

LEAD! C.6 Stewardship and Simplicity

In Which God Reminds Us That All "Our" Money Is Ultimately "His" -- And That's A Good Thing!

Stewardship is closely related to the virtue of [generosity](#) we studied in the last module. While that lesson focused primarily on our attitude towards money, here we will focus more on our attitude towards God. True stewardship includes financial wisdom, but is also a general attitude toward all of our resources: e.g., time, energy, and attention.

In particular, we practice the discipline of simplicity in order to both *reflect* and *reinforce* our devotion to the Master of whom we are stewards. This prevents us from wasting our resources trying to prop up our own glory -- which paradoxically is what allows God to glorify us in Him!

Memory Verse: *"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."* -- [Luke 12:34](#) (NKJV)

Assigned Reading

1. [Richard Foster: *Celebration of Discipline*](#)
 - Part II. The Outward Disciplines
 - 6. Simplicity
2. [Donald Whitney: *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*](#)
 - 8. Stewardship
3. [Eugene Peterson: *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*](#)
 - 9. Work: "If God Doesn't Build the House"
4. [Ruth Haley Barton: *Sacred Rhythms*](#)
 - 8. Sabbath: Establishing Rhythms of Work and Rest

Anecdote

Read [Mark 12:1-17, 38-44](#). What makes for a good Steward?

Bible

[Luke 12](#)

In the [previous chapter](#), Jesus has some very sharp words for the Pharisees -- and He isn't done yet:

[12:1](#) In the meantime, when an innumerable multitude of people had gathered together, so that they trampled one another, He began to say to His [disciples](#) first of all, "Beware of the [leaven](#) of the [Pharisees](#), which is [hypocrisy](#)."

The word hypocrisy implies "playing a part." Jesus is warning his disciples against the seductive idea that righteousness can be measured by how we act in public, and that our "private" sins don't really matter [C.1]:

[2](#) For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not

be known. ³Therefore whatever you have spoken in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have spoken in the ear in inner rooms will be proclaimed on the housetops.

More importantly, we shouldn't be concerned with a human audience at all:

⁴"And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. ⁵But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!

Yet paradoxically, he simultaneously exhorts us not to fear, because we are valued by God:

⁶"Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God. ⁷But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

The important thing, apparently, is to stay on God's side:

⁸"Also I say to you, whoever confesses Me before men, him the Son of Man also will confess before the angels of God. ⁹But he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God.

Especially when it comes to the Holy Spirit:

¹⁰"And anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but to him who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven.

Jesus himself came not to condemn, but to forgive (cf. [Luke 23:34](#)). However, when the Holy Spirit speaks -- in the life of Jesus, the words of Scripture, and His whispers into our own hearts -- then either we obey, or we call Him a liar and the devil; with dire consequences! [C.2]

Conversely, once we learn how to listen and submit to the Holy Spirit, we need fear neither God nor man:

¹¹"Now when they bring you to the synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry about how or what you should answer, or what you should say.

¹²For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say."

Alas, the crowd -- like us -- wants Jesus to deal with more earthly problems:

¹³Then one from the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."

But Jesus refused to be drawn in:

[14](#)But He said to him, "Man, who made Me a [judge](#) or an [arbitrator](#) over you?"

Moreover, he saw the dangerous attitude behind that request:

[15](#)And He said to them, "Take heed and beware of [covetousness](#), for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses."

Money is awfully useful to those of us who live on the earth, but that very utility makes it a potential idol:

[16](#)Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. [17](#)And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?' [18](#)So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods.

The rich man's problem is not necessarily his prudence (cf. [Proverbs 6:6](#)), but more likely the fact that he uses his wealth to justify self-indulgence and a false sense of security:

[19](#)And I will say to my [soul](#), "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, [and] be merry." '

Which is soon dispelled:

[20](#)But God said to him, '[Fool!](#) This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?'

For he who tries to save his life will lose it (cf. [Luke 9:24](#)) [C.3]:

[21](#)"So [is] he who lays up [treasure](#) for himself, and is not rich toward God."

So what should we do instead?

First of all -- as we've [heard before](#) -- don't worry:

[22](#)Then He said to His disciples, "Therefore I say to you, do not [worry](#) about your life, what you will eat; nor about the body, what you will put on. [23](#)Life is more than food, and the body [is more] than clothing.

[24](#)Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap, which have neither storehouse nor barn; and God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds?

[25](#)And which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? [26](#)If you then are not able to do [the] least, why are you anxious for the rest?

[27](#) Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. [28](#) If then God so clothes the grass, which today is in the field and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more [will He clothe] you, O [you] of little faith?

[29](#) "And do not seek what you should eat or what you should drink, nor have an anxious mind.

[30](#) For all these things the nations of the world seek after, and your Father knows that you need these things.

Instead, seek God's kingdom -- His name, His presence, and His lordship:

[31](#) But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you.

