deceitfulness of riches?

The first thing we might point to is that riches can cause people to more easily obscure the obvious truth, that we are dependent beings and everything here is temporary. It is very easy, if one has many possessions to become quite independent, looking to self rather than to God. That sense of independence can obscure the reality that we are only here for a while in light of which our best attentions should be focused on using our time well while also preparing for what is to come. This point was well-made by Peter when he wrote his letter to the early Christians.

- **2 Peter 1:5-9** (Common English Bible) – *“⁵ This is why you must make every effort to add moral excellence to your faith; and to moral excellence, knowledge; ⁶ and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, endurance; and to endurance, godliness; ⁷ and to godliness, affection for others; and to affection for others, love. ⁸ If all these are yours and they are growing in you, they’ll keep you from becoming inactive and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ Whoever lacks these things is shortsighted and blind, forgetting that they were*

cleansed from their past sins.” (CEB)

Secondly, having many possessions often creates the illusion that life is now secure. But wealth does not secure life. Certainly, it provides a lot more options than does poverty, and having wealth does allow for many more options some of which do make life better and more secure, but wealth itself does not guarantee life. This is the main point of the parable Jesus told of the Rich Farmer, a man who tried to secure his life with his possessions only to lose his life overnight.

Another thing that possessions obscure is the reality that lots of possessions tend to create lots of worry. The primary worry that those with much face is the possible loss of wealth. But there is another kind of worry, more hidden, that besets those who have much and that is the worry that comes from having to care for or monitor all those possessions. An old piece of advice fits well here – “The more things you own, the more things you become slave to.”

Let there be no suggestion here that wealth is a bad thing. Everyone knows that having more money or goods does make life better, but it has its dangers, too. Perhaps nowhere is this revealed more than in the experience of Judas, the disciple who betrayed Jesus, where it is said of him in Matthew 26, that “*the one who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, “What will you give me if I turn Jesus over to you?” They paid him thirty pieces of silver. From that time on he was looking for an opportunity to turn him in.*”

A particular danger is covetousness, the craving desire to get something that you do not have. This has led to much sorrow and can still do so today, especially if it drives you to take things inappropriately, or if it produces a real passion to acquire that cannot be managed.

One good cure for covetousness is to give away some of what you have. For many, this is a hard discipline, but it can be a very beneficial one to yourself, but also to those who receive what you give. In this light, consider the experience of the Corinthians who, though many were poor, gave generously to their fellow believers who were suffering in Jerusalem:

- **2 Corinthians 8:1-7** - *“Brothers and sisters, we want to let you know about the grace of God that was given to the churches of Macedonia. ² While they were being tested by many problems, their extra amount of happiness and their extreme poverty resulted in a surplus of rich generosity. ³ I assure you that they gave what they could afford and even more than they could afford, and they did it voluntarily. ⁴ They urgently begged us for the privilege^[a] of sharing in this service for the saints. ⁵ They even exceeded our expectations, because they gave themselves to the Lord first and to us, consistent with God’s will. ⁶ As a result, we challenged Titus to finish this work of grace with you the way he had started it. ⁷ Be the best in this work of grace in the same way that you are the best in everything, such as faith, speech, knowledge, total commitment, and the love we inspired in you.” (NIV)*

What do you think believers can do to limit the growth and effects of greed and covetousness?

Lesson 3

January 13-19

God or Mammon?

Read for This Week's Study: *Ps. 33:6–9; Matt. 19:16–22; 1 Pet. 1:18; Heb. 2:14, 15; Exod. 9:14; Ps. 50:10.*

Memory Text: “Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (*Philippians 2:9–11, NKJV*).

The lesson this week is a reflection on the age old issue of not being able to serve two masters very well. Key to this discussion is the understanding that, when talking about serving two masters well, we have to have in mind primary loyalties. We cannot share primary loyalties between two entities. We do not have enough time, or energy or inventiveness to do that. Primary energy and loyalty can be given to only one thing.

The two entities under discussion in this lesson are God, and what Old English referred to as “mammon,” or money, material things. The Bible would have us understand that, giving primary loyalties to God and to the pursuit of possessions is impossible. We will simply default to the possessions. Do you agree with this assessment? If you do, for what reasons do you agree? Do you disagree? If so, for what reasons? The parable of the rich farmer found in **Luke 12:20, 21** would be a good discussion starter.

