

BEING A GOOD STEWARD BY NELLIS DE JAGER WRITTEN ON 11 SEPTEMBER 2024

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As a newly found disciple of God, I experienced a profound awakening regarding the true nature of stewardship. Throughout my life, I never fully considered the consequences of being a poor steward. I believed that all my achievements stemmed solely from my own greatness as a person and leader, convinced that my hard work alone was the driving force behind my success. I often overlooked the impact my actions had on others, viewing people as mere tools to fulfil my own desires. I operated under the assumption that what I possessed was at my disposal to use however I wished. I dabbled in various get-rich-quick schemes, ultimately losing significant amounts of money. My approach was ruthless, as I convinced myself that I could always obtain more if I needed it. While my business was thriving; I believed my marriage was good. I now recognize that my marriage was suffering—reflecting back, I realize I was a horrible husband.

On February 16, 2022, during a "Business by the Book" class led by Uncle Moss, an epiphany struck me. As we discussed stewardship, I was confronted with the stark realization that I had been living a lie, far removed from the truth. The Holy Spirit came upon me, shaking my very core, asking if I truly desired what the others in my group had. Their words resonated with truth, and in that moment, I felt deeply convicted of my misguided path. Though I was a heavy cannabis user and had some awareness of God, I

had never truly known Him or understood His will for my life. The Holy Spirit urged me to change my ways. The next morning, after much prayer and with unwavering faith that God could help me turn my life around, I surrendered my addiction—astonishingly, I experienced not a single craving thereafter. I was embarking on a journey to become a better person and a more responsible steward.

I first needed to comprehend what it meant to be a steward and the responsibilities that came with it. According to the Oxford Dictionary, stewardship is defined as: The act of taking care of or managing something, such as property, an organization, money, or valuable objects.”

What has God entrusted to all of us, regardless of our personal circumstances? He has given us at least five assets for which we will ultimately be held accountable before Christ regarding our stewardship:

1. Our physical bodies
2. Our conscience
3. Our relationships with others
4. Our talents
5. Our possessions

1. Our physical bodies

Most of us are blessed with a healthy body from birth. While it was our parents’ responsibility to care for us, this stewardship transitioned to us as we gained the ability to think for ourselves. The Bible addresses laziness over a hundred times, highlighting its

significance as one of the deadly sins. I was one of the people that said, “What good is a healthy body if I’m just going to end up dead?” But upon rebirth, I desire a new body, not just one that can be patched up to appear new.

One of the biggest dangers of our time, in my view, is the comfort that breeds laziness. Many are too afraid to step outside their comfort zones. God designed us to lead healthy lives, to explore His creation, and to raise our children with an emphasis on health and physical activity. We are representatives of God, tasked with building His kingdom. How can we persuade others if we appear as though we’ve been pulled from the gutters? How can we effectively steward anything if we neglect the very first gift that God entrusted to us?

Research has shown that a healthy body fosters a healthy mind, which naturally leads us to our second point.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 states: “19 Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; 20 you were bought at a price. Therefore, honour God with your bodies.”

2. Our conscience

2.1. Gift

First and foremost, our conscience is a gift from God. He has endowed humans with the remarkable ability to identify and reflect upon our internal thoughts—both positive and negative—regarding various ideas, actions, and situations. In Romans 2:15, Paul

articulates that conscience is an intrinsic understanding, “written on every heart” of each individual.

Instead of adopting a preachy stance on matters of conscience—thinking, “I know what other families should and shouldn’t do”—we should recognize that our conscience is a precious gift. It is something to appreciate in ourselves and others, and we ought to engage with it gracefully.

2.2. Our Conscience is a Guide

Our conscience serves as a vital guide. A friend of mine once described it to her children as “a moral compass that directs individuals toward a clearer understanding of right and wrong.” This divine gift helps us navigate the choices we face daily. As we encounter various circumstances and decisions, our conscience leads us through the decision-making process.

We should teach our children to be attentive to their feelings of guilt when they make poor choices or commit sins. Such feelings are the conscience guiding them toward repentance and reconciliation. By becoming attuned to our conscience, we can discern whether our thoughts and actions are steering us away from the true north of God's righteous standards.

