

I. Lifestyle Stewardship in Biblical Perspective
Discovering, Developing and Deploying our Spiritual Gifts
“Servant Stewardship Embraced”

I Corinthians 4:1-5

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I'd like to start by looking at a wonderful text on spiritual gifts which is where we are headed in this coming year. I Peter 4:10-11 says [10] *As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: [11] whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.*

The grass withers, the flower fades, the Word of our God abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

We come to this matter of stewardship of spiritual gifts and the aim is to discover them, develop them and deploy them. One of the things I'm praying for is that by the time we have brought our focus to this throughout this year that everyone will have an idea, have developed and deployed their spiritual gift. It's the same way we approached the series I did on evangelism so that by the end of the series everyone had the tools to share the Gospel with other people. The reason I have this desire is because of the I Peter 4 text. Everyone of you who are a Christian have a spiritual gift and some have more than one in which we'll get into that later on in the series. We are also accountable for how we use that gift and if we use that gift. None of your gifts are superfluous, for every single one of them are important.

There are no small people and no small gifts in the body of Christ. As members of the body of Christ we have roles and responsibilities and a gifting from the Lord that no one else has. Not only do you have a gift but each has a unique gift and these gifts fall into categories. We are called to discover that gift. Paul informs us that Timothy through the leadership of the Presbytery, discovered his gift. He was called to stir it up, to develop that gift. In a word, our two year theme on lifestyle stewardship has now come to a focused area of stewardship, specifically on spiritual gifts.

I remember a couple of years ago and one of my sisters had just gone to be with the Lord and as I returned from her funeral our ministry theme was lifestyle stewardship. My heart desire was for us to take the entire year to study the Biblical doctrine of stewardship as a lifestyle, as a vocational calling as a Christian. We are soldiers for Christ. We are to be saints for Christ. We are sinners saved by grace for Christ. We are all servants and then to look at what it means to live as a steward for Christ. What I didn't know was that in a few weeks after starting that we would be hit with something called a pandemic and then we had to deal with so many issues surrounding that.

Here is my problem and challenge now. I remember wanting to bring things to a focus and the illustration of the microscope from the biology lab that I used. That microscope had three prongs on it – 10 power, 20 power and 30 power – and it could be used to take a closer look at things. Lifestyle stewardship is not what people do to be saved but it's what saved people do and I wanted to focus this theme specifically around our time, talents and treasure. I.e., what does it mean to be a good steward of my time? We were all born into this world with a finite number of sunrises and sunsets and for each of us that is different. The goal was to help

you see how you would be a good steward of all of your days. One of the ways is for me to set aside one day that becomes a foundation and framework for the other six days in which I work for the Lord. I rest from that in order to worship Him and be equipped in order to live those six days unto the Lord.

I don't really like the term time management for time manages itself very well. It's really how do you manage yourself with that resource of time. I like the Biblical term – redeem the time. How do you spend your time? I can spend \$10 and go get another \$10 but once I've spent today, I don't get it back for it's done, so what did you do with it? I will be accountable for what I did with that day before the Lord. Then we would have looked at the stewardship of our treasures and how we used those for the Lord. God has given us training wheels in this by giving us the Sabbath for the Sabbath is not that one day belongs to the Lord and then the other six belong to me, but the Sabbath is set aside with the template of worship to set the pattern throughout the week for how I worship God the other six days which could be through my work, my school, my family etc. All seven days belong to God and this also goes for how we steward the tithe because it's not God gets 10 percent and I get 90 percent. The tithe is the first fruits that tells God that everything we have is what He gave us. It's the training wheels for following financial stewardship – it's not the objective, the maximum or the minimum – for it's something that trains me.

What about spiritual gifts? Also, we have natural gifts. We have spiritual talents and natural talents as well. How you deal with your natural talents will be very much related to what you understand about your spiritual talents and gifts and how they will be used. So here is where we are and because I didn't get to give you all I wanted to when I started this series and had to stop, I'm going to give you four basic principles of stewardship and in the coming studies this I Peter 4 text will be a very important text for us.

