

Stewardship Bible Study #1

Tomorrow – It's Only a Day Away

First read Luke 12:13-21

Then read the following commentary of the rich fool, or have it spoken aloud as a drama.

Let's see now. The blueprints are here. The building materials are being delivered by four o'clock this afternoon. The contractor said there will be over twenty workers on the site in the morning. We're ready to go. Without a doubt, these new barns are going to be the biggest in the whole region.

It's hard to believe it was just twenty-five years ago that I bought my first field. Back then I thought it was going to be the most exciting venture in my life. It was land enough to provide a modest crop and a modest income. The soil was good and the size was perfect for me to manage alone.

That "most exciting venture" turned out to be nothing more than a first step. Soon I owned two fields, then three. I hired a helper, then two, then ten. Now I own a dozen fields and have over fifty helpers, if you include the three housekeepers.

It wasn't easy. I worked hard. Fourteen hour days are not uncommon for me. I haven't had a vacation since.... My goodness, it's been a long time. Oh well, they say hard work never killed anyone. I've got respect, money and power. And I've earned it all.

These new barns will position me well for the future. With what I will be able to store in them, I could retire. Now, that's an interesting thought. I could take a little time to relax, eat, drink and be merry. That would be a change!

Do you know what I might do tomorrow? I just might take my fourteen year old daughter – or is she fifteen – to that new market in town. I've never been to the Mediterranean. I just might plan a trip to the coast. Or I just might walk down to the pond, sit under that big old tree, and read a book. Tomorrow will be a new day.

Oh, please excuse me. I see the first wagon load of barn boards is arriving.

Questions for Group Discussion or Personal Reflection

1. When is the best time in life to "relax, eat, drink and be merry"?
2. How can one adequately plan for the future and still be rich toward God?

Stewardship Bible Study #2

The Grass Is Always Greener

First read Luke 15:1-7

Then read the following commentary of the wandering sheep, or have it spoken aloud as a drama.

Well, they say the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence.

It's not that the grass at home isn't good; it's just that I have to share it. I find a new clump of sweet tender grass, and sooner than later, all those little lambs are muzzling in on it. Now, don't get me wrong, I think the lambs need to be cared for, but do they have to eat my grass? And those sick sheep...and the old ones, too... standing there just in view. It's so hard trying to eat a good meal with them on your conscience. My grass is my grass, and I should enjoy it in peace and quiet.

Then there is the problem of knowing what to do when I find a clump of "good eating" grass when I'm already full. I have to live with others in the flock while keeping the secret. The ones that haven't been as lucky as me in the search for grass start to get desperate and even begin to beg. They whine, "I'm hungry, do you think you could spare a bit of grass?" Stupid, lazy sheep. Let them find their own grass. If I shared my extra grass with them today, I might not have enough for myself tomorrow. I have to look after "number one" because no one else will.

That's the reason I'm heading off. I don't need the flock. I'm pretty resourceful and I shouldn't get lost. Now, if I can just sneak by the shepherd. He'll never even notice I'm gone.

Questions for Group Discussion or Personal Reflection

1. Is the person who doesn't "welcome sinners and eats with them" the one who is lost?
2. Is sharing with others a requirement of those who would live in community?

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Stewardship Bible Study #3

He's Got to be Kidding

First read Luke 18:18-25

Then read the following commentary of the rich ruler, or have it spoken aloud as a drama.

He's got to be kidding! Sell all I have, give the money to the poor, and follow him. Right!

The way this Jesus talks, you would think money grows on trees. Well, it doesn't. My father worked hard for what I've got. It's my money, it belongs to me, and I don't want anyone telling me what to do with it. If I give it all away, the town folks wouldn't respect me or listen to me. They wouldn't even know I existed. And I'm not sure what my friends would say, that is if they're still talking to me.

Then he says, "...give it to the poor". Like I said, it's my money. If they need money, let them go and work for it like my father did. They're just lazy people and they're always begging. I already flip a coin or two to them. Now he wants me to give them my whole bank account.

Then, if that's not enough, he's demanding that I follow him. I guess that would be okay if he stuck to meditation and healing a few sick people. But he goes way beyond that. He keeps getting into trouble with the powers that be. He talks about changing the way we view the world. He insists the last will be first and that we need to be a slave to all. No wonder there are so many people wanting him out of the way. If he keeps putting up roadblocks like this, it will be tough for those of us who are rich to keep power, let alone share in the reign of God. He knows he's in trouble. He keeps talking about going to the cross. Forget that! I like things the way they are right now.

Questions for Group Discussion or Personal Reflection

1. Jesus tells the rich ruler to "sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor...then come follow me" (Luke 18:22). Is Jesus making the same point when he earlier says, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23)? Compare the two statements.
2. Why is generosity required of those who would follow Jesus?

