



THE
**GOOD
STEWARD**

GIFTED TO SERVE

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The Good Steward: Gifted to Serve

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Forward

Steward – Life and service

I recently had a book given to me by a friend about stewardship. The title suggested it would look at the way of life of a steward. As I read through the material, I was thoroughly disappointed. What it really covered was the dangers on the narrow way of salvation. It was more like a remake of *Pilgrim's Progress* but clearly not as well done. The other disappointing aspect of the book was its negativity. It presented the difficulties and challenges under the umbrella that no matter what you did you would fail, lose your way, and need help regaining the narrow way.

By the time I finished, I was quite discouraged and frustrated. Discouraged because it seemed that I was doomed to failure. Frustrated because it really did not deal with the life and way of serving as a steward in God's kingdom.

That caused me to do a little research on the word steward and books dealing with this term. I discovered that there were very few books dealing with the life of a steward as their focal point. They mostly dealt with the concept of stewardship and the life of a steward was a sidebar. This again was a bit discouraging. How can one be a good steward if the only approach is how to use the resources given to that person and not consider the personality of the person responsible for those resources?

That seemed a bit backward. How can one understand good stewardship if they don't understand what defines and makes a good steward? How can one develop good habits in

the management of resources if they do not know how to build a good foundation for those habits?

This book is an attempt to study the lives of those who served as stewards in the Bible. It is hoped that this will help us understand the attitudes and characteristics that need to be developed in order for us to be good stewards.

Perry J Hubbard

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Steward 1 – The First Stewards: Adam and Eve (Ge 1:26, 28; 2:18-21)

Adam and Eve are the first stewards mentioned in the Bible. Though not called stewards, they are clearly given the responsibility to fill the earth and take control of all that lived on it.

- Gen 1:24 God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."
- Gen 2:15 The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.
- Gen 2:18 The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

There are two tasks given to them. The first one is to subdue the earth. The second is to multiply. They are also given a specific place to begin this work: The Garden. As part of this process, they are given two guidelines: 1. they can eat of any fruit and plant, and 2. they are not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This suggests they are given a great deal of freedom in deciding how to subdue their new environment.

As stewards, they are to carry out a key function. They are to understand the issues of the work they are given and take control of them. The word used in many translations is the word "subdue." This involves an awareness that there are issues or challenges to be dealt with.

A good steward knows how to identify the challenges that will be faced in the work that is given to them. It means being able to evaluate the situation in light of the task that has been given. The first task we learn about is that they are to fill the earth. They are to make the necessary plans for their offspring to live in every part of the world that was created for them to live in.

We do not know all that this meant. We do not know if there were mountains, deserts, forests, and so on. It is likely that there were different features in existence and the Garden was representative of one type of climate and environment.

In a sense, the descendants of Adam and Eve have been successful, to a great extent, in this process. There is almost no place on the planet where man has not established himself and subdued the climate, animals, and environment, so that he can live in that place.

A good steward understands the issues, makes the necessary adaptations, and learns to do what is required to live successfully in each place. He learns what food is available, what resources are available, and so on. He uses them to provide essential items with which to live and be safe. As we look around the world, we see this reality. The evidence of this is clear, based on the different types of plants and animals used for food, and the work, and the different types of materials used for housing, tools, and other needs.

At a more personal level, each person is called to understand the world in which they live. They are called to fill it. This can mean several things. For many, the idea of procreation is central to this. Each person is expected to reproduce so that the presence of man is maintained in each place. That is a minimum expectation.

There is another possibility that could be included. Man is to carry out his work and, in doing so, reveal the presence and person of the Creator in every location. In the Garden, we see the prototype of this. God walked and conversed with Adam and Eve. Multiplying and filling the earth would mean that God could be encountered at a personal level in every location. God wants to have a personal relationship with all who are the offspring of his creation.

In Adam and Eve, we see or learn about a key part of the life of a good steward. They are to understand their world and their work, so that they can identify the challenges, risks, and issues of making a place livable. They are expected to subdue these issues. This would mean knowing what steps need to be taken, in order to gain control of what is happening, and be able to maintain that control. Subdue is just that; seeing the danger or threat and gaining control of it. Even more so, establishing the proper guidelines or steps so that it will be possible to maintain that control.