2.3. Calibration

Third, our conscience requires calibration. One of the challenges we face is that our consciences have been affected by the fall. While it possesses inherent goodness, it are nonetheless flawed and need consistent adjustment. On one hand, the human conscience tends toward positive moral ideals, gravitating toward justice, goodness, and truth. On the

other hand, we can dull our consciences through sin and deceit. Additionally, we may harden our consciences by judging others harshly for making different choices than our own.

Fortunately, we have access to God's Word and the guidance of the Holy Spirit to correct our consciences, helping us avoid the twin pitfalls of lawlessness and legalism. When we measure our lives against the Bible's teachings, God graciously awakens our conscience to the truth. After all, God is devoted to our sanctification and transformation. He desires to make us more like Jesus, and the calibration of our conscience is a vital part of that process.

Have you had conversations with your children about their conscience? As parents, our motivation should align with Paul's instruction to Timothy. Paul urged him to live with "love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith" (1 Tim. 1:5). By imparting these foundational principles about the conscience, we can empower our children to develop godly discernment in navigating the world around them.

Historically, the Puritans and other reformed groups regarded the conscience as one of God's most significant gifts. Nurturing one's conscience with God's Word and keeping it pure was viewed as a paramount stewardship issue.

3. Our relationships with others

3.1. Cultivate Empathy and Compassion

One of the most fundamental ways to reflect God's love is by cultivating empathy and compassion. This means striving to understand others' perspectives and experiences, listening attentively, and responding with kindness and care. By demonstrating empathy,

we create a safe and supportive environment for others to share their struggles and joys, thereby strengthening the bonds of our relationships.

3.2. Practice Forgiveness

Forgiveness is essential for embodying God's love in our relationships. When we forgive those who have sinned against us, we mirror the grace and mercy that God has shown us. By letting go of resentment and bitterness, we open the door for healing and reconciliation, fostering deeper connections with others.

3.3. Speak Truth with Love

Effective communication is vital for healthy relationships. Speaking truth with love allows us to express our thoughts, feelings, and needs in a respectful and compassionate manner. This approach cultivates mutual understanding, enhancing trust and intimacy in our relationships.

3.4. Serve Others

Serving those around us is a tangible expression of God's love, reflecting the selflessness of Christ. By actively seeking opportunities to serve and support others, we demonstrate our commitment to their well-being, thus strengthening our relationships and fostering a sense of purpose and meaning in our lives.

3.5. Extend Grace

Extending grace is a powerful way to showcase God's love in our relationships. Grace involves offering kindness, forgiveness, and understanding—even when it feels undeserved. By choosing to see the best in others and granting them the benefit of the

doubt, we create an atmosphere of love and acceptance that can transform our interactions and significantly impact those around us.

Reflecting God's love in our relationships is a transformative endeavour, bringing profound joy, meaning, and fulfilment to our lives. By cultivating empathy and compassion, practicing forgiveness, speaking truth with love, serving others, and extending grace, we establish an environment of love and acceptance that can rejuvenate our relationships and draw us closer to the heart of God. As we journey through life, let us remain mindful of the numerous ways we can reflect God's love to those around us and strive to live with the intention of transforming our relationships and spreading the love of Christ to the world.

1 Peter 1:22: "Love one another deeply, from the heart."

4. Our Talents

When I reflect on talents, the "Parable of the Talents" (Matthew 25:14-30) immediately comes to mind. God has created us all uniquely, each with different talents, and it is up to us how we ultimately use them. This parable offers valuable lessons.

4.1. Success is a Product of Our Work (Work is an Eternal Blessing)

In the book of Genesis, we see that God placed Adam in the garden to work it and care for it. We were designed to work. As Christians, we have a mission that our Lord expects us to fulfil in the here and now.

Too many evangelical Christians today perceive their salvation merely as a "bus ticket to heaven," believing it doesn't matter what they do while "waiting for the bus." The Parable of the Talents teaches us what we should engage in while anticipating the return of our King: we are to work diligently, using our talents to glorify God, serve the common good, and

advance His kingdom. Biblical success entails labouring faithfully in the present, leveraging all the talents God has given us to yield a return that meets the Master's expectations.