The point should be made that this assessment is not driven by the idea that the material world is somehow evil. Some forms of religion argue that there is a division between the “spirit” and the “material” realms, that the spiritual one is good, the material one bad. It is for this reason that some people despise the body, seeing it as carnal, not worthy of attention. But the creation story is very plain, that what God made was good. So the problem is not material things themselves, but the love of obtaining them, the inordinate love of things, that can be a seriously driving passion in the minds of humans.

The point to keep ever in mind is that, since God made all things, He rightly claims ownership. That leaves humans at best to be managers of another's goods. And managers should never take to themselves the prerogatives of owners.

One of the main instructional stories in the Bible that illustrates this point so well, is the well-known story of the interchange between Jesus and a young man known as the rich young ruler, found in Matthew. The story reads as follows:

- **Matthew 19:16-22** - ¹⁶ *A man approached him and said, “Teacher, what good*

thing must I do to have eternal life?”¹⁷ Jesus said, “Why do you ask me about what is good? There’s only one who is good. If you want to enter eternal life,

keep the commandments.”¹⁸ The man said, “Which ones?” Then Jesus said, “Don’t commit murder. Don’t commit adultery. Don’t steal. Don’t give false testimony.¹⁹ Honor your father and mother,^[a] and love your neighbor as you love yourself.”²⁰ The young man replied, “I’ve kept all these. What am I still missing?”²¹ Jesus said, “If you want to be complete, go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor. Then you will have treasure in heaven. And come follow me.”²² But when the young man heard this, he went away saddened, because he had many possessions.” (CEB)

This is a very sad story for in it we see clearly the outcome of the struggle when it occurs between two masters. In this case, as it is in most cases, for we are very attached to things we can see, the possession side won without much struggle at all.

We do well to keep in mind that there is a certain difficulty in being a follower of Christ. Just as he gave all for our redemption, giving up his station in heaven in order to do so, in like manner, primary loyalties are called for from those who believe. The focus of this struggle is the self. Will we serve the interests of self, or will we be drawn to God and the promises He holds out? This struggle has often been called the greatest of struggles for a believer has to live in self-denial that God might prevail in his or her life. This struggle runs contrary to human nature. These thoughts are reflected in the words of Peter in his letter to the Christians:

- **1 Peter 1:17-19** – *“¹⁷ Since you call upon a Father who judges all people according to their actions without favoritism, you should conduct yourselves with reverence during the time of your dwelling in a strange land. ¹⁸ Live in this way, knowing that you were not liberated by perishable things like silver or gold from the empty lifestyle you inherited from your ancestors. ¹⁹ Instead, you were liberated by the precious blood of Christ, like that of a flawless, spotless lamb.” (NIV)*

How do you think we can learn to distinguish between the proper use and enjoyment of things, and the inordinate fascination with acquiring them?

What is the best way for successfully fighting the battle against self? What are the best tools to use here?

- **Psalm 33:6-9** offers a useful reflection:
*⁶ The skies were made by the LORD’s word,
all their starry multitude by the breath of his mouth.
⁷ He gathered the ocean waters into a heap;
he put the deep seas into storerooms.
⁸ All the earth honors the LORD;
all the earth’s inhabitants stand in awe of him.
⁹ Because when he spoke, it happened!
When he commanded, there it was!” (CEB)*

Escape From *the* World's Ways

Read for This Week's Study: *Ps. 119:11; Eph. 6:18; Rom. 8:5, 6; Heb. 11:1–6; 1 Kings 3:14; Ezek. 36:26, 27.*

Memory Text: “Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death. . . . He who trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish like foliage” (*Proverbs 11:4, 28, NKJV*).

The lesson this week has a very interesting title – “Escape from the World's Ways.” The meaning of the title is derived from the biblical understanding that the ways of the “world,” a term used to designate the whole of human society devoid of interest or deference to God, are at odds with the ways of God. And, given the grand theme for this quarter – Stewardship – the clear implication is that, unless and until believers escape the ways of the world, stewardship will not grow and flourish as it ought to.

Probably the most formative and interesting biblical passage that comments on this dynamic is found in Romans.

- **Romans 8:5-8** – *“For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law, indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”* (ESV)

This is a remarkable passage. It clearly lays out the fact that there is a tension we experience in life between life without God, and life with God. And the two are not at all compatible. They are opposites. A person living one way, cannot please God. The one way – the way of the flesh – satisfies personal ambitions and goals so that we would say that stewardship, the management of life and assets, is all focused on the self while in the life lived in the Spirit, stewardship is focused on pleasing God, as the Bible puts it.

