

Stewardship Lesson 9: Time, creation, money

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.

Time

1. 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.*

2. Time is God’s creation
 - a. God is the only being that is outside of time. He created time and purposely placed all other beings into that dimension of his creation.
 - b. Inasmuch as God is the only being outside of time, he had to create time in order for there to be other beings, or creation at all.
 - c. Time does not belong to us; it belongs to God because he created it. God intends for us to not merely exist in time, but to steward the time that he created.
 - d. Paul implores Christians to “make the most of every opportunity” with the time God has given us. That language implies stewardship. Each moment in time is an opportunity to love God, love others, and spread the Gospel.
 - e. According to Paul, the reason why we make the most of opportunity is “because the days are evil.” We use time to overcome the evil in the world with good... love.

3. How do we use time?
 - a. I can use my time selfishly.
 - b. Whereas being lazy is poor stewardship, so also is ignoring sabbath principles of balance between work and rest.
 - c. It’s easy to understand why laziness is poor stewardship of time, but how can making unwise choices regarding time be poor stewardship? How can ignoring sabbath balance principles fail to “make the most of every opportunity”?

4. Presumption of time
 - a. James 4:13-17
¹³ *Now listen, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.” ¹⁴ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. ¹⁵ Instead, you ought to say, “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.” ¹⁶ As it is, you boast in your arrogant schemes. All such boasting is evil. ¹⁷ If*

anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them.

- b. God expects us to remember that time is his, not ours. To act as if time is something that belongs to us is presumptuous and arrogant. Part of being good stewards of time means that we have a realistic understanding our relationship to time. That includes realizing our dependence upon God. To assume time is ours is arrogant boasting.
 - i. God intends that we should be flexible with our time, remaining ready to do the good God has for me to do, even if it interrupts my initial plans.

Creation

Genesis 1:26-31

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals,^[a] and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

²⁷ So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

²⁹ Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. ³⁰ And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so.

³¹ God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

1. Made in the image of God
 - a. We are made in God's image "so that" (for the purpose of) we may "rule over" creation.
 - b. Being made in God's image means that we have dominion and reason, neither of which is found in creation other than humans. We are not a part of nature, but we rule over it as stewards of God's creation.
 - c. *Being made in the image of God is a prolific topic that covers a great many doctrinal elements; ruling over creation is one of many aspects of the doctrine.
2. We subdue nature
 - a. To subdue here means to bring order. Just as God created order out of chaos, so (being made in His image) we bring order to nature.

- b. Bringing order to nature is neither exploitation, nor worship. These are two extremes we see in culture today. Godly stewardship of nature is to bring order to (subdue) nature, caring for it as God would.
- 3. Creation (being) is very good
 - a. There are those who believe (wrongly) that humans are a plague on the Earth. God's word teaches that being (the existence of humans and all of nature) is "very good."
- 4. How is selfishly exploiting nature an affront to God's command to subdue (bring order)?
- 5. The other extreme is to worship nature (idolatry). How is isolating humans from nature or treating it as "untouchable" also against God's injunction to subdue nature?
- 6. The principles of stewardship (loving God, loving our neighbor, and spreading the Gospel) bring important tools to the issue of our relationship to nature.
- 7. It can be difficult to know exactly how to approach environmental issues at times; however, the principles of stewardship can enlighten my understanding of the issue, helping me to make wise choices.

Money

Luke 16:1-13

16 Jesus told his disciples: "There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. ² So he called him in and asked him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer.'

³ "The manager said to himself, 'What shall I do now? My master is taking away my job. I'm not strong enough to dig, and I'm ashamed to beg— ⁴ I know what I'll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.'

⁵ "So he called in each one of his master's debtors. He asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?'

⁶ "'Nine hundred gallons^[a] of olive oil,' he replied.

"The manager told him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred and fifty.'

⁷ "Then he asked the second, 'And how much do you owe?'

"'A thousand bushels^[b] of wheat,' he replied.

"He told him, 'Take your bill and make it eight hundred.'

⁸ "The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. ⁹ I tell you, use

worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

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. ¹¹So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? ¹²And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else’s property, who will give you property of your own?”*

¹³ *“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.”*

1. This passage is sometimes seen as a difficult passage because at first glance it seems to be advocating dishonesty; however, it is not dishonesty that Jesus is advocating, but the proper placement of material things with respect to relationships.
2. The first thing to notice is that the parable subject is a “manager” of the rich man’s wealth. In other words, he was a steward.
3. The second noteworthy element is that he was accused of wasting the rich man’s possessions. In context, we may discern that the manager was not using them the way the owner wanted.
 - a. The context suggests (from the owner’s later remarks) that waste is defined as selfishness or hoarding.
4. Once the manager was in danger of punishment, he used the rich man’s wealth to build something more valuable: relationships with other people. He built better relationships by being forgiving and generous with the rich man’s wealth.
 - a. The attitude of the shrewd manager was that he had nothing to lose (it wasn’t his wealth) and that he could build solid relationships with someone else’s wealth.
 - b. What made the manager so shrewd was his understanding that relationships were more valuable than someone else’s wealth. He was right!
 - c. Evidently, worldly wealth (God’s wealth) is deemed a “very little” thing. We act shrewdly when we use the little things (such as wealth and possessions) to buy “true riches” such as relationships.
 - d. Notice the manager didn’t bribe anyone, but was generous and forgiving with debtors. These debtors perceived the manager as the one who was forgiving and were appreciative of his generosity.
 - e. What enabled the manager to be successful in this regard was his understanding that the wealth was not his, but the “rich man’s,” and, consequently, he had nothing to lose and everything to gain.
 - f. Jesus implies that this attitude is like serving God, our master, as opposed to money.
5. Clearly, God places far more value on relationships than he does on the possessions over which we are stewards. If we have the same attitude as the manager in the parable, we will see our material wealth as a means to an end, not an end in itself.
6. We should shrewdly use the wealth God has entrusted to us as a means to build relationships with others. Not in a manipulative manner, but the same way that the manager did – with generosity and forgiveness that reflects the attitude of the true owner of the wealth, God.

7. Acting like possessions are ours for our own benefit is dishonest and serving the money.
8. It should be noted that Luke 15 deals with seeking the lost, while chapter 16 suggests shrewdness in stewardship. I will be interrupted (time), but I should continue to use the resources God has entrusted to me to build relationships.

Question: What does this teaching mean I need to change in order to love God, love others, and spread the Gospel?

How does this parable inform me when I see someone trying to take advantage of my generosity?

When Jesus warned that being dishonest with little indicated that that person would be dishonest with much, what is the “much” that Jesus is talking about?

Offer a prayer that God will move us to be good stewards of time, creation, and wealth.