Those who have planted a garden understand this. There are several issues to be understood and dealt with, in order to be successful. They range from preparation of the soil, to planting, the protection of plants, and harvest of the crop. If you fail to identify the issues and care for them correctly, there will be no harvest, no results.

Truthfully, it doesn't matter what area of responsibility a person may be given in which to serve as a steward. All of them incorporate the need to identify the issues and take control of them. This action will allow the steward to fill the activity with their presence. That is what happens when one is successful in taking control of anything. Their personality and style are evident in how things are handled and processed.

Now let us look at what the word, “subdue” or “take control of,” means and how it is used in other parts of the Scripture. The Hebrew word is *kabas* and can be translated in different ways. It can be translated as “to bring into subjection, to conquer, or to overcome.” The key concept behind these ideas is that there is, or will be, opposition or a barrier to be overcome by the one seeking to gain control.

This suggests that, for Adam and Eve, the creation would not simply bow to them, but they must work at gaining control and earning the right to rule. An interesting concept. This means they would have to learn what will work in each place and situation, and with each type of animal and plant. This would be contrary to our normal vision of the Garden as a place where everything was provided and accessible, as and when needed.

Such a requirement implies the need to understand what is necessary to grow in one’s ability to do what is required in each situation. A good steward understands this. He understands that nothing comes without effort and proper control.

In most of the references where this word is used, as in Joshua (18:1), Samuel (2 Samuel 8:11), and Chronicles (1 Ch 22:18), the action refers to the subjection of different peoples and nations. In Nehemiah (5:5) and Jeremiah (34:11), it is used in reference to various Hebrews subjugating others and making them their servants. We could easily apply this idea to our steward. A steward knows his enemies and the form they take, and he works to subdue and conquer them in order to carry out his tasks.

In Micah, we have a different concept in using this term. In Mi 7:19 the prophet talks about how God will subdue, conquer their sin, and cast it into the depths of the sea. This concept of

sin being cast away, appears in different texts. Dare we extrapolate and say that a steward knows the temptations that he will face and knows the source of power that can help him conquer those temptations?

The New Testament equivalent is *damazo* and is used in only two contexts. The first is in Mk 5:4 where we are told that no one was able to tame or bring under control the demoniac. In this case, only Jesus is able to do so, and the demons are driven away, and the man is restored to sanity.

The second use is found in Ja 3:7-13. Here we are told that man has learned to tame every kind of beast, bird, snake, and sea creature. But he has not learned how to control his tongue. In verse thirteen we are told it is a wise man who understands this and can produce results.

A steward understands what needs to be controlled and subdued, but he also knows the limits of his abilities. When dealing with his limits, he knows where to gain the knowledge and authority needed, so he can obtain the power to effectively do the work. In this case, he becomes the vehicle through which control is applied. He knows the limits of his authority and how to access the authority of the One he serves, when necessary.

This is, in fact, the focus of Paul in Ph 3:21 and 1 Th 4:4. In the first example, we see what is possible as a person accesses the power of Christ, who has brought everything under his control, which is the power Paul refers to in the next verse 4:1. It is this power that allows a steward to stand firm in the Lord.

The second passage is about learning to take control of one's own body. The goal is to know what we need to take control of, so that we will be holy and honorable. It means not being controlled by passions that are constantly shifting, but about

taking control of them. This becomes possible because of our relationship with God. A steward's ability to subdue his world is often based on the nature of the One he serves.

A steward in God's kingdom has a clear idea of what must be subdued and controlled. He has the right to do so, because of the One he serves. He also knows the limits of his own ability or right and when to defer to the authority of the One he serves to be effective in the work he has been given to do. Finally, he is aware of what he needs to control, both on a personal level and service level. Both are important to being effective in his tasks as a steward.

For further study.

Read the first few chapters of Joshua and learn what God told Joshua he needed to do in order to subdue the people living in the Promised Land. How can these principles be applied to areas of our life and ministry that require our subduing or conquering an attitude or behavior, or other challenges we face?

Steward 2 – Noah (Genesis 6:11-7:5; 9:1-3)

Again, the word steward is not used in reference to Noah but, as with Adam and Eve, he is given a critical task that involves in many ways the work of a steward. The task, in this case, appeared impossible and ludicrous. No one knew what an ark was, much less how to build one. No one knew what rain was or how this unknown thing could cover all the earth with water.