Perhaps the most foundational observation to make here is that the outcomes are automatic rather than contrived. Following life in the Spirit produces a focus on the things of God while living a life in the flesh does not. The whole business of life management – stewardship – springs from this foundational matter.

- What causes people to live in the flesh?
- What causes people to live in the Spirit?
- What makes it hard to live in the flesh? And what makes it hard to live in the Spirit?

We might add a couple more texts to the end of this lesson, one a promise found in Ezekiel, the other a bit of wisdom from the Psalmist, both of which give counsel that helps manage the tension between the flesh and the Spirit:

- **Ezekiel 36:26-27**

“²⁶ I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.” (NIV)

- **Psalm 119:11**

“¹¹ I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.” (NIV)

Stewards After Eden

Read for This Week's Study: *Isa. 22:14–18; 1 Cor. 4:1, 2; Col. 2:2, 3; Eph. 6:13–17; 2 Cor. 5:10.*

Memory Text: “On the contrary, we speak as those approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts” (*1 Thess. 2:4, NIV*).

In the story of humans as it is laid out in the Bible, Adam and Eve were the very first stewards. When they were placed in the Garden of Eden, they were given a multi-layered mandate to care for each other, and to care for the garden and also for what lay outside its parameters. Therefore, they are the prototypical stewards, their work being established even before the fall. From their experience, we learn that stewards are not owners. They are, rather, care-takers of that which belongs to someone else. In consequence we also learn that a good steward is one who acts in the best interest of the owner. Failure to act this way, particularly if the actions tend toward using someone else's assets and possessions to advantage oneself, makes for very bad stewardship.

Notice the several passages from which we can draw our understanding of what it means to be a steward:

- **1 Corinthians 4:1-2**
“This, then, is how you ought to regard us: as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the mysteries God has revealed. ² Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.” (NIV)
- **Ephesians 6:13-17**
“¹³ Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” (NIV)
- **Colossians 2:2-3**
“² My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, ³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” (NIV)

A sad but interesting counter to Adam and Eve, who were initially good stewards, is the story of a bad steward, found in **Isaiah 22:15-18**, the story of Shebna, an unfaithful, self-serving steward. What lessons are to be learned from this incident?

There is also the story found in **Luke 16:1-15** that warrants mention. It is a major biblical passage on what it means to be a steward. After reading it and thinking about it, state what lessons you learned.

In the Bible, there are listed various elements that are to be stewarded:

- Spiritual Truths
- Life
- Assets
- The Mysteries of God and the Gospel.

A final point to be made here is a call to be faithful as a steward. Perhaps the most pressing text to consider here is **2 Corinthians 5:10** – *“¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.”* (NIV)

The Marks of a Steward

Read for This Week's Study: Heb. 11:8–12; Rom. 4:13, 18–21; Matt. 6:24; Heb. 9:14; 1 John 5:2, 3; Luke 16:10–12.

Memory Text: “Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful” (1 Corinthians 4:1, 2, NKJV).

This week the focus is going to be on the character traits that good stewards ought to show forth.

- **Faithfulness** - 1 Corinthians 4:2 - *“Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.”* How would you describe faithfulness? How does a human develop faithfulness? Notice also **Hebrews 11:8-12** *“⁸ By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. ⁹ By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. ¹¹ And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she^[a] considered him faithful who had made the promise. ¹² And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.”* (NIV)
- **Loyalty** – Matthew 6:24 - *“²⁴ No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”* Should loyalty be total, or is there reason to moderate loyalty in some cases? (NIV)
- **Trustworthiness** - Luke 16:10-12 - *“¹⁰ Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. ¹¹ So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? ¹² And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else’s property, who will give you property of your own?”* (NIV)
- **Hopefulness** - Romans 4:18-21 *“¹⁸ Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”^[a] ¹⁹ Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah’s womb was also dead.*

*²⁰ Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, ²¹ being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. How does being hopeful help in matters of stewardship? Can you list some reasons why this would be important? Consider also **Romans 4:13** - ¹³ It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.” (NIV)*

- **Humility**

Honesty With God

Read for This Week's Study: *Luke 16:10; Lev. 27:30; Gen. 22:1–12; Heb. 12:2; Luke 11:42; Heb. 7:2–10; Nehemiah 13.*

Memory Text: “But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience’ ” (*Luke 8:15*).

The lesson this week is quite interesting in that it focuses on one characteristic that every good steward should have, honesty, particularly when it comes to honesty with God. The lesson then goes on to use the biblical teaching of tithing to illustrate the way this principle plays out in life.

