

BEGINNING THE JOURNEY

The Steward's Characteristics:

"The Defining Characteristics of a Good and Faithful Steward"

In this lesson you will be introduced to the three defining characteristics of a good and faithful steward that will serve as a helpful "measuring stick" for you to evaluate how well you are doing as a trusted steward of the Owner.

Now that we are clear on what it means to be a steward and how we can get our directions from the Owner on what He wants us to do with what He has entrusted to us, let's unpack specifically what the life of an obedient steward should look like. In this lesson, we are going to consider the three dominant life-characteristics present in a good and faithful steward. As we examine each of these three characteristics, may it enable us to better assess how well we are personally doing actually living the life of a good and faithful steward.

#1 – A Good and Faithful Steward Lives an Examined Life

This practice of living a life of regular self-examination is often referenced in the Bible. In II Corinthians 13:5 Paul told the believers in Corinth, *"Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves..."* He also tells them in I Corinthians 11:28 that, *"A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup (referring to taking communion)."* Even Jeremiah exhorts his people in Lamentations 3:40, *"Let us test and examine our ways."*

There is nothing more appropriate for a faithful steward of someone else's resources to routinely examine how effectively he is doing in carrying out his responsibilities. Stewards will be continually examining their behavior – their motives, their thoughts, their attitudes, the direction their lives are headed and if their life is a close replica of the life of Jesus.

Unfortunately, we far too often only examine our lives when something is going wrong or we face some significant crisis. In the midst of that trial, we finally pause to take stock of our lives to determine what might have caused this difficult situation. Crisis examination is certainly better than no examination at all, but a good and faithful steward will be doing routine self-examination as part of his or her daily life.

Pilots say that a plane is off course about 95% of the time it is flying due to wind currents, barometric pressure, etc. Because of this, the pilot must be vigilant in making continual minor

course corrections to bring the plane back on course. If he doesn't, he will find, after several hours of flying that his plane is actually hundreds of miles off course.

The good and faithful steward is like the attentive pilot in flight - continually examining the course of his or her life to determine if it is still on the flight pattern that has been set by the "Tower." The steward will routinely make whatever midcourse corrections to his life that are needed regardless of how subtle or how dramatic they need to be. He recognizes that the gravitational pull of this world and the unpredictable winds of temptation can very quickly get him off course.

Socrates correctly concluded, "The unexamined life is not worth living."

So, would the word *examined* describe your life?

#2 – A Good and Faithful Steward Lives a *Controlled Life*

Living a controlled life is a foundational characteristic of a good and faithful steward. Self-control is one of the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:23). Paul repeats several times in his letter to Titus that believers are to live a controlled life. Elders are to have their lives under control in Titus 1:8. Older men are to be self-controlled in Titus 2:2. Young men and women are to be self-controlled as well in Titus 2:5-6.

Paul uses the discipline and self-control of an athlete in training to illustrate the controlled life of a steward in I Corinthians 9:25. Just two verses later he applies self-control to himself when he says, "*But I discipline my body and keep it under control...*"

I think Solomon makes this point best when he says in Proverbs 25:28, "*A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls.*" There is nothing to contain him and he lives a life that is out of control in one or more ways.

We all know people who lack self-control. They cannot control their tempers. They cannot control their appetites. They cannot control their emotions. They cannot control their tongues. They cannot control their sex drives. They cannot control their spending. In one or more ways they are lacking self-control. They are "*like a city broken into and left without walls.*"

The good and faithful steward, to the contrary, is constantly *restraining* and *retraining* his natural impulses to keep all of these fleshly desires (both good and bad) under control. He is diligently working day-by-day and often minute-by-minute to keep his head in the game and not allow "*the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions...*" as it says in I John 2:16 to break down the walls of self-control that is a defining characteristic of a good and faithful steward.

John Milton said well, “He who reins within himself and rules passions, desires and fears is more than a king.” The steward who is in control will be both useful and effective in obediently serving his Master.

So, would the word *controlled* describe your life?

#3 – A Good and Faithful Steward Lives a *Sacrificial* Life

The third characteristic that will commonly be seen in the life of a good and faithful steward is sacrifice. We simply cannot be good and faithful stewards if sacrifice is not a part of our lives.

Paul calls us in Romans 12:1 to be “*living sacrifices*.” Jesus challenges every steward that if he wants to follow Him in Luke 9:23, “*let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.*” The cross in Jesus’ day was used for only one purpose, to kill someone. So the imagery He is giving us is quite dramatic. He is not calling us to a one-time sacrificial death for “the cause.” The sacrifice He is describing here is to be a daily sacrifice. Each day, we are to put to death our wishes, our desires, our agenda, our comforts, our free time and our hopes for the greater good of the Kingdom and the world we seek to win.

In his book *The Kingdom and the Cross*, James Bryan Smith suggests that, “If our God is self-sacrificing and seeks to bless others who have done nothing to merit it, then we should be people who are self-sacrificing and who bless others who have not earned it.”

There is no more powerful demonstration of a good and faithful steward than when he willingly and sacrificially gives to others without any consideration of their worthiness to receive his gift.

Regardless of how great or small the need or opportunity, he gladly sacrifices whatever he currently stewards for the good of others.

John gives us the extent we must be willing to live a sacrificial life. He said in I John 3:16, “*By this we know love, that He laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.*”

If sacrificing our lives is the maximum sacrifice we might be called to make as a steward, it seems to put into a clear context the modest sacrifices we make when we give some of the money, or the time or the talents we have been entrusted to steward to help others.

So, would the word *sacrificial* describe your life?

If we want to be identified as a good and faithful steward and someday hear those wonderful words, “*Well done,*” we must (1) routinely examine ourselves to be sure that our lives are on the right course that has been set by our Master. (2) We need to be vigilant that we control our appetites and impulses to ensure that they do not end up controlling us. (3) We need to be regularly and generously sacrificing what we have been entrusted with in hopes of bringing a little bit of heaven to those who are here on earth. Living the life of a good and faithful steward is a tremendous challenge. So, let me ask, are you up to the challenge?

STUDY GUIDE QUESTIONS

1. What is your initial reaction to the message of this lesson?
2. Which of these three areas of life stewardship (examined life, controlled life, or sacrificial life) do you most struggle with? Why?
3. When do you most often find yourself willing and desiring to carefully examine your life? Are you more of a routine self-examination person or a life-crisis examination person?
4. Why do we so seldom take the time to do a thorough self-assessment of our lives and the direction we are headed?
5. Share some examples of people you know who are living examples of what Proverbs 25:28 says, “A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls.”
6. In what areas of your life do you currently struggle most to keep under control?
7. What do you think Paul means when he says in Romans 12:1 that we are to be “living sacrifices?”
8. How does the ownership issue of our possessions hinder us from living a more sacrificial and generous life than we do now?
9. What would be the hardest material thing for you to let go of (sacrifice), if the Lord were to call you to release it?
10. For you, what is most challenging about John’s statement in 1 John 3:16, “By this we know love, that He laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers?”
11. What is going to change in your life because of what you have learned in this lesson?