

Stewardship Lesson 1: Stewardship Principles, Overarching Frameworks

Theme Verse for Series: Matthew 22:36-39

“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

Jesus replied: Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself.

Stewardship principles: Love God, love your neighbor, spread the Gospel.

Stewardship in a Secular Context

In our society, similar titles and roles include: fiduciary, trustee, executor, guardian.

Examples include:

- Administering an estate.
- Managing a trust.
- Being the guardian of another person and/or their property.
- Having a power of attorney for another person’s financial or health matters.
- Managing investments of others.

People in these roles are in a position of trust: something has been entrusted to them.

People in these roles have a set of principles that guide their decisions. All decisions must be consistent with and support those guiding principles. Examples of guiding principles include:

- Subordinate their will to the will of the owner
- Act in the best interests of the owner
- Be watchful
- Be attentive
- Use good judgement
- Act prudently
- Act in good faith
- Be loyal

The document that gives people the authority to serve in their role also typically has rules these people must follow; however, in following those rules, they must defer to the principles that guide their decisions.

A steward is expected to become and remain trained and knowledgeable.

A steward must also care for themselves so they can fulfill their obligations well.

A steward has a posture of humility/deference to the true owner.

Bible References to Stewards and Attributes of Stewards

In Biblical times a steward typically had full and control and management of a household. The Greek word frequently translated as steward was οἰκονομῶς which literally means the law of the house.

A few representative scriptures:

1 Corinthians 4:2

“Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful.”

Matthew 25:14-30

The steward who protected what was entrusted to him, returned it in the same condition, and did not lose or squander it was described as wicked, slothful, and was to be cast into outer darkness.

Genesis 39:1-7

Joseph honored his obligations to Potipher to his own detriment.

1 Peter 4:10

“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace”.

1 Corinthians 10:23

“All things are lawful, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful, but not all things build up. Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace.”

John 15:4-6

“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”

Galatians 5:25

“If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.”

Colossians 1:25

“I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known,”

Biblical Framework for Stewardship (Guiding Principles)

Just as people who have similar secular roles have a set of principles that guide their decisions, a good steward in a religious context also needs a set of guiding principles.

In a Biblical, religious or spiritual context, everything belongs to God and nothing belongs to us; we are only stewards of what God entrusts us with. This implies that God has put his trust in us.

As a steward, it is my responsibility to follow the owner's guiding principles/priorities in my decisions.

What are the Biblical Principles/Priorities that take precedence and guide our decisions as stewards and what does the Bible say is most important?

Everything in the Bible is important, but not equally important:

Matthew 23:23

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.”

A good steward must use judgement to ascertain the “weightier matters of the law” (what is most important).

The New Testament specifically identifies two things as most important. While these two things can be thought of separately, they are complementary and virtually inseparable: Gospel and Love.

Nearly all of the New Testament is centered on these principles.

These are the overarching principles a good Biblical steward must use to guide their decisions and actions.

It should be obvious to anyone observing the steward, that these are the overarching principles being applied.

Next Week:

We will explore an example of how these principles were applied in the New Testament and then in the following weeks we will explore various items that God has entrusted to us and how we as Christians can approach our role as stewards.

Suggested readings:

1 Corinthians 7:1-14:1a

With an emphasis on:

1 Corinthians 8:1-13

1 Corinthians 10:23-33

Notes for Teachers

Principle-based systems and rules-based systems:

A principles-based system provides concepts to be followed.

A rules-based system provides a list of regulations to be followed.

In a principles-based system, rules often are developed with the purpose of supporting the principles.

Rules can be broken, but not the overarching principles.

While the gospel and love are the overarching principles, it should be noted that a steward still must devote some time to self-care. Everyone needs nourishment and rest. The Old Testament included a sabbath rest and as a key part of following God.

While a steward is focused on God's wishes and using the overarching principles of the gospel and love, it is possible and even probable that in pursuing this path the steward will receive a sense of joy in serving God. Even when serving God can lead to personal pain and suffering, those who have focused on God often report a sense of peace and joy from emptying themselves and being filled by God and the Holy Spirit.

The example of a vine and a branch is a good metaphor or analogy for the relationship of a steward to the one a steward serves.

Sample Scriptures on Gospel and Love:

Gospel:

1 Corinthians 15:3-4

“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,”

Luke 4:43

“but he said to them, ‘ must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose.’”

Matthew 28:18-20

“And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’”

Love:

Matthew 22:36-40

“‘Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?’ And he said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.’”

Colossians 3:14

“And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.”

1 Peter 4:8

“Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.”

2 John 1:4-5

“I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we were commanded by the Father. And now I ask you, dear lady—not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but the one we have had from the beginning—that we love one another.”

1 Corinthians 13:13 – 14:1a

“So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love. Pursue love”

Possible Discussion Questions:

Is the Bible more of a principles-based system or more of a rules-based system?

If God is all-powerful, all-knowing, all-seeing, etc. what are some possible reasons he would entrust anything to us as stewards?