We begin by talking about honesty, noting that it is a prized trait in all humans but it is particularly both valuable and beautiful in those who are stewards. Honesty is a virtue that is not automatic in life. Nor does it grow in a moment. Honesty is a trait that has to be developed over time. It grows by practice. Jesus noted these things in his comment recorded in **Luke 16:10** - ¹⁰ “*One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much.*” Behind this comment can be seen a growth process. One can see that persistent honesty, being faithful over and over again, is what produces the kind of effect being looked for.

A very good place to witness the development of faithfulness is to look at the life of Abraham, the prototypical pilgrim who appears early in the Old Testament. Read the story in **Genesis 22:1-12**. As you read it, notice that this is not the first story about Abraham. It is preceded by a host of other stories, some of which indicate great faithfulness in following after God, some of which indicate failures.

- Which of the stories about Abraham indicate faithfulness?
- Which stories indicate failures?

The story in **Genesis 22** is very significant because it comes well after some of Abraham's failures. He now has the promised son Isaac. Then comes the command to take the young man to Mt. Moriah to make a sacrifice. Along the way, Abraham learns he is to sacrifice Isaac. We are greatly alarmed by this request, but it was not out of the realm of the reasonable in Abraham's day. In the end, God prevented the sacrifice of the young man, then provided Abraham with a substitute sacrifice. There is great significance to this story, but for this lesson we look at the fact that Abraham was willing to obey God. We conclude that, as his life progressed, he learned to be honest with God, faithful to God's admonitions. For this he is later on commended.

The lesson, having established the value of honesty and faithfulness, turns to discuss the subject of tithing as a place where faithfulness to God is demonstrated. This is a very

interesting example to turn to because it involves material substance, money,

particularly gain. Because money and assets enable our living, giving away money can be particularly hard.

- Can you explain what “tithing” is all about?
- **Leviticus 27:30** is a particularly interesting verse here: *“A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the LORD; it is holy to the LORD.” (NIV)*. What, in particular, do we learn about tithe from this verse?
- On what basis does God ask for a tithe?
- What texts would you use to support your ideas?
- Does tithing earn you any credits with God?
- What happens when people do not pay tithe?
- **Luke 11:42** is another very interesting verse on the subject - ⁴² *“Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone.”* What can be learned from this verse?

A closing thought to ponder here has to do with the human reluctance to be faithful. So often it looks like being unfaithful would bring advantage so we become expedient.

- What are the effects of this?
- How can one fix the damage of unfaithfulness?
- What ideas can you offer to help grow faithfulness in your life?
- What makes being faithful difficult?
- What makes it joyful?

The Impact of Tithing

Read for This Week's Study: *Mark 16:15; 1 Pet. 3:8, 9; 1 Cor. 9:14; Rom. 3:19–24.*

Memory Text: “Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings of the altar? Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel” (*1 Corinthians 9:13, 14, NKJV*).

Last week's lesson talked about honesty and faithfulness, then used the idea of tithing to illustrate faithfulness. This week's lesson picks up the tithing idea and develops it further.

The first biblical record of someone paying tithe is found in the story of Abraham.

Genesis 14:18-20 describes how he met with the King of Salem and gave him one tenth of all he had.

After the nation of Israel was founded, there was more precise instruction about tithe, particularly about what it was to be used for. One of the most descriptive verses is **Numbers 18:26** - *“Moreover, you shall speak and say to the Levites, ‘When you take from the people of Israel the tithe that I have given you from them for your inheritance, then you shall present a contribution from it to the LORD, a tithe of the tithe.’”* This verse indicates that there was a design behind tithing, that it was to be used for funding the operation of the religious life of Israel, and to support those who were what might be called, the religious professionals.

- What do you think the effects of a collaborative and systematic process were?
- How does this compare with what you think would occur if everyone did as they pleased or saw fit individually?

The biblical record is clear that there were plenty of ups-and-downs in the experience of ancient Israel. This was the case with general affairs, but it was also the case with their loyalty to the idea of paying tithe and being otherwise generous with God. Notice the verse **Nehemiah 10:39** – *“³⁹For the people of Israel and the sons of Levi shall bring the contribution of grain, wine, and oil to the chambers, where the vessels of the sanctuary are, as well as the priests who minister, and the gatekeepers and the singers. We will not neglect the house of our God.”* (ESV)

- This verse is a window on struggle. During the reforms of Nehemiah, it seems renewed efforts were made to encourage people not to neglect the house of God. This comment was made at a time when people were building lavish places for themselves but the building or the temple languished as did the priesthood.

