

Stewardship Lesson 8: Stewarding the Body

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.

Note to Teachers. This is Lesson Eight of the Stewardship series. The lesson’s subject is stewardship of the body, referring to the flesh or a person’s visible matter, including internal organs. Attention to stewarding the invisible (i.e., heart, soul, and mind) was given in Lesson Seven. This lesson attempts to highlight four important points in regards to stewarding the body.

1. Our bodies are created by God, the creator of heaven and earth.
2. Because our bodies are created by and belong to God, we belong to Him.
3. That we have been given a body from God, we are to take care of it in such a way that it will produce a harvest of good works, like the servant’s stewardship from Lesson Five. This lesson gives consideration as to how to care for the body.
4. The good work our bodies produce is to be carried out within community, both in the church and in the world. The good works we are commissioned by God to produce are the two greatest commandments through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

These four points are introduced in the Prologue and interspersed throughout the three other sections.

Prologue

“May you be blessed of the Lord, Maker of heaven and earth.” Ps 115:15

“The earth is the LORD’s, and all that it contains, the world and those who dwell in it.” Ps 24:1.

God is Creator of heaven and earth. Because He is Creator of all things, all things belong to Him. All living things are His possessions, especially humans. We are his prize possessions (Psalm 8). We are the Lord’s. Paul writes this in Romans 14:7, *“For not one of us lives for himself, and no one dies for himself; for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s.”* We are the Lord’s and we belong to Him. In His justice and righteousness, the Lord has entrusted us with our lives, much like the master who entrusted his servants with the bags of gold to be stewarded and taken care of. God shares His possessions, and we in turn share them with others. The good and faithful servant stewarded the bag of gold in such a way that it reaped a hundred-fold. The lazy, wicked servant did the opposite. He took a hands-off approach to what was entrusted to him and he buried the gold. He erred in his stewardship and he was punished. A person’s years have been given to him and her by the Lord for the purpose of glorifying God. Today’s lesson will study the stewardship of the body.

Discussion Question: *Jesus told His followers to “pray that you do not enter into temptation.” Is making a decision to live as if my life belongs to me a temptation? How might I avoid that?*

Our Bodies belong to One Another

I do not belong to myself. I am not mine. I am the LORD's possession (1 Peter 2:9). He redeemed me and purchased me for a great price. He delivered me and put me in a safe place, His fold. I am a sheep and He is the good shepherd. Like the member of a body, I am a sheep in a fold. Paul writes of this in Romans 12:4 *“Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ's body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to one another.”* My body is not mine, it belongs to another. Because it is not mine, I do not have authority over it. My spouse has authority over my body. Paul affirms this in 1 Corinthians 7:4.

Even more, my body belongs to an authority greater than my wife. My body belongs to Christ and I'm in His fold, His body. In His body we are protected and secure. The Lord's body has many parts, many sheep. My body also has many parts. Just the number of organs is 79! My hand and forearm belong to one another, as do the kidneys and the brain. The head and the feet are also connected to one another. The head cannot say to the feet, “I don't need you.” So it is in community. I belong to Kaye, I belong to Everett, I belong to Amara, I belong to Scott, I belong to Kathie, I belong to Ben, I belong to Jon, I belong to Susan. Through Christ, I am attached to each one. I cannot say to Phil, “I don't need you” nor can I say to Carol, “I don't need you.” I need them. And they need me.

That my body belongs to the LORD and to others, what is my duty? Remember, I am not duty free. I owe a tax and it needs to be paid in a timely manner, with one exception. Remember, let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another. This is my duty to others, both friend and enemy: diligent love. Love is the greatest commandment and it is the essence of the good news: love God; love others; love self. Remember, the last shall be first so I'll start with myself. In order to love all members, I must first love my own body. Love springs forth from love. I've *learned* to love my body. When I look in the mirror I do not say to my body “I do not like you.” When I see my reflection, I do not say, “Ooo, gross.” In Christ, there are no bad hair days! Love is not rude to self nor others. In America and in American churches, loving oneself is difficult for many people, for many reasons. For one, many people in America are critical and judgmental because inside themselves, they are driven by an inner critic. A person's inner critic is like elevator music; it plays unawares continually. A haranguing inner critic causes much sadness in a man's life. Love is not critical, it is not rude (1 Cor 13). Christ is not critical nor rude. I am to love my body in the way that Christ loves me-with goodness and forgiveness. Goodness is my robe and forgiveness is my crown. My right hand holds a staff of righteousness. “Love self”: this is a good mantra. When I allow the LORD to do the hard labor of drying up pools of self-doubt and resentment within me, then I am most equipped to love others fully.

We belong to God. He purchased us. ***As His, our identity is holy and beloved. As a holy and beloved people, what are we to do, what is our duty?*** We are to clothe ourselves with compassion, humility and patience (Col 3:12). Compassion is a deep feeling about someone's

misfortune. Humility is a deep sense of one's moral littleness. Patience is literally long-passion. We are to bear with the weaknesses and shortcomings of others and forgive others their complaints. The Lord does this, why shouldn't we? Compassion, humility and patience have feet. They walk towards people, they stand close to the afflicted, just as Christ did. Love moves.