In I Peter 4 it says that each one of us have a gift and we are to use that gift for the Lord. Then it says we are to use it as good stewards. In other words, the framework and backdrop of discovering, developing and deploying our spiritual gifts is stewardship. Spiritual gifts are one of the crucial elements of stewardship. I can't be a good steward of my spiritual gifts if I don't understand what stewardship actually is from the Bible. In this study I want to share with you four principles from three different texts starting with I Corinthians 4. These principles will help us get a grasp on stewardship so that we can do the deep dive into spiritual gifts.

Just to give you a little summary of our study on spiritual gifts, we will be looking at a total of six texts of Scripture. One will be from Matthew 25 and another from Luke 19. These are two different parables that Jesus taught where one is about the use of talents and the other has to do with the use of the mina. They are not the same parable and they have two different purposes. Those will be important to understand. After we look at those two parables there will be four more texts of Scripture, we will look at to get a better understanding on spiritual gifts. Two of the texts are I Peter 4:10-11 and Ephesians 4:1-16. The other two are Romans 12 and I Corinthians 12 which is the most extensive text on spiritual gifts. This study on spiritual gifts will help us be a good steward of His spiritual gift He has given us by His grace as we understand how to discover the gift, develop it and deploy it, but first we need to make sure we understand what it means to be a steward.

Let's start in this study by looking at I Corinthians 4:1-5 which says *[1] This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. [2] Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful. [3] But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. [4] For I am*

not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. [5] Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.

Paul says here we have a two fold calling – servant and steward. It is not that you can be a servant or a steward, no they are cojoined. We are identified with this calling as servants and stewards. The word servant in the Greek is *doulos* and it means slave or servant. It can mean bond slave which was one who had been freed but had put themselves out of love to the master back into slavery. The word for master is *despotés* and we get the word in the English called despote, because among humans when someone is in absolute authority it always corrupts them, thus it has become a negative term among humanity. But in Jesus, our *despotés*, there is no corruption. In Jesus, the word *despotés* actually means an unrivaled master. He is not One among other masters in our life or One master over masters in our life, but He is the unique, singular, unrivaled Master for our adoration, our affections and our allegiance. He is the Master and we are the servants.

Then the text says for us to be regarded as stewards. In the first century, all stewards were slaves. A slave in a household could be elevated to overseer, executor, or steward of the household – the manager of the household. Stewardship is not something for the slaves of Christ, those of us who have been bought by Christ, belong to Him and out of love follow and serve Him. Stewardship is not something we can get promoted to but it's what we are called to do as His servants. We are servants of Christ and stewards of Christ.

Steward or stewardship is a word put together from two Greek words that were compounded together. The first word is *oiko* and the other word is *nomas (nomia)* and when the two words are together the word becomes *oikonomia*. That translated from Greek letters into English letters produces the word economics – the economy of life. We have a certain economy of life and it's different from the world's economy of life. God sets our economy of life – how we structure our life, to live our life, to steward our life.

I want to take this Greek word a step further and look at the two Greek words separately. *Oiko* is the Greek word for house or home. *Nomas* or *nomia* means rule or ruler. So a steward is a house ruler and you can say that stewardship are the rules of the house. God, through Jesus has purchased us, we are His servants and all of us have been appointed executors over God's house. In the Bible we find that God's house is found in two places. One is His church for the Bible says we are the household of God which is built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets – Christ's gather church is the household of God. You may have heard this Sunday school if you grew up in the church – here's the church, here's the steeple, open the door and there are the people and your hands were used to show this. It's a great rhyme but terrible ecclesiology, i.e., doctrine of the church, because the church is not the building, it's the people.