The struggle to remember the house of God along the way gave rise to a very interesting passage about tithing that is found in **Malachi 3:9, 10** – *“⁹You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. ¹⁰Bring the full tithe into the storehouse,*

that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need. ¹¹ I will rebuke the devourer¹² for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of your soil, and your vine in the field shall not fail to bear, says the LORD of hosts.” (ESV)

- What do you make of the mention of being cursed?
- What do you think the phrase “the full tithe” means?
- Do you think that these verses indicate that if people pay a “full tithe,” they can be guaranteed blessing and success?
- The storehouse in ancient times was the Temple. Is there a current equivalent place?

In New Testament times, the principle of tithing is found again. Indications are present that it was used to pay those who were busy propagating the gospel message. In I Corinthians Paul makes a rather straight-forward comment to this effect, drawing a connection between the OT practice and what was to be done in NT times:

I Corinthians 9:13-14 – *“¹³ Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? ¹⁴ In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.” (ESV)*

Paul makes a similar comment to the young gospel worker Timothy when he enunciates the principle taken from the Old Testament, *“¹⁸ For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,” and, “The laborer deserves his wages.” (ESV)*

We are left with some interesting things to contemplate here:

- Have you ever thought that paying tithe results in a double blessing? Those who pay tithe are promised a blessing, and those who receive the tithe also receive a blessing in that they can give their full time and attention to gospel work.
- Do you think individuals are at liberty to pay tithe to what ever cause they desire, or is there a call to be more collaborative?
- Where is the “storehouse” today?
- If we hold that there is a mandate to pay a faithful tithe, is there also a mandate that rests on those who decide how to spend the money tithe brings in?
- What would the Christian world look like if everyone paid tithe faithfully?

Offerings of Gratitude

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 6:19–21; Eph. 2:8; 1 Pet. 4:10; Luke 7:37–47; 2 Cor. 8:8–15; 2 Cor. 9:6, 7.*

Memory Text: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (*John 3:16, NKJV*).

The lesson this week asks us to focus on another of the traits that should be found in stewards if they are to be good stewards. That trait is generosity. To make this point, the lesson begins by quoting the best-known text in all the Bible, **John 3:16** – “*For God so loved the world that He gave...*” and what did God give? His best, his very best, his son, the consequences of which is the redemption of humanity, making it possible for Paul to say, “*For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.*” **Eph. 2:8** (ESV). In the gift of Jesus we see very clearly that God is inclined to be generous, as generous as need requires. And the benefits of his generosity are enormous, giving humans a real hope of escaping the brokenness of life on this planet.

The lesson then moves on to consider what an appropriate response to God's generosity by humans might be. The obvious answer is that, we should respond in kind. We should be motivated toward generosity. Indeed, a generous spirit should prompt a generous response. In this vein, a number stories should be considered.

- **Luke 21:1-3** - contains one of the most remarkable stories in all the gospels. Jesus was watching the rich giving their offerings at the temple when, during a lull in the giving, a widow, a poor widow, one who was afforded none of the protections society usually provides. The verses read, “*Jesus^[a] looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the offering box, ² and he saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins.^[b]³ And he said, “Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them.”* On the face of it, the assertion is silly. There is no way the gift of a single coin or two could equal or exceed the larger gift of the rich. But the lesson here is not about money, but about attitude. This woman gave “all that she had.” Hers was a gift of total generosity for it seems, after she had given her gift, she had nothing left. Here is generosity in its fullest flower. It is no wonder that her story is told everywhere the gospel is preached.
- We should be careful not to limit generosity to money issues only. Some of the gifts to God – the greatest ones – are not monetary. Look at the comment made in **1 Peter 4:10** – “*¹⁰ Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.*” (NIV).

Here is a reminder that the best gift is not money but grace. And grace should be stewarded, its record preserved and then shared. When we become the recipients

of God's grace, there should well up in our hearts a desire to share it just as certainly as if we have been given a cure for some ailment. This desire to share would normally be spontaneous.

- Another good and illustrative story is the one found in **Luke 7:37-47** – *“³⁷ A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee’s house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. ³⁸ As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.” (NIV).*

This act was considered extravagant by some present when it unfolded. But the story is not so much about extravagance as it is about great generosity driven by love. How do we measure things like that?

Behind all these stories and the instruction, or admonition, to be generous, is a principle that is described in **Matthew 6:19-21**, the words of Jesus, in this case talking again about material possessions but certainly a concept that can be expanded to other areas of life - ¹⁹ *“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (NIV).*

- Can you put this principle into your own words?
- Why are we so fascinated with material possessions in this life?
- Does wealth give security?
- Why is generosity so difficult for so many?
- Do you have any personal examples of generosity in which you were either the receiver or the originator of the actions? What feelings emerged? What effects?