Noah did build the ark. Even more, he took care of all the animals that were sent to him to be cared for, quite likely for some time before the rain even began to fall and for the duration of the time they spent in the ark...just over a year.

A key characteristic of a good steward is their ability to follow, completely, the instructions given to them by their master. It really doesn't matter what those instructions are or whether he fully understands them. The steward's responsibility is to carry out the work given to him and in the time allotted for the work.

Noah, quite likely, struggled with all the information given to him, but he faithfully listened and shared that information with the people around him. The work would have been so much easier if others had heard his words and taken them seriously. As it was, only a few did: his wife, his three sons, and their wives. Just his family, and that meant there would be only 8 people to build the ark and care for the animals. It was not a small project. The proof is in the fact that it took them 100 years to complete the task. Not only that but gathering the food for everyone at the correct time and in a sufficient amount to last for a long period of time.

This reveals a few more key attributes of a steward: the ability to organize the work, a willingness to keep at the task until it

is done, and a willingness to learn new skills and abilities. A further aspect of this is having the capacity to make the necessary changes in one's life to make all of this possible. The key ability here is the capacity to organize the work, in order to define the time frame and skills needed for the work.

Noah did this well. The ark was built. The animals were fed and cared for. Everyone, who was chosen to survive the flood, did. Good organization made all of that possible.

There is one thing to keep in mind as we look at this idea of organization. We need to understand that there are many ways to organize work, activities, and any task that may be assigned. Sometimes there is a need for great detail and a clear timetable. Sometimes the need is for flexibility and openness, so that those involved can comfortably do what is required. Sometimes there is urgency; sometimes there may not be.

In the Old Testament, there is no specific word for organization. But the concept is present and is most evident in the life and activity of David. The idea of organization appears in several texts or is at least implied.

David was a man who knew how to organize. It is evident from the description of how he set up the structures and plans for the temple and those serving in it. It is clear from all the materials he stockpiled for the construction of the temple. It is also evident from how he identified key areas that would need supervision, and how he assigned people to carry out the work in those areas. To see and understand all of this, read 1 Ch 23-28.

Solomon saw all of this and realized that he would need more wisdom and ability than he had. This is the focus of his prayer to God, requesting wisdom to manage all that his father had

established and set in place. Rehoboam, on the other hand, did not understand this and saw all of the structure simply as a means for him and his friends to have a life of ease and luxury.

In the New Testament, we see two words related to this idea, the words “administration” and “orderly.”

The word *kubernesis* is translated as “to govern or administer.” It is used only in 1 Co 12:28, where it is listed among the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In the Ro 12:8 listing of gifts, people are called to various activities in the church. One of those is leadership, and those with this responsibility are told to “govern diligently.” In this passage, the word used is *proistemi* which is translated as “to be over or to rule.” This same word is used in 1 Ti 5:17. Here, Paul refers to the elders, who are to direct the affairs of the church, and how they are worthy of double honor.

The last passage that talks about this concept is in He 13:17. The author tells the people to obey those in authority over them. They are the ones who keep watch over you and will be expected to give an account of their activities. Here the word is *hegeomai* and is translated as “to have rule over.”

While these last two words deal with the overall idea of rule and control, a key aspect of such governance is having the ability to organize. A good ruler, leader, one who governs, knows what needs to be done and organizes the work or activity in such a way that all are involved and satisfied with how things have been organized.

The other word, “orderly,” comes from the Greek word *taxis*, which is translated as “order or arrangement.” Luke uses this word in Lk 1:3 to describe how he has written his account of the life of Christ. It is an orderly or well-organized account.

An account that will adequately present the data to his friend, so that he will understand and be able to live accordingly.

In 1 Co 14:40, it is used in reference to the proper use of the gifts in the church. Paul says that everything should be done in an orderly manner. In Col 2:5, Paul praises the Colossian church for how orderly they are. The absence of this order was a concern for Paul, regarding how the church in Corinth was observing communion (1 Co 11:17).

There are other stories that indicate the importance of being organized. The parable of the ten virgins talks about how five of them were organized and prepared for what could be a long wait, and how the other five did not organize properly and so were absent when the bridal party arrived (Mt 25:1-12).