This reminds me of a phone call I received from a guy asking about our church. He said 'I have been listening to you on the radio program 'In Perspective' and realized your church is in Birmingham. Where exactly is the church?' I sometimes have what others would call sarcasm that can take over but I call it sanctified irony so I responded by saying 'I don't know.' He said 'Can I talk to the pastor?' I said 'I am the pastor.' He said 'You're the pastor and you don't know where your church is?' I said 'No, I don't.' He said 'How can I visit your church if I don't know where the church is?' I said 'Oh, you want to know where the church I pastor meets and I can give you that, it's 2200 Briarwood Way so I hope that helps you for that's where we meet.'

It's only been about eight or nine decades ago that Presbyterians started calling the buildings that they meet in a church for before then it was always called the Presbyterian meeting house. The church was the people but the building was where the church met. So, we are God's house and we dwell in that house. The elders of a church are to guide the resources of the church as good stewards. This church is the Lord's and He dwells in our midst. We especially feel His presence when we gather together on the Lord's Day. When this church functions it must do so with Biblical stewardship, guided by Biblical principles.

I thank God for Dr. Barker and the elders of this church who challenged me years ago when we went to plant the church in Charlotte, North Carolina. I learned the principle of budgeting in this church that 50 percent leaves the church for the work of the Kingdom – evangelism, church planting, benevolence, mercy, church revitalization. Be a good steward of the finances and of the people for hundreds of people from here are on the mission field given away for the work of the Kingdom. When ministries are done here they are put together to accomplish the Great Commission and when that happens it effects the church universal for they are put together to be given away to other churches. That's how it multiples and that's stewardship.

There is a second place we find God's house in the Bible and that's you. If you are a Christian, God resides in you. To use the language of Jesus, He makes His abode in you. I grew up with a mother who was fastidious. Whenever I would get home from school, I knew there was going to be a list and there were rules of the house. We had rules like, where to take off your shoes, where to put them on, where to mop, where to clean, when to make the bed, etc. To live here, here were the rules of the house and we do this because we love and respect each other and that's the way we functioned in the house I grew up in. It was the economy of my home growing up.

God lives in you and dwells within you. We are responsible for the economy of how we spend our days – all our days, all our hours. How do I spend my resources? How should I see this? There is my Master. I'm His servant and He has appointed me as steward of the house. How am I to function and what am I to do? I want to get my directions from Him and that means from His Word. So here are the four principles of stewardship that I want to leave you with.

Number one is, a steward is not the owner of the resources. A steward is a trusted manager, servant and executor but is not the owner. I understand we live in an economy of men and I believe the Bible teaches property rights, personal property and all those things, but as a Christian, while we operate in the city of man as we understand the economies we operate in, we have an overarching economy where the courthouse says the current house I live in is in mine and my wife's name but I know it's in the name of the Lord. It's not mine, it's His. I know He owns my marriage, my children, my grandchildren, my calling for I answer to Him with my spiritual gifts and I know He owns the finances, not just the tithe but all of it. We know as stewards that God owns everything, every piece of my life – my resources, my responsibilities, my relationships.

Secondly, a servant steward is owned. I'm not only not the owner but I'm owned. He owns me. Have I overstepped the Bible? It's important to keep 'servant steward' together. I have been appointed as the steward. I Corinthians 6:19-20 says *[19] Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? **You are not your own,** [20] for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.* Everything you have you have by His sovereign grace and mercy and as a Christian you are owned yourself. We not

only don't own it as stewards because we are His servants but we are owned by Him. He bought us with His blood.

Galatians 2:20 says [20] *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.* I want to show you another passage in Romans 14. This is so revolutionary that it will change everything. Stewardship brings it home. God owns everything and He owns me. Do we live like we believe that? He is my everything.

Romans 14:7-12 says [7] *For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. [8] For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. [9] For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.*

[10] *Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; [11] for it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God." [12] So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.* If I see a Biblical concept of stewardship and servanthood, I don't own anything and I am owned.