In **2 Corinthians 8:8-15** there can be found some admonitions from the pen of the Apostle Paul that are worth considering – *“⁸ I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. ⁹ For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich. ¹⁰ And here is my judgment about what is best for you in this matter. Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. ¹¹ Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. ¹² For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have. ¹³ Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. ¹⁴ At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality, ¹⁵ as it is written: “The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered*

little did not have too little.” (NIV).

There is one final admonition that should be brought to mind – *“6 Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. 7 Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”*

- What do you think might be done in order to cultivate generosity in all the spheres of life?

The Role of Stewardship

Read for This Week's Study: *Col. 1:16–18; Heb. 4:14–16; 3 John 3; Gen. 6:13–18; Rev. 14:6–12; 1 Pet. 1:15, 16.*

Memory Text: “For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life” (*1 Thessalonians 4:7, NIV*).

This week we begin our discussion and thoughts with several different passages from the Bible. At the core of the discussion is the question of what it is that lies at the center of the mandate to be stewards.

- Why is stewardship necessary?
- What provides the best mandate for Christian stewardship?
- What is the deepest motivation toward being a good steward?
- Where does the power to be a good steward come from?

The main passages of Scripture we will look at are these:

- **Colossians 1:16-18** – *“¹⁶ For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.”* (NIV)
- **Philippians 2:4-11** – *“⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,^[a] ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,^[b] ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant,^[c] being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”* (ESV)
- **1 Peter 1:15-16** – *“¹⁵ But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; ¹⁶ for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”* (NIV)

Several things essential to the concept of stewardship emerge from these verses:

- The creatorship of God, or Christ. There is a very clear indication that all things were created by God and, as we would expect, creatorship conveys ownership. God has a right to all things as he originated them.

- The Philippians passage conveys a rather astonishing truth, that the God who made all things did not consider the retention of his place in heaven to be of more importance than the redemption of those who were lost, so he humbled himself, all the way from heaven to the ignominy of a cross.
- The third passage indicates a mandate for humans to be like Christ, like God. The actions of God, the nature of God, provide a mandate for human emulation. Because God is holy, and giving, and because he made us, we ought to be like him. In other words, because Christ is at the center of things, we ought to aim to be like him. Prominent in his work is the stewarding of God's resources for the benefit of others.

In a very interesting twist, the lesson elects to illustrate this principle of stewarding God's assets for the benefit of others by drawing attention to the tabernacle that is described in the Old Testament. The construction and set-up of the tabernacle, is described in various places in the books of Exodus and Leviticus. In the New Testament, particularly the book of Hebrews, some links are made between the tabernacle and the work of Jesus. (See **Hebrews 4:14-16**). Though the design and operation of the tabernacle are complex, some very clear and important lessons can be drawn from its study. Among them are these:

- God has not set himself up in some far-away place out in the universe where he is remote from trouble. In this case, he set his throne up in the middle of things!
- It is clear from the tabernacle that people were to understand that when they had some trouble with sin, they were not to flee from God but to come toward him.
- Through some sort of sacrifice, God had found a solution to sin for the sinner who came, after sacrifice was made, was free to go back into life.
- The problem of sin is very serious for being freed from it, required the death of some kind of substitute.
- The whole system was designed to deal with sin, exonerate God, and free the sinner. All resources were stewarded toward that end.

It should be noted, at the end of this lesson, that it is not an ordinary thing for a person to be selfless, inclined to be a good steward for the benefit of others. That kind of motivation comes only from the contemplation of what Jesus has done, and from the power that comes into a life given over to God because of the work of the Holy Spirit. Unless God and the work of the Spirit are kept in the forefront of living, any calls for good stewardship fall hard on human ears.

We close with the observation made by the Apostle John as he watched the believers in his day - ³ *It gave me great joy when some believers came and testified about your faithfulness to the truth, telling how you continue to walk in it.* **3 John 1:3** (NIV)

Lesson 11

March 10-16

Debt—A Daily Decision

Read for This Week's Study: *Ps. 37:21; Matt. 4:3–10; Matt. 6:33; Deut. 28:12; Prov. 13:11; Prov. 21:5; 2 Cor. 4:18.*

Memory Text: “Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor. Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law” (*Romans 13:7, 8, NIV*).