And He will give it to us -- along with everything else we need:

[32](#) "Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

In fact, we can get a head start by reducing our earthly treasure in order to build up heavenly treasure [C.4]:

[33](#) Sell what you have and give [alms](#); provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys. [34](#) For where your treasure is, there your [heart](#) will be also.

Reducing our earthly attachments is a great way to focus our minds on Jesus, and all He requires of us:

[35](#) "Let your waist be girded and [your] lamps burning; [36](#) and you yourselves be like men who [wait](#) for their [master](#), when he will return from the wedding, that when he comes and knocks they may open to him immediately.

For if we are ready, we will be rewarded:

[37](#) [Blessed](#) [are] those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find [watching](#). Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down [to eat], and will come and [serve](#) them.

This is an amazing picture: the master serving the servants! It shows how much He values having servants who are prepared to receive Him -- especially when he comes unexpectedly:

[38](#) And if he should come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and

find [them] so, blessed are those servants. ³⁹But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. ⁴⁰Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."

Peter, ever the spokesman, wonders aloud exactly whom Jesus is addressing with these commands:

⁴¹Then Peter said to Him, "Lord, do You speak this parable [only] to us, or to all [people]?"

As He often does (cf. [Luke 10:36](#)), Jesus answers with a question:

⁴²And the Lord said, "Who then is that [faithful](#) and [wise](#) steward, whom [his] master will make [ruler](#) over his household, to give [them their] portion of food in due season?

The implication seems to be that the parable is for any of us who want to be found faithful stewards. For we will all be rewarded according how we treat our master's dominion, for good...

⁴³Blessed [is] that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes.

⁴⁴Truly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all that he has.

... or ill:

⁴⁵But if that servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and be drunk, ⁴⁶the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for [him], and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two and appoint [him] his portion with the unbelievers.

And if we receive that parable, we are even more accountable...

⁴⁷And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare [himself] or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many [stripes].

... than if we did not:

⁴⁸But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.

These are hard words [C.5] -- and Jesus intends them to be:

⁴⁹"I came to send fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!

After all, it isn't easy for him either:

[50](#)But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how distressed I am till it is accomplished!

The commands of Jesus are radical, and threaten the status quo. His comments about being prepared aren't relevant only for political persecution, but also for generational disputes:

[51](#)Do [you] suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division. [52](#)For from now on five in one house will be divided: three against two, and two against three. [53](#)Father will be divided against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law."

As would be obvious to anyone who takes time to look:

[54](#)Then He also said to the multitudes, "Whenever [you see] a cloud rising out of the west, immediately you say, 'A shower is coming'; and so it is. [55](#)And when you see the south wind blow, you say, 'There will be hot weather'; and there is. [56](#)Hypocrites! You can discern the face of the sky and of the earth, but how [is it] you do not discern this time?

Are we so concerned with outward appearances that we ignore the spiritual reality? Do we realize the time is short?

[57](#)"Yes, and why, even of yourselves, do you not judge what is right?

And does that inspire us to surrender to God everything He deserves?

[58](#)When you go with your adversary to the magistrate, make every effort along the way to settle with him, lest he drag you to the judge, the judge deliver you to the officer, and the officer throw you into prison. [59](#)I tell you, you shall not depart from there till you have paid the very last mite."

Or are we living complicated lives of hypocrisy and materialism, to avoid facing the fact that there **will** be a reckoning?

Conversation

1. Do you worry more about sins other people know about?
2. Have you ever worried that you'd blasphemed the Holy Spirit? How would you respond to someone who has that concern?
3. Why does God call the rich man a *fool* (cf. [Lesson B.4](#)) but a faithful steward *wise*

(cf. [Lesson B.1](#))?

4. How can the discipline of simplicity free us from worry?
5. What are the benefits -- and risks -- of being a steward?

Decision

- Repentance: What resources -- e.g., financial, personal, relational -- have you treated as your own instead of God's?
- Action: Where can you simplify your life to sharpen your focus on God's kingdom?
- Worship: How should we fear God?

Explore More

- [Steward – International Standard Bible Encyclopedia](#)
- [Pharisees – International Standard Bible Encyclopedia](#)
- [Biblical Stewardship](#)
- [What is the unforgivable sin? :: Desiring God Christian Resource Library](#)
- [#59. Repent before Judgment Falls \(Luke 12:49–13:9\) -- JesusWalk](#)

For Next Week

For next week, read [Luke 4](#). Why does Jesus seek out deserted places?

Memory Verse: *"Now when it was day, He departed and went into a deserted place. And the crowd sought Him and came to Him, and tried to keep Him from leaving them; but He said to them, 'I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent.'" -- [Luke 4:42–43](#) (NKJV)*

References

1. **Blue Letter Bible.** "[Luke 12](#) – New King James Version." Blue Letter Bible. 1996–2009. 05 May 2009. < <http://www.blueletterbible.org/Bible.cfm?t=NKJV&b=Luk&c=12> >
2. **New King James Version (NKJV)** Copyright © 1982 by [Thomas Nelson, Inc.](#)