Thirdly, as a servant steward I am to manage, mobilize and multiply my resources, responsibilities and relationships. I am to do this Biblically for God's Word tells me how. In other words, God calls me to be productive. I hope you will read the next two studies when we look at the parables of the talents and the minas. Not only do each of us have a gift, and not only can we mature it, multiply it and mobilize it, but if we don't use it or abuse it, it can be taken from us. This is something that we are accountable to God to use. He owns everything and us and now He calls us as He gives us His Word to show us how to manage it, mobilize it and multiply it.

Elders are called to manage the church of God well in Scripture (I Timothy 5:17). We are to manage, mobilize and multiply whether it's God's house or His church, as servant stewards before the Lord. Now, none of us will ever be profitable and the reason we won't be profitable is because everything we have done will be done from what He has given us – the strength and the resources. So, none of us will bring something to the Lord that wasn't first given to us or the ability to multiply it wasn't given to us and that is why He gets all the glory, but we can be found faithful.

What does the servant steward want to hear? The servant steward wants to hear 'Well done, good and faithful servant.' We don't do this perfectly for we are not perfect, but we still want to hear 'well done'. Our perfection is in the blood and righteousness of Jesus. Yes, God is a capitalist. He invests in us that we invest for Him according to His Word and watch what He does with it, because little is much when God is in it. He multiplies it even as He uses us.

Number four and finally, a steward is accountable to the Owner at the Judgment. We will all appear before the Judgment Seat but I want to be clear here. Some will appear when the issue of the Judgment is salvation but for those who are in the Lamb's Book of Life, it's a stewardship judgment. Romans 4:12 says we must appear for the commendation – what we did with what He gave us, why did we do it, how did we do it. We don't stand at the Judgment Seat for salvation for Jesus stood at the Judgment Seat for our salvation at the cross when He took all of our judgment and bore it at the cross.

As Christians, we stand at the Judgment Seat accountable for stewardship. There are two things that motivate me as a steward. One is the love of Christ for the love of Christ compels us. Lord, what else do You want me to do? We are to be drink offerings, not burnt offerings where

ashes are left but drink offerings where nothing is left. The Christian life isn't a sprint, it's a marathon. A good marathon runner will tell you that you have to pace yourself so that every lap, every mile gets faster where you want your best mile to be your last mile and when you're through you are done. Nothing is left to take. It's all been given – spent and be spent – to use Paul's language (II Corinthians 12:15). We are to do this for Christ Jesus, the Lord of glory. That is what God has called us to do.

My other motivation to be the steward God called me to be is that when I get to the Judgment Seat, I know I won't be profitable but Lord, can You help me from here to there, for I want to be found faithful. I just love that language – found faithful. When you stand before Him will you be found faithful in responsibilities, relationships and resources that He did His work through His body by our engagement as good stewards? What does that mean on spiritual gifts? Read the next study for I can't wait to start on it. Take these four principles on stewardship and frame your lives with it, then we'll focus in with the power focus upon spiritual gifts starting with the next study.

The reasons I keep emphasizing that the servant and steward go together, is because I have found my understanding of servanthood has enlivened my understanding and I have so far to go. I am so glad to be in this series with you, but my understanding of servanthood is what has helped me embrace the joys of stewardship. What do I mean? The servant serves Jesus and Jesus is our unrivaled Master. I have found what gets in the way of my stewardship are rival masters – if only my eyes are fixed on Jesus. When He alone is my unrivaled Master, then stewardship becomes the expression of joy to the Master. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the time we could spend in Your Word. Take a few moments in silent prayer and let the Holy Spirit speak to your heart. Lord, I'm not the owner, You are. Jesus You are not only the Owner of everything You have entrusted to me but You own me. I'm Yours and You're mine. Jesus, by Your Spirit, with Your Word and discipleship, teach me how to manage, mobilize and multiply my relationships, responsibilities and resources that You have entrusted to me. Jesus, let me with great anticipation look forward to the Day of Judgment, knowing that though I'm never profitable or perfect, it can be a day of commendation – found faithful, well done, good and faithful servant. I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.