

STEWARDSHIP: THE FOUNDATION OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Introduction: This morning I want to talk with you about stewardship. Stewardship may be one of the most abused and misunderstood words in all of Christianity. It is almost always used in connection with money, but that is only a very small part of its meaning and application. So, this morning I hope to give you both an accurate and a complete understanding of this biblical idea of stewardship.

I want to say right from the start that stewardship as a concept is rather easy to understand. Unfortunately, attempting to successfully translate the concept into an overall lifestyle may likely be the most difficult thing you have ever attempted in your Christian life. Stewardship is so broad and so deep in its ramifications that even discussing stewardship in one short sermon may actually be far too ambitious an undertaking. But under the circumstances, since my remaining time with you is very limited, I believe sharing only one sermon on stewardship with you will be better than sharing none at all. In light of this, I present this stewardship sermon with no little degree of caution and trepidation.

What I want to share with you this morning will be at best nothing more than a possible starting point to begin your thinking about stewardship and the role God wants it to play in your lives.

It is also important for you to know that just because I am preaching on this topic, I am not saying or even implying that I have a successful handle on this concept of stewardship in every area of my life. I continue to struggle to achieve an acceptable level of biblical stewardship in a number of areas of my life. So areas have been easy and some have been and continue to be a real challenge.

Paul apparently had a similar stewardship struggle as well. In Romans 7:15; “For that which I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I *would* like to *do*, but I am doing the very thing I hate.” Or, as Jesus said of his disciples who fell asleep while He prayed in Gethsemane, “the spirit indeed *is* willing, but the flesh *is* weak.” (Matt. 26:41)

So, please do not feel overwhelmed as I attempt to lay out for you this morning the entire stewardship landscape for your consideration this morning.

I. The Concept of Stewardship

- A. Principle #1 - God owns all people and all things by virtue of Him being creator of the universe
 1. Ps. 24:1; The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it;
 2. If you make something, you naturally would own it.
- B. Principle #2 - God owns all Christians by virtue of His redemption through His son, Jesus Christ
 1. Titus 2:14; “who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, zealous for good deeds.” (NASB)
 - a. S&H Green Stamps
 - b. Gold Bond Stamps
 - c. Redemption store
 2. I Cor. 6:20; “you were bought at a price.”
 3. Eph. 1:14; “who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.”
 4. God owns us twice once because He made us and once because he bought us back - Illustration of little boy and sail boat
- C. Principle #3 - We therefore own nothing. We are called by God to stewards to simply carry out His wishes for his property
 1. Until we become more driven to fulfill the Great Commission than we are to enjoy ever increasing number of creature comforts, the church and ministries will continue to be substantially under-funding.
 2. Jimmy Mitchell – “Do you think He would mind if I kept a dime.”

II. The Application of Stewardship

- A. Meaning of steward - "To Manage, Administer, Plan"
 1. Caretaker
 2. Slave
 3. Servant
 4. Manager
- B. The three stewardship questions – Which is the right question to ask?
 1. What do I want to do with my possessions?
 2. What do I want to do with God's possessions?
 3. What does God want me to do with His possessions?
- C. The scope of our stewardship responsibilities
 1. Our time - Ephesians 5:15-17; "Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is." (NASB)
 - a. Bible study/quiet time
 - b. Work schedule
 - c. Recreation time
 - d. Entertainment activities
 - e. Continuing education
 - f. The continual Struggle: The Tyranny of the Urgent vs. The Priority of the Important
 2. Our talents/gifts - Pet. 4:10; "As each one has received a *special* gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."
 - a. developing your talents/gifts
 - b. utilizing your talents/gifts
 - c. cultivating your talents/gifts in others
 3. Our bodies – Rom 12:1; "I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is your spiritual service of worship.*"
 - a. Our health – self-destructive habits
 - b. Our diet – self-destructive diets
 - c. Our exercise – self-destructive inactivity
 4. Our relationships – I Tim 3:12b; "good managers of *their* children and their own households." I Tim. 5:8; "But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever."
 - a. Our immediate family – spouse and children
 - (1.) Are you raising your children or God's children?
 - (2.) Are you married to your spouse or God's spouse?
 - b. Our extended family
 - c. Our neighborhood family
 - d. Our work family
 - e. Our church family
 5. Our possessions – Luke 12:48; "And from everyone who has been given much shall much be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more."
 - a. Our personal property
 - (1.) Do we know the difference between wants and needs?
 - (2.) Do we need this nice of a house?
 - (3.) Do we really need a new car?
 - (4.) We have redefined our wants as essential conveniences
 - b. Our Income/Consumption
 - (1.) Ask, "God, do you want us to spend Your money on this?"
 - (2.) Answer this question? "How much is enough?"
 - c. Our investments
 - (1.) Is what I am investing in reflect godly virtues and biblical moral values?

