

2. Good Stewardship

6 Remember this--a farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop. But the one who plants generously will get a generous crop. 7 You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. "For God loves a person who gives cheerfully." 8 And God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others. - 2 Corinthians 9:6-8 NLT

Beginning in the Garden of Eden, God has shared with us the responsibility to care for His creation and to be fruitful and multiply. We are called to be good stewards and responsible for everything He has trusted us with.

In 2 Corinthians, Paul reminds believers of the truth we found in our parable, that our faithful stewardship brings God joy, and will yield an abundance of blessings to us in return. What are the attitudes we are not to respond to in verse 7? How does verse 8 alleviate those issues?

WRAP-UP

The gifts God entrusts us with are a blessing, but they are also a responsibility that requires stewardship. In the parable we studied, the two servants who invested the man's money brought Him joy, and were promised to be given even more. But the servant who didn't know him, saw the man as shrewd, and did nothing with what he was given. Ultimately it was his lack of knowing Jesus, not his lack of investment that led to his destruction. If we know Jesus as Lord, then we trust in His faithfulness to provide for us and bless us as we faithfully invest what we have been given.

MEMORY VERSE

"The master said, 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let's celebrate together!'"

- Matthew 25:23 NLT

Challenge-

This week as you seek God, follow Paul's instruction to "decide in your heart how much to give." Trust God, He is faithful to provide.

Blossoming- Blessings and Responsibility

Flourish Week 9

INTRODUCTION

This weekend was our Pledge Sunday for the Flourish Campaign. It is the launching of a new season for our church. We have seen God moving at New Life and we are joining together to align with the vision to accommodate new growth in various ministry areas of our campus. It is a season of blossoms, the signs of what is to come. During this season we will be using what God has entrusted to us, and blessed us with, to further the work of His Kingdom. Jesus taught a parable of the Kingdom of Heaven which demonstrates how we might be good stewards of the blessings He has given us.

Ice Breaker

If you had an unexpected wind-fall of \$10,000 what would you do with it?

Key Passage

"The master said, 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let's celebrate together!'"

- Matthew 25:23 NLT

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. The Parable

Jesus often taught in parables, stories which would illustrate a spiritual truth. In Matthew chapter 25 He told the parable of a man who left on a long journey, but first entrusted some of His wealth with His servants.

14 "Again, the Kingdom of Heaven can be illustrated by the story of a man going on a long trip. He called together his servants and entrusted his money to them while he was gone. 15 He gave five bags of silver to one, two bags of silver to another, and one bag of silver to the last--dividing it in proportion to their abilities. He then left on his trip.

- Matthew 25:14- 15 NLT

The man who left on a long journey represents Jesus who has ascended to heaven but will return one day (but that's a whole different study). Who do the servants represent? Would you consider yourself a servant? Who did the money belong to? How did the man determine the amount he would give to each?

In this parable it is important to note that the servants were not being paid for their work, they were entrusted with the man's money in his absence. We usually think of what we have earned, or worked for, as belonging to us.

But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, as it is today. - Deuteronomy 8:18 NIV

How does Deuteronomy 8:18 change your perspective on the ultimate ownership of your wealth?

If we call Jesus LORD then we belong to Him, and since God has given us life, and the ability to earn income, then what we earn, even if by our own efforts, ultimately belongs to Him. Like the man in the parable, He has entrusted it to us. This is true of more than material wealth, it includes our family, our abilities, even all of His creation.

16 "The servant who received the five bags of silver began to invest the money and earned five more. 17 The servant with two bags of silver also went to work and earned two more. 18 But the servant who received the one bag of silver dug a hole in the ground and hid the master's money.

- Matthew 25:14-18 NLT

What was the difference in how the third servant handled the money compared to the other two? What do you think motivated him to do so?

19 "After a long time their master returned from his trip and called them to give an account of how they had used his money. ... 21 "The master was full of praise. 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let's celebrate together!' - Matthew 25:19, 21 NLT

This wasn't a quick trip, in fact the servants had to be patient and faithful with handling the man's money. But ultimately, they were called to give an account of how they had used what they were given.

The first two servants invested what they had been trusted with and both earned double their investment. Both received identical replies. What praise did they receive? What could they expect because of their good stewardship?

24 "Then the servant with the one bag of silver came and said, 'Master, I knew you were a harsh man, harvesting crops you didn't plant and gathering crops you didn't cultivate. 25 I was afraid I would lose your money, so I hid it in the earth. Look, here is your money back.' 26 "But the master replied, 'You wicked and lazy servant! If you knew I harvested crops I didn't plant and gathered crops I didn't cultivate, 27 why didn't you deposit my money in the bank? At least I could have gotten some interest on it.'

- Matthew 25:24-27 NLT

25 To the faithful you show yourself faithful, to the blameless you show yourself blameless, 26 to the pure you show yourself pure, but to the devious you show yourself shrewd.

- Psalm 18:25-26 NIV

When called to account, the third servant began with a description of the man. How well did the servant know the man? Do you think this was an accurate description? This could be the way some people view God if they don't know Him personally. It might also be a reflection on the character of this servant. Based on Psalm 18 what might this say about the servant's character?

The most precious gift God has given us is Jesus as our Savior. We can invest that relationship into others and multiply the impact of our salvation by inviting others into a relationship with Jesus.