The person in charge of the wine for the wedding in Cana was not well prepared. He had not obtained enough wine, good or bad, for the event. It was only with the help of Jesus that things turned out well for him (Jn 2:1-10).

The steward of the house of the owner who goes on a long journey is encouraged to keep things well organized and in order, so that the master will be pleased when he returns. Further, he is to carry out all of his duties and planning in a way that will allow for the master to return at any time (Mt 24:45-47). He will not be caught “sleeping on the job,” so to speak. This implies an ability to organize his work.

These should be sufficient examples for us to see the importance, as a steward, to know how to organize the work for which he is responsible. It means accomplishing the task at hand in a clear manner. It allows for the development of key skills and resources for the work. Finally, it will allow for changes in expectations, timing, and resources. A good

steward knows how to organize his responsibilities in order to facilitate accomplishing the tasks given.

Further study – read the book of Nehemiah and consider how proper organization facilitated the work he was doing.

Steward 3 – Eliezer - Abraham’s Steward (Genesis 15:2; 24)

The first mention of Eliezer is in reference to the possibility that he will be the heir of all that Abraham possesses, since Abraham did not, at that point, have any offspring. This information was provided by Abraham after his victory over those who attacked several cities and carried off Lot and his family. God tells Abraham his reward will be great, and Abraham responds with this information. (Ge 15:2-3)

It is interesting that a servant, one who was possibly born in his household, would become his heir. This suggests that there was a deep relationship between them, deeper than that of an owner to his slave or servant.

We also learn that Eliezer, or his family, was originally from Damascus. In some translations, it is indicated that he was born into the household and grew up serving the household from his childhood. This would suggest that he has proven himself and slowly advanced, until he has become the chief servant or steward over Abraham’s household.

It is not clear what all his responsibilities were during that time. What we do know, is that Eliezer has likely witnessed, over and over, the involvement of God in the life of his master. He has seen God protect him from foolish errors, like those related to Sarah regarding Pharaoh and Abimelech. He has seen Abraham take a small mobile force and successfully overcome a much larger enemy to rescue his nephew. He has been present when God has appeared to Abraham and heard the promises repeated.

He may have been the one who prepared the meal for the three travelers and witnessed the destruction of Sodom and

Gomorrah. Maybe he listened as Abraham shared the discussion about how many it would take to prevent their destruction. It is likely that he also traveled with Abraham to Moriah and watched as Isaac was rescued from being sacrificed.

He has seen all the “ins and outs” of Sarah and Abraham trying to have a son. He is there when Sarah, in her old age, miraculously gives birth. He is there when Sarah dies, and it is likely that Abraham leans on him for comfort. Step by step he has seen God make promises and fulfill them for his master.

Then the day comes, when he is called on to serve in a unique way. He is tasked with finding a wife for Isaac. Further, he is to travel back to the homeland of Abraham’s family, locate them, and hopefully find a willing bride among them. We could talk about the honesty of Eliezer. We could talk about how much Abraham trusts him, and those would be good topics, critical to being a good steward. But there is one other quality that stands out from the rest.

Abraham lays it out. Go back to my people and find a wife. Do not take my son back to Haran, even if you don’t find a wife for him there. The only release from his oath to Abraham is if she is unwilling or her family will not let her come back with Eliezer. With this in mind, he leaves, taking 10 camels loaded with gifts for the family. He has been given his purpose and what to focus on.

His honesty and faithfulness make it possible for him to maintain that focus. It also allows him to keep his focus on the God who has always provided for his master. That focus is clear in his prayers to God, as he arrives in the town of his destination. He knows what he needs to find and how to find that person. He makes it clear what is needed and God honors

that focus. Eliezer has come for one thing, to find the right wife, from the right family, and then convince her to go back with him and convince the family to let her go.

The tests are key: bring him water to drink and then offer to water all the animals in the caravan. He barely finishes his prayer, and it is answered. Rebekah comes and does exactly what is sought. He wastes no time in giving her a special gift...a gift that may have paved the way for what happens in the rest of the story. She is, in fact, from Abraham's family and she runs home to tell them what has transpired.

Laban seems to understand and quickly invites Eliezer home. They share a meal, and Eliezer tells his tale. As he finishes, he comes right to the point: will you let her go back with me? They perceive that the Lord has guided all that has happened. The answer is simple; if she is willing, then take her. She says yes, and he delivers all the gifts he has