- (2.) The tension between putting money away for future and deploying those funds now for ministry
- d. Our giving
 - (1.) Tithing vs. Stewardship
 - (2.) These words have become synonyms, but they are actually antonyms
 - (a.) Tithing has to do with what we give
 - (b.) Stewardship has to do with what we keep
 - (3.) The reason that churches and ministries all over America struggle to survive financially is because Christians spend about 98% of what they make on themselves and their preferred lifestyle and only give about 2% of their incomes to support kingdom causes.
 - (4.) In recent research it was revealed that if everyone who claims to be a born-again Christian would just begin giving 10% of their incomes, the Kingdom would have access to an additional \$133 billion dollars annually. Do you have any idea how much money that is? All the giving that was collected as a result of 9/11 was only \$1.5 billion. This sum of money would operate over 133 million Heritage CCs. Or, if you want to use one of the largest ministries in America, it would entirely fund an additional 1,300 Focus on the Family sized ministries annually. Or, we could send an additional 3.3 million missionaries to the field.
 - (5.) I personally believe that ever dollar that is needed to completely underwrite the needs of every ministry in the world and to allow us to fulfill the Great Commission in our lifetime is already available to the Kingdom. The great tragedy is that the overwhelming majority of it is in the hands of the Christians who still see themselves of owners and not stewards.
 - (6.) Illustration: Giving by faith vs. Giving by percentage (LCD Projector)
- 6. The Gospel
 - a. I Corinthians 9:16-17; “For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel. For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me.” (NASB)
 - b. I Cor. 4:1-2 “Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy.”
 - c. Matthew 28:19-20 – Great Commission - Evangelism/Discipleship

III. The Rewards of Stewardship – Matt. 25:21; “Well done, thou good and faithful ‘steward’”

- A. Emotionally – Joy and satisfaction that we did it right!
- B. Physically – Better health and longevity to serve and honor God as long as it is His will.
- C. Spiritually – Knowing you have made the greatest possible contribution to expand the kingdom and fulfill the Great Commission

Conclusion: I think you can see just how all-encompassing the idea of stewardship is - it is a whole lot more than a just financial term.

I can tell you that there is no way you will be able to be faithful stewards in every area of your life, just by simply deciding to so. It is like building a home. You cannot build a home in a week. Likewise you can not become a good and faithful steward in a week either.

To build a home there is a clear sequence of events that must to take place if you want to end up with a well built house. First, you need to dig the footers, then pour the foundation, then you need to rough in the utilities, then you need to lay the floor joists, then the outside weight bearing walls, then the roof joists, and so on.

To try to put the roof on before the walls go up would be silly. Likewise putting all the drywall up before the plumbing lines are installed would require tearing out the newly installed drywall and then reinstalling it later.

I say all this to tell you that you simply cannot address effectively all the areas of stewardship at one time. If you attempt to, you will just go nuts or give it up as hopeless. I would encourage you to make a list of all the areas of stewardship that I have mentioned and add any others you think of and then prioritize all the stewardship areas and begin working on one area at a time. Once you have that area down, go on to the next. You must recognize that this is a lifetime pilgrimage that you will be traveling for the rest of your life and even then you will likely never master the role of being God's steward.

But it is a journey worth traveling. And with each area you take stewardship control of, your life will be richer and fuller and you will be more capable of being used by God in even greater ways from that point forward.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER— E. G. “JAY” LINK

E. G. “Jay” Link has a unique combination of being an ordained minister with a Master Divinity degree in Biblical Theology and a professional Stewardship planning coach who for over 40 years has been working with very affluent Christian families to enable them to optimize their Kingdom impact with all that the Lord has entrusted to them to manage. After retiring from his personal practice, he then served for five years as Director of Taylor University's Stewardship Planning Ministry, which he launched for them. Most recently, Jay founded the Stewardship Resource Group to serve Christian ministries, colleges, and churches to better minister to their highest capacity families. He has written six books, hundreds of articles and has provided extensive training curriculum for hundreds of professional financial and legal advisors in how to provide stewardship planning services for their clients.