4.2. God Provides Everything We Need to Fulfil His Calling (God Pays for What He Orders)

Have you ever pondered what a talent is worth in today's currency? While it's challenging to pin down an exact value, a talent in the New Testament signifies a significant sum of money. We might feel sympathy for the servant who received only one talent; however, he essentially received the equivalent of a million rand, which he buried in his backyard. He was entrusted with more than enough to meet the master's expectations.

Just as the master expected his servants to do more than merely preserve what had been entrusted to them, God expects us to generate a return by actively using our talents for productive purposes. Each servant was given sufficient resources to produce more; the same is true for the gifts God has granted us. As the Apostle Paul writes in *Ephesians 2:10*:
“For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

We seldom associate this verse with our work, but we should.

4.3. Not Everyone is Created Equal

One of the most commonly overlooked aspects of this parable is the second half of verse fifteen, which states that the master gives to each servant talents, “...each according to his ability.” The master recognized that the one-talent servant could not produce as much as the five-talent servant. While we may want to protest this as unfair, our own experiences remind us that diversity is woven into the fabric of creation.

However, despite the differences in the number of talents given, there is equality found within the Parable of the Talents. This equality lies in the fact that it requires just as much effort for the five-talent servant to produce five more talents as it does for the two-talent servant to yield two additional talents. This is why the master rewards them equally: he measures success by degrees of effort, a standard we should adopt as well.

4.4. We Work for the Master, Not Ourselves

The money entrusted to the servants is not their own; any profits generated from the capital are not theirs to keep. These servants are merely stewards of the master's investment, and it is their stewardship that the master seeks to measure.

We should strive to maximize the use of our talents—not for our own selfish desires but to glorify God. Acknowledging that we live in a fallen world, we understand that our work may come with difficulties due to the curse of sin. Nonetheless, we can find satisfaction and joy in doing our best with what God has given us in the circumstances He has placed us, aiming for success that honours Him.

4.5. We Will Be Held Accountable

The Parable of the Talents is not about salvation or works righteousness; rather, it centres on how we use our abilities to fulfil our earthly callings. It is fundamentally about stewardship.

The unfaithful servant in this parable didn't waste the master's money in the traditional sense—he squandered an opportunity. Consequently, he faced judgment as wicked and lazy. We are each accountable for what we do for God with the gifts we have been given, and one day, we will have to answer for our stewardship.

What we hear from the Master on that day will ultimately depend on how we have chosen to use our talents.

5. Our Possessions

God has blessed each of us with possessions, which may include wealth and relationships—our spouses, children, family, and more. When we begin to understand that everything ultimately belongs to God and that what we have attained in life is solely by His grace, we start to reconsider how we use these possessions.

Everything in life is a gift from God, and it all belongs to Him. If we misuse our possessions, God has the authority to take them away. We should use what we have to glorify His name and expand His kingdom. If we build according to His patterns and properly use what He has entrusted to us, He will bless us with even more to steward.

It's important to recognize that God doesn't need anything from us, nor can we bribe Him for more since everything already belongs to Him. Our role is to be obedient to whatever He requests from us.

For instance, when God commanded Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, Abraham did not hesitate; he obeyed without question. God recognized Abraham's heart and devotion, knowing he was willing to give up his most prized possession. In return, God blessed Abraham even more because He saw that everything given to Abraham was still considered God's and would be used for His kingdom.

I've learned from native cultures that one cannot receive with closed hands. If God wants to bless you, you must be willing to open your hands to give what is needed; only then can you truly receive the blessings He has for you.

Psalm 24:1 state, “*The earth is the Lord’s, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it.*” As stewards, we have the significant responsibility to carry out what God has entrusted us with—to bring glory to His name in everything we do each day. We are called to build His kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven, following His command in Genesis to take care of all that He created and to rule over it as intended.

Genesis 1:26-30 records:

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, 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.