

## STUDY GUIDE: LIVING THE EXAMINED LIFE (MODULE 102)

### Lesson #1 - Examining our Motives | Keeping the Heart of God and the Heart of Living

*In this lesson you will come to appreciate why the will of God must be the central focus of living as a disciple of Jesus. You will also be presented with what is always the number one enemy of being a good and faithful steward – selfishness – and how to overcome it.*

There is no better way to practically define what total life stewardship really is than with the 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 His caretakers of His property. We need to be reminded again of Psalm 24:1, which expresses this truth, “*The earth is the Lord’s and all it contains, the world and all who live in it.*”

This concept of life stewardship is exceedingly 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 correctly 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 here is the inconsistency. 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 are going to do with it. And it is this question #3 that should drive us to be constantly seeking to get directions from the Owner for what He wants us to do with His possessions we manage.

Consider a few simple common examples that should 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 free hours of 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 all our own. The cornerstone of *The Steward’s Way* message is both fully acknowledging God’s ownership *and* consistently allowing God to direct you in what to do with all He has entrusted you to manage.

But there is something that is an even more serious problem for us than this superficial inconsistency

between what we say we believe and how we live. This real problem is so deep within us and so dangerous to us that we should take a long pause and ponder it very carefully. Here is our real problem: *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 sins of omission (not doing the right things). Think about it. Why do we lie? Why do we cheat? Why do we steal? Why are we fearful? Why do we hate? Why do we not help someone we see in need? Why do we commit adultery? Why do we 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."

The reason for making this point is because 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. We want to 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 in charge. We are managers who are expected to meticulously carry out the wishes of the all-loving and the 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, always looking out for number one—at the center of our sin.

- This is why Jesus said that 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 really 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 mean time, 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.

## STUDY GUIDE QUESTIONS

1. What is your initial reaction to the message of this lesson?
  
2. We were asked to choose which of these three stewardship questions was the right question to ask?
  - a. What do I want to do with all my possessions?
  
  - b. What do I want to do with God's possessions?
  
  - c. What does God want me to do with His possessions?...which one did you initially choose as the right stewardship question?
  
3. How have you seen an intellectual disconnect between knowing that question (c) is the right question and how you are currently living and handling your possessions?
  
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. Based upon what question you practically ask in your daily life, which of these three groups does it put you?
  
6. How does your own sinfulness/selfishness cause you to “inappropriately assume the throne and play little gods over stuff that does not even belong to you?
  
7. Has this been true in your life? If so, what are you going to do to change it? If not, how have you successfully avoided that temptation?
  
8. Since you committed in the previous study to intellectually and emotionally return everything you possess back to the rightful owner, how have you been doing living that way since then?
  
9. Over the past few months what have been the greatest obstacles you have faced in continuing to live like a steward instead of the owner?
  
10. How will your life change if from this day forward you seek to literally keep “The heart of God at the heart of your living?” What are you going to start doing differently?