

KEEPING THE HEART OF GOD AT THE HEART OF LIVING

There is no better way to practically define what total life stewardship really is than with this simple phrase: *keeping the heart of God at the heart of living*. As we have already learned, stewardship is all about carrying out the wishes of God, the Owner, as one of the caretakers of His property. We need to be reminded again of Psalm 24:1 (NASB), which expresses this truth, *The earth is the Lord's and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it*.

This concept of life stewardship is especially challenging because even though we may be more than willing to *intellectually* acknowledge that God owns everything, on a daily basis we do not *functionally* live as though He owns anything. To illustrate this disconnect between what we say we believe and how we actually live, choose which one of these three questions is the one we should be asking in regards to our material possessions:

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?

Believers always choose #3 as the correct question. Intellectually, we all get it and we accept it. But the inconsistency is this: Practically speaking, we live as though #2 was the right question to ask. We are more than happy to acknowledge that it all belongs to God, but when it comes to making decisions about what to do with what we possess, we seldom, if ever, seek any guidance from the Owner on what we should do. Question #3 should drive us to constantly seek directions from the Owner concerning His desires for the possessions that we manage.

Consider a few common examples that demonstrate the presence of this disconnect in our lives:

- When you bought your last car, did you ask God if this was the car He wanted you to buy with His money?
- When your money manager proposed an investment portfolio for you, did you go to the Lord and ask Him if these were the places He wanted His money invested?
- The last time you went shopping for clothes, did you ask your Father if these were the clothes He wanted you to buy and wear?
- When you had a few hours of free time, did you ask the Master what He wanted you to do with it?

You get the point; we are all routinely guilty of intellectually acknowledging that God owns everything, while we live, spend, and invest like it is our own. The cornerstone of the stewardship message is to both fully acknowledge God's ownership *and* consistently allow God to direct you in what to do with all He has entrusted you to manage.

However, there is an even more serious problem for us than this superficial inconsistency between what we say we believe and how we live. The real problem is so deep within us—and so dangerous to us—that we should take a long pause and ponder it very carefully: *All our sin, at its core, is the result of personal selfishness.* Take a minute to consider this. All our sin, at its core, is the result of *personal selfishness*. The truth is we are our own worst enemies. We are continually getting in the way of God’s best for us because we are so consumed with *our own desires, our own rights, our own dreams, our own passions, and our own way* that we continually fall into sins of either commission (doing the wrong things) or omission (not doing the right things). Think about it. Why do we lie? Why do we cheat or steal? Why are we fearful? Why do we hate? Why do we ignore someone in need? Why do we commit adultery or lose our temper? Why do we become addicted to drugs, or work, or entertainment? Why do we covet what others have? Why do we wear “masks” around others? Why do we not want to submit to God? We could go on and on, but the fact is, it always circles back around to self. And as the old cartoon character Pogo confessed, “We have met the enemy and he is us.”

Our practical rejection of the life of a devoted and obedient steward is just another example of how *self* gets in the way of God’s best for us. We want to be in charge and make the decisions. We want to “pull the trigger” and get things done. We must face the life-changing fact that we are not the Owner, and we are not in charge. We are managers who are expected to meticulously carry out the wishes of the all-loving and all-powerful Owner. What an honor; what a responsibility.

Someone once noted that at the center of SIN is the letter “I.” We will always find “I”—self, ego, looking out for number one—at the center of our sin.

- If we really want to live, we must first die to self. *For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.* (Matthew 16:25, NIV)
- If we want to be first, we must let everyone else go ahead of us. *The last will be first, and the first last.* (Matthew 20:16, ESV)
- If we want to be truly free, we must submit to slavery. *Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave.* (Matthew 20:26-27, NIV)
- If we want to be great, we must strive to make everyone else greater than ourselves. *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.* (Philippians 2:3, NIV; see also Luke 9:48)

The reason living as a steward is so challenging to practice is because we must get *self* out of the way. As long as we are fallen creatures with a fallen nature, we will have to wrestle daily with the lingering ghosts of our own selfishness, until we someday finally shed this “dirt body” and move on to better things. In the meantime, we must resist with every ounce of our being the temptation to inappropriately assume the throne and play “little gods” over stuff that does not even belong to us.

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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.