

## Life as a Steward-- Sunday Discussion

Introduction- This year I was asked by our Pastor Debra and our Church Council President Dave Nash to lead the Harmony Stewardship Program into 2020. I want you to know that initially I had many questions and some concerns about implanting the concept of stewardship. As I began to research ...become more knowledgeable...gain wisdom about stewardship...and understand how important stewardship is in our Christian life....my excitement grew and the more convinced I became that this thing called stewardship is integral to, in fact, defines a person's relationship to God. I also became convinced that we...all of us, should work toward giving stewardship here at Harmony a new meaning...a new understanding...a new purpose...new life. Stewardship is a lifetime of commitment to God. It deserves a yearlong...and continual year after year focus at Harmony, certainly not just 2 weeks of discussion every Fall. And as I shared some preliminary stewardship thoughts, I was encouraged that members of Harmony's congregation feel the same way.

So I want to share with you now a defined purpose and essential elements for your Harmony Stewardship Program. Much of what I am about to present comes from the Bible, and many Methodist and theological publications. I pray that what I am about to say is pleasing to God, will be pleasing to you and will be encouraging to you also.

So what does the Bible says about stewardship-- let's start with the very first verse: *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth"* (Genesis 1:1). As the Creator, God has absolute rights of ownership over all things. Nothing else in the Bible, including the doctrine of stewardship, will make any sense or have any true relevance if we miss the fact that God is the Creator and has full rights of ownership. It is through our ability to fully grasp this and imbed it in our hearts that the doctrine of stewardship is understood.

The biblical doctrine of stewardship defines a man's relationship to God. It identifies God as owner and man as manager. God makes man His co-worker in administering all aspects of our life. The apostle Paul explains it best by saying,

*“For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, God’s building” (1 Corinthians 3:9). Starting with this concept, we are then able to accurately view and correctly value not only our possessions, but, more importantly, human life itself. In essence, stewardship defines our purpose in this world as assigned to us by God Himself. It is our God given opportunity to join with Him in His worldwide and eternal redemptive movement to spread Christianity.*

*Jesus says “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me, Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19-20). Stewardship is God’s method of bestowing His richest gifts upon His people and He commands us to help.*

#### Four principles of biblical stewardship—

##### 1.The principle of ownership.

*The 24<sup>th</sup> psalm begins with “The earth is the LORD’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.”*

In the beginning of Genesis, God creates everything and puts Adam in the Garden to work it and to take care of it. It is clear that man was created to work and that work is the stewardship of all of the creation that God has given him. This is the fundamental principle of biblical stewardship. God owns everything; we are simply managers or administrators acting on his behalf.

Therefore, stewardship is our obedience in the administration of everything God has placed under our control. Stewardship is the commitment of one’s self and possessions to God’s service. Stewardship acknowledges that we do not have the right of control over ourselves or property - God has that control.

*Deuteronomy 8:17 says: “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.” And Deuteronomy 8:18 reminds us: “Remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth.”*

## 2. The principle of responsibility.

God gives us *“all things richly to enjoy,”* nothing is ours. Nothing really belongs *“God commands us to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.”* (1 Timothy 6: 16,17)

God has graciously entrusted us with the care, development, and enjoyment of everything He owns. As his stewards, we are responsible to manage His holdings well, and according to His desires and purposes. We are responsible for how we treat it and what we do with it.

## 3. The principle of accountability.

As stewards of the resources, abilities, and opportunities that God has entrusted to our care, we are called to exercise our dominion under the watchful eye of the Creator managing His creation in accord with the principles He has established.

Recall the Parable of the Talents (Bags of Gold). The master left on a trip and trusted his wealth to his 3 servants. Upon his return he asked each for an account of what they had done with his bags of gold. (Matthew 25: 14-30).

Like the servants in the Parable of the Talents, one day each one of us will be called to give an account of how we have managed everything the Master has given us- our time, money, abilities, information, wisdom, relationships, and authority. We will all account for how well we managed the things He has entrusted to us.

## 4. The principle of reward.

Paul writes: *“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.”* (Colossians 3:23-24).

We all should want to hear the master say what He says in Matthew 25:21: *“Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things;*

*I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!"*

As Christians today, we need to embrace this biblical view of stewardship, which goes beyond church budgets or building projects, though important; it connects everything we do with what God is doing in the world. We need to be faithful stewards of all God has given us...to glorify Him, to serve the common good, and to further His Kingdom.

### Our responsibilities--

So let's go back and spend some more time on our stewardship responsibilities. To be a child of God, to belong to our Harmony congregation is to be a steward of God. Faithful stewardship means that we fully acknowledge we are not our own but belong to Christ, the Lord, who gave Himself for us.

As we have said...It is the Master, not the steward, who owns the property, but the steward is responsible for it and is accountable to the Master. So as a steward, we have responsibilities to:

- *Receive:* We receive with joyful thanksgiving the many gifts that God showers upon us — time, talent, treasure, our bodies, our friendships, our families, natural resources, and the beauty around us.
- *Manage:* We take good care of what we have received. We manage these resources wisely — for our own good and the good of others.
- *Give:* Out of our gratitude in receiving so abundantly, we want to share with others. Now let's look at the gifts that we receive, manage, and share:

### Our time

Time is a gift of God. We did nothing to earn the hours, the days, the weeks of our lives. How we choose to use it is a matter of stewardship. Some people lead lives of frenetic activity, always over-extending themselves to the point of exhaustion, while others sit around in apathetic boredom. Some spend all their hours serving the needs of others at the expense of their own, while others live only for themselves.

Membership in organizations has become commonplace in our society, and we all spend valuable time in various organizations...that's a good thing. As Christian stewards we try to manage time wisely and in a balanced way. And we try to give our time gladly to family and friends, to strangers, to the community, to ourselves, and to the church.

But church membership and time spent must be distinctive...time dedicated to developing generous world changing disciples, time devoted to church ministries, time spent being part of a church family, time spent being a faithful steward to God.

### Our talents/our abilities

God blesses each one of us with talents and skills. In 1 Peter 4:10, *"Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace."*

Each of us is unique and God wants you to use your unique talents to glorify Him, to bless others, to reach those who don't know Him...build His kingdom.

### Our resources

We may think that our financial resources are our own. But when we recall that the time, the energy, the good health, and the opportunities for employment behind these dollars are all gifts from God, we see that the funds belong to God too. Again, we are the stewards; God is the owner. So questions about what we earn, how we earn it, how we save, spend, and give it away, are all questions of Christian stewardship.

One vital aspect of our stewardship is our giving to Christ's work in the world. The Lord told Moses to speak to the Israelites (Leviticus 23:9-14) and explain the concept of giving the first of the harvest to God.

We've learned that giving is most effective when we commit ourselves to give a definite proportion of our income through the church. For many, this proportion is one-tenth, or a tithe. We want to discover the joy in giving to God the "first fruits," an amount "off the top" of our income, not what's left over at the end of the month.

**What are the financial priorities in your life? What is most important in your life?**

**John Wesley's teachings – Earn all you can. Save all you can. Give all you can.**

**End with inviting the congregation to join in saying My Stewardship Covenant**