Our bodies are to move like the Lord's, let us keep step with Him. How to walk as Jesus walked takes wisdom. We do not want to over-function in our love for others, nor do we want to under-function. Love hits the mark. We do not want to be errant or random in our love. How did Jesus determine HOW to love those who need help? He asked them a question. This question is the best question to ask someone who needs help. The question is asked by a King, and a Servant; it's a full-spectrum question. It is sometimes a miracle question. The question Jesus asked to people who needed help is "What do you want me to do for you?" This question will help us do the right deed when we see the need. The question is humble because it does not assume we know what that person needs or what's good for them. In that respect it's non-judgmental. The question is also patient in that it waits for the person's answer. Let us become skillful and steadfast in asking others what we can do for them.

Discussion Questions:

Asking a person in need "What can I do for you?" takes strength and courage. ***Why might we be hesitant to ask a needy person "What can I do for you"?***

Share how you live out daily, with your body, the truth that we are possessions of God.

Our Bodies are Temples

We are the LORD's, even our body: eyes, ears, mouth, hands, stomach, legs, and feet, from top to bottom, it's all His. The apostle Paul affirms this in His letters. He wrote the Corinthians saying, *"The body is not for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body."* Our bodies were made for service to the Lord; therefore, we depend upon Him to lead and guide us. He is our light. When we depend solely upon the Lord, our bodies run cleanly. Who would put diesel fuel in a gasoline powered engine? If we lapse in remembering that our bodies belong to the Lord and begin to live in such a way that might suggest our bodies belong to another purpose-like immorality-then our bodies will suffer and run poorly. Paul underscores this by writing, *"Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? May it never be!"*. Paul is advancing his point. Not only do we belong to the Lord (i.e., we are His possessions), now Paul is saying we are parts (members) of Christ's physical body. The possession is an active member, not a vase on a bookshelf. It's like we can now say "I am Christ's metatarsal" and another member might say "I am His wrist" and another saying "I am His ear". If we are made for such holy purposes, shall we use our bodies for unholiness? May it never be! Holiness cannot be joined with unholiness. The arm of Christ cannot be joined to a prostitute. A prostitute does not know how to steward and care for holy things nor his body. He or she can learn, but learning is what they must do. A branch cannot be grafted into a door; what is alive cannot be part of what is dead.

Yes, we are to be holy and set apart for the service of Christ, which is to love one another and proclaim the good news to our neighbors. This is why Paul exhorts the Christians in Corinth to *"Flee immorality."* We are to run fast in the opposite direction of immorality. We are to live in a manner (holy) worthy of God and avoid any appearance or scent of evil. We don't want to smell like the smoke of immorality. What is immorality? In the Corinthians 6 passage it is referring to sexual sin, or fornication but immorality is more than sexual sin. Immorality is also impurity and evil desire; anger, wrath, malice and abusive speech are members with immorality. Immorality is not holy. Let us not yoke to immorality.

Let us not defile the purity of the marriage bed, where sex between a husband and wife is good and right and a gift of God. Why? Because our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit: *"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?"* And Peter writes, *"You, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God."* Our bodies are the home of God; it is where He tabernacles on earth, our hearts being the upper chamber of the Spirit. Our bodies are the vessels to which we carry out the spiritual sacrifices to God: *"Present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship"* (Romans 12:1). Our bodies are gins that daily separate unholy seed from holy cloth, so that we might reap a harvest of praise and glory for the Lord. Not to us O Lord, not to us, but to Your name give glory. O Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary, pure and holy, tried and true. With thanksgiving, I'll be a living sanctuary for You.

Discussion Questions:

- ***Which is more important, body or spirit? What is a good balance?***
- ***Discuss the importance for believers of maintaining the temple by "staying in shape" and "being fit"-exercising, good diet, personal and sleep hygiene, etc***

Our Bodies are Machines

Everything created by God is good. This includes our bodies. Our bodies are good; we are fearfully and wonderfully made. Why were we made? To perform works that bring glory to God. Paul writes in Ephesians 2:10, *"For we (the church) are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them."* We were forged by God to perform good works in the world. Our bodies are like machines, delicate but sturdy. The purpose of machines is to produce some type of work. Our bodies are created to produce a work. God gave us six senses so that we can optimally produce the work. The works of God produce good works but not all machinery is the same. The combine does big work. The weed eater does small work. The work of both machines is important to the farmer. What's important to the farmer is that both machines do their work with maximum efficiency and capacity. If each machine fully operates to the capacity for which they were created, then the farmer will reap the fullest harvest, even a hundred-fold!

When a person buys a new piece of machinery or equipment, like a chainsaw or a car, she wants to take care of it. This is what a good steward does: he or she takes care of what they are given. How do I take of the machinery? I wash it so that road impurities and tree sap will not corrode

and dull it; I put clean gas in it so the engine will run cleanly; I regularly check the oil and change it so its parts will be fully lubricated; I shelter it in the storm; I give thanks for it. The list of how I care for the car is long. If we steward a car in such a way, how much more shall we steward our bodies. Our bodies require daily proper care and maintenance, including good oral care, healthy eating and drinking, and sleep hygiene. What goes into the body greatly affects how the body will perform. What you put on the skin goes into the skin.

Discussion questions: There are different ways to describe the running of a car engine: sluggish, missing, bad timing, knocking, smooth, purring like a kitten, creaky, slow, fast.

- ***If your body was an engine, how do you describe the current functioning of your body? What maintenance will you perform this week to further help and improve the functioning of your body?***