Stewardship Bible Study #4

I Was a Great Magician

First read Acts 8:4-25

Then read the following commentary of Simon, or have it spoken aloud as a drama.

I was a great magician – the best magician in the whole region! I'd put on a show and people would flock to see me. Everyone was looking for quality entertainment, and I gave it to them. I was so good, they thought they were looking at the power of God. It was a good business to be in.

Then those Christians came to town. Phillip was the first. He went around Samaria telling about this Messiah and soon he got the crowds. He had a good show, too, with people screaming their lungs out as evil spirits left them, paralyzed and lame people walking, and people lining up to be baptized. It's hard to compete with that kind of an act. Even so, we hit it off pretty well. I liked him. I cut my show tour short and joined his group.

It wasn't much later that Peter and John teamed up with Phillip. The show those Christians put on got even better. The people these two would lay hands on began shaking and speaking a strange language. Everyone was filled with the Spirit. It was something to see!

I thought to myself, "I'd like to do that!" You know, it would be a great addition to my repertoire to be able to perform miracles and fill people with the Spirit. So I went to Peter, offered him a little cash, and asked him for the secret to the power.

He went crazy! He began yelling at me and jumping up and down. You better believe I was looking for the nearest way out. He told me and my money "to go to hell" because I thought I could buy "God's gift" with cash. He called me "wicked" and "bitter" and commanded me to get on my knees and pray for forgiveness.

He did get my knees shaking and I've been pretty nervous ever since. I keep wondering, "What if he's right? What if God's upset with me?"

I think I'll ask Peter to pray for me. Wouldn't you?

Questions for Group Discussion or Personal Reflection

1. Are there things in life that money just can't buy? What are they? If we can't buy them, how do we get them?
2. What role does our money have in revealing the spirit and grace of God?

Stewardship Bible Study #5

An Entrepreneur's Lament

First read Acts 16:16-24

Then read the following commentary of the slave owner, or have it spoken aloud as a drama.

Let me tell you about the best investment I ever made. A while ago I bought a slave girl at the market. At the time, I thought she would be okay. She could clean house, mop floors, take out the garbage. But it turned out I got a real bonus. She read fortunes! Don't ask me how she did it; it was some sort of spirit inside her.

Anyway, do you know how many people these days want their fortunes read? They line up. Will it be love or loneliness? Wealth or poverty? Happiness or grief? They want to know, and they're willing to pay to find out. And pay they did. I charged top dollar and business was booming. Yes, my little slave girl was made out of pure gold.

Life was good until the day someone named Paul came by. Customers were waiting in line and she took after this clown. She didn't leave him and his friends alone for a minute. She followed them around for days. And during all that time, she kept on shouting crazy things about "God" and "salvation".

Now, I'm not denying she made a pest out of herself, but Paul shouldn't have done what he did! He drove out that spirit inside her! She can't tell fortunes any more. No fortunes, no money – it's as simple as that. Now, I ask you, how am I supposed to live?

Of course I had him arrested and thrown in jail. Wouldn't you have done the same?

Questions for Group Discussion or Personal Reflection

1. How do we determine what are ethical and unethical ways to make money?
2. Would you deny a person his or her income if you thought the occupation contributed to injustice, conflict, or environmental damage?

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Stewardship Bible Study #6

It's Not Easy Being Governor

First read Acts 24

Then read the following commentary of Felix, or have it spoken aloud as a drama.

It's not easy being governor. You have to keep people happy.

For example, just over a year ago I had to act as a judge in the trial of an itinerant preacher named Paul. He wasn't appreciated by the Jews. They said he stirred up trouble, that he was the ringleader of a Nazarene sect, and that he tried to do inappropriate rituals in the temple.

Paul put up a good defence at his trial. He was not out to deny his Jewish heritage. He claimed that he never missed making his offering, and he gave pretty clear evidence that he never tried to agitate the people to go up against the authorities.

My wife is Jewish and I knew a little about the issues upsetting his accusers. I also knew he was innocent. But if I let him go, there would have been riots in the streets. So, I put him under house arrest. He could have a few liberties and his friends could visit. A good compromise, I thought.

Anyway, prisoners appreciate this special kind of treatment. If they think they're getting favours and if I really act interested in their welfare, they slip me a bit of money. Why not? It's a good deal for them. They're getting special treatment and they know it. The other option is to be in chains or worse. It's a good deal for me, too. I look like a compassionate leader and my retirement fund gets a boost.

Well, I'm off to another visit with Paul. He hasn't paid me anything yet but it shouldn't be too long. I tell you, I'm earning this money. You should hear what he's telling me. It's frightening stuff.

Questions for Group Discussion or Personal Reflection

1. What motivates us to be compassionate?
2. Does our need to give generously conflict with our desire for personal security?

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