The lesson this week is quite interesting as it is a journey through a goodly number of biblical passages that talk about the use - and misuse - of money. In particular, there are some pithy proverbs that perhaps are not well known.

One such proverb is the one found in **Psalm 37:21** which, as a single verse, sums up the general flow of this lesson – “²¹ *The wicked borrow and do not repay, but the righteous give generously.*” (NIV)

Let's talk about the first part of the text. It has to do with borrowing, something that is very much a part of modern society. Perhaps in times past, it was difficult to borrow money, but not so today. The opportunities, yea the invitations, to borrow money are legion. Let's think about the dynamic that surrounds borrowing:

- The tendency to borrow more than one can afford is a big issue. Borrowed money can easily cause a person to live beyond their means and so, over time, bring financial ruin on themselves.
- Borrowing money puts you in debt to someone else who can then work to control the flow of your life. It has been said that debt leverages the future which, to us is unknown.
- A significant percentage of your income automatically goes to the lender. Is it worth giving up 5-25% of your income for whatever it is that you borrowed money for?
- Notice the sage observation in **Proverbs 22:7** – “*The wealthy rule over the poor; a borrower is a slave to a lender.*” (CEB)
- Borrowed money seems to be far more easily spent than earned.
- Borrowing money can frustrate a very important discipline in life, that of delaying gratification. A lot of activity, including spending activity, is driven by impulse. We see something and want it now. But is having it now a good thing when the big

picture is brought to mind? One example of the effects of momentary impulse shared in the lesson is the story Esau trading his birthright for a pot of lentils (**Genesis 25:34**). What happens in a moment might not be reversed even with much time and effort.

- Another text that fits this discussion is **Proverbs 21:5** – “*The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty.*” (NIV)
- What are some of the joys and benefits that come from not owing money?

While there are injunctions in the Bible warning against the troubles that come from incurring debt, there is no indication that debt is to be totally avoided. The admonitions are more in the form of warnings about the adversities that easily come when debt is taken on. So, it is fair to ask under what circumstances it might be necessary to take on debt. Can you name some?

Another line of thought to engage here is that of living simply. Create a list of the benefits that would come from a simple lifestyle vs. a very complex one. What role might borrowing play in the development of a very complicated way of living?

The other side of debt is investment, making money grow by putting it to work. The parable of the owner who left “talents” with his servants is relevant here, though, sadly, we do not learn how the faithful stewards invested their money to make it grow. We learn only of the lazy man who buried his resources, apparently in the ground.

There is a very interesting little observation found in **Proverbs 6:6-8**. Of all things, it is about the ants. What do you learn from reading and pondering the life of ants?

There is also some very good advice given by the Apostle Paul to the Christians in Rome. While his advice is about more than money, the advice applies to money, too - “*Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor. Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law*” **Romans 13:7, 8** (NIV).

Perhaps a final selection of thought should be toward eternal things. Believers do not live here on earth only for themselves. They are to live with a view to eternal things, bringing to mind any eternal implications that might be produced by their actions. Below are some verses that serve as guides and reminders of this:

- **Matthew 6:33** – “³³*But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*” (NIV)
- **2 Corinthians 4:18** “¹⁸*So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.*” (NIV)
- **Deuteronomy 28:12** – “¹²*The LORD will open the heavens, the storehouse of his bounty, to send rain on your land in season and to bless all the work of your*

hands. You will lend to many nations but will borrow from none.” (NIV)

- **Proverbs 13:11** - *11 Dishonest money dwindles away, but whoever gathers money little by little makes it grow. (NIV)*

Lesson 12

March 17-23

The Habits *of a Steward*

Read for This Week’s Study: *Eph. 5:15–17; Col. 3:23; Luke 12:35–48; James 4:14; Acts 3:21; 1 Cor. 9:24–27.*

Memory Text: “How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word. With my whole heart I have sought You; oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You”. (*Psalms 119:9–11, NKJV*).

This week we are invited to look at the habits that define a good steward. There are several of them to explore but before doing that, let us think about habits as a broad category.

A habit is a way of conducting oneself. It could also be called a usual manner of behaving. Habits are behavior patterns that come into existence due to repetitious actions on our part. Some habits are beneficial, good for us and those around us; others are hurtful, again to us and to those around us. Habits can become deeply engrained in our lives, in some cases to the point of becoming an addiction. Our habits help form us, and they become one of the ways in which others come to know us. For example, a person who comes to work at the same time every day comes to be known for that. Habits can also be very helpful in that they help facilitate living. Habits, once established, make our work less mentally taxing, more automatic, if you will.

