

THE DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD AND FAITHFUL STEWARD

We have learned what it means to be a steward and how to get our directions about what the Owner wants us to do with what He has entrusted to us; now 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 of 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 at living the life of a good and faithful steward.

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

The practice of living a life of regular self-examination is often referenced in the Bible. In II Corinthians 13:5 (NIV), Paul instructs 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 (ESV), *Let us test and examine our ways*.

When you are a faithful steward of someone else's resources, there is nothing more appropriate for you to do than to routinely examine how effectively you are carrying out His responsibilities. Stewards will be continually examining their behavior—their motives, their thoughts, their attitudes, the direction their lives are headed, and whether their lives are a close replica of the life of Jesus. Unfortunately, we far too often examine our lives only 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 performing routine self-examination as part of his or her daily life.

Pilots say that a plane is off course about 95% of the time due to wind currents, barometric pressure, and other factors. 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 the necessary midcourse corrections to his life 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." 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 charged in Titus 1:8 to have their lives under control. Older men are instructed to be self-controlled in Titus 2:2. Paul also commands young men and women to be self-controlled 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*. With nothing to contain him, 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, appetites, emotions, tongues, sex drives, or 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, by contrast, 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 lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride in one's possessions* (I John 2:16, CSB) to break down the wall of self-control that is a defining characteristic of a good and faithful steward. John Milton wisely noted, "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. 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 a *"living sacrifice."* Jesus challenges every steward who wants to follow Him in Luke 9:23, *"let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me."* The imagery He is giving us is quite dramatic. In Jesus' day the cross was used for only one purpose—to kill someone. He is not calling us to a one-time, sacrificial death for "the cause." He is describing here 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 to willingly and sacrificially give to others without any consideration of their worthiness to receive the gift. Regardless of how great or small the need or opportunity, he gladly sacrifices whatever he currently stewards for the good of others. John illustrates the lengths to which we must be willing to go in living a sacrificial life. He exhorts us in I John 3:16 (ESV), *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 puts into a clear context the modest sacrifices we make when we give some of the money, time, or talents we have been entrusted to steward to help others. 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 routinely examine ourselves to be sure that our lives are on the right course that has been set by our Master. We need to be vigilant in controlling our appetites and impulses to ensure that they do not end up controlling us. 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. Are you up to the challenge?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR — 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.