Faith Aflame: 360 Degrees

Stewardship Learning Community
Living in God's Economy
Living as a Steward

Opening Prayer

Scripture Read **Matthew 25:14-30.**

Introduction

What would you do if you were given something of great value and asked to take responsibility for its use?

"The parable," writes Ronald Vallet in *Stepping Stones of the Steward*, "was based on a common custom in Jesus' day: owners of great properties and estates often traveled for long periods of time on business. While away, they entrusted their responsibilities to servants, usually referred to as stewards. As a matter of fact, several of Jesus' parables focus on persons who go away leaving their investments, vineyards, or kingdom to the care of trusted servants…In the parable of the talents, a man set out on a journey, entrusting his property to his servants. It is important that we recognize from the outset that this man represents God. It is God who owns the world. The disciples are the servants" (page 81).

- How does this parable define a steward?
- Why is it important to recognize from the outset that it is God who owns the world and that we, as disciples, are servants/stewards?
- What are the differences between an owner and a servant/steward?

A Stewardship Prayer

Heavenly Father, we know that all we have and all we are comes from You, the Owner. Teach us not only to treat the possessions we have as Yours, but also to use them according to Your will.

Show us the things that are important to You. Show us Your heart and Your compassion. Use us to meet the needs of those around us.

Forgive us, Lord, when we act as owners. Keep our hearts focused on You, Your Word, and Your will for our lives. Remind us always that we are stewards and not owners.

In Jesus Name, Amen

Don Coley writes in *A Steward's Journey*, "Jesus showed us that stewards don't have the right to manage their masters' assets the way the steward would like. Instead, it's the role of the steward to understand the master so completely that they choose the things their master would do if he were present" (pages 78-79).

- How does the servant know what the master would do if he were present?
- What are some things the servant can do to "understand the master completely?"
- What are you doing to understand the master completely?
- Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement:

  Christians are finding it increasingly difficult to discern the difference between the pull of the culture and the pull of the Holy Spirit?

Living as a steward is quite different than living as an owner. Ben Witherington makes that point in *Jesus and Money*, "Properly speaking, God is the only owner of all things, whether born or made, whether natural or humanly fashioned. This sounds simple and obvious enough, but all too often we fail to think about money and material possessions in this proper theological way. And that failure leads to a host of problems…Christians can have some pretty odd notions about the issue of ownership in this world…Our task is to be good stewards of property we do not own…A theology of human ownership creates all sorts of problems: rival claims for a plot of land, tussles over wills and inheritances, efforts to buy up as much property as possible, remembering the mantra 'location, location, location.' It leads to assumptions that we are what we own, or what we supposedly own" (pages 18-19).

- Give some examples of how living as a steward is different than living as an owner?
- What are some of the "odd notions" Christians have about the issue of ownership in this world?

"One question about this story has plagued me," writes Tom Gardner in *The Desires of Your Heart*. "Why was it that two of the stewards had the confidence to invest what was given—even risking their talents—when the third was so fearful that he hid his in the ground" (page 94)?

- How would you answer his question?
- What was the result of the third steward's fear?

In the parable how the three stewards managed what was entrusted into their care mattered to the owner. How we use money and material possessions matters to God, the owner of all things. Ron Jones suggests in *Jesus, Money, and Me* that God applies a money test to His people in four ways:

1. The Laodiceans were tested with _____. Revelation 3:14-22
2. Job was tested with _____. Job 1:13-19
3. The Israelites were tested with God's _____. Deuteronomy 8:16-17
4. The Macedonians were tested with _____. 2 Corinthians 8:2

- How did those listed above respond to their tests?
- What money tests have you experienced?
- How did you respond?
- What did this parable teach you about living as a steward?

Closing Prayer

Provide time at the end of each session for questions, comments and group prayer. The prayer can take one of the following forms or be done in a way the group decides.

Adoration…
Confession…
Thanksgiving…
Supplication…
Praise…
Remember…
Ask…
Yield…

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