It all but goes without saying that a good steward would be someone who has developed good habits rather than deleterious ones. In a Christian sense, those good habits would be the ones formed with the teachings and principles of the Bible in the foreground.

Some good, general Bible passages to consider here are these:

- **Ephesians 5:15-17** - *“15 Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise,¹⁶ making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is.” (NIV)*

- **Colossians 3:23** – “²³ Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters.” (NIV)
- What thoughts come to mind after reading and thinking about these verses?

Another set of verses that give a general context for Christian living are these:

- **Matthew 6:25-33** - *25“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? 26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? 27 Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? 28“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 30 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? 31 So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”* (NIV)
- **Jeremiah 29:13** – “¹³ You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.” (NIV)

In addition to these general comments, there are some specific things, or habits, that the Bible enjoins good stewards to develop:

- **Contentment** – A good steward is one who learns to be content with circumstance, not to the point of being inactive, but to the point of not being over-stressed and driven to the point of distraction. See **Philippians 4:11**; **1 Tim. 6:6**.
 - What are some strategies or ideas that can aid a person toward contentment?
- **Trust** – **Proverbs 3:5** is a good verse that instructs believers to trust God. Trust is the willingness to believe in the integrity of another person. It is an antidote to stress and skepticism.
 - What makes trusting God difficult?
 - What makes trusting humans difficult?
 - What makes trusting easier?
- **Watchfulness** – In **Luke 12:35-48**, there is a rather long story about a home owner who went away but left his home in the care of a servant who, though the owner was gone a long time, proved faithful, ever watchful lest a thief come in unexpectedly to steal. The watchfulness of the steward was a key element behind the owner’s commendation given to his servant when he returned.

- **Self-discipline** – **1 Corinthians 9:24-27** is an interesting passage about self-discipline, particularly as it relates to those who run races intending to win. Self-discipline is a very valuable trait, or habit, to develop because it facilitates a lot of

growth and production as opposed to the lack of production that comes from self-indulgence..

- **Faithfulness** – In **Matthew 25:21** there are words that every steward would like to hear, that every steward hopes to hear – “Well done good and faithful servant,…” It is simply a fact of life that the way we live tells a lot about who we are and what we find important. For a follower of Christ to be found faithful in the end, is a very big thing that will bring lasting joy.
 - What are you doing in your life that builds faithfulness?
 - What do you wish you were more faithful about?

The Results of Stewardship

Read for This Week's Study: *2 Tim. 3:1–9; Ezek. 14:14; Phil. 4:4–13; Prov. 3:5; 1 Pet. 2:11, 12; Matt. 7:23; 25:21.*

Memory Text: “Having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by *your* good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation” (*1 Peter 2:12, NKJV*).

Today we conclude our sequence of discussion on the subject of stewards and stewardship. Appropriately, we face the question, “What are the results of good stewardship?” This seems to be a good way to end the discussion, talking about what the outcomes of good stewardship are.

There are several rather obvious results:

- The first would be the preservation of personal integrity on the part of the stewards. To be able to live with yourself, to live with your conscience clear of trouble, to know that you have done well, the best you can, are all great blessings in life.
- The resources of the “Owner” will have been well tended and well used. The parable of the talents is one place where we can see this played out in the Bible. What would it be to receive the commendation of the owner, that you have done well!
 - **Matthew 25** – “*Well done, Good and faithful servant,...*”
- The cause to which the resources were assigned will have had maximum benefit. If the cause is a noble one – and the cause of redeeming humans is most noble – then making sure that maximum resources are used in the best way possible is a wonderful outcome.
 - **Philippians 4:10-14** – “*¹⁰ I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it.¹¹ I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. ¹² I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or*

hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. ¹³ I can do all this through him who gives me strength.” (NIV)

- Onlookers will receive a sterling witness. Here one particular text comes to mind, a cogent but little-known one:
 - **I Thessalonians 4:11-12** – *“¹¹Do everything you can to live a quiet life. Mind your own business. Work with your hands, just as we told you to. ¹²Then unbelievers will have respect for your everyday life. And you won’t have to depend on anyone.” (NIV)*
 - **1 Peter 2:12** - *“Having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation” (NKJV).*

Then there are some final exhortations of a broad and generic sort, to consider:

- **Proverbs 3:5** – *“⁵ Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding;”*
- **2 Timothy 3:1-9** **3** – *“But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. ² People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, ⁴ treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God — ⁵ having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people.” (NIV)*
- **Philippians 4:4-13** – *“⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ⁸ Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. ⁹ Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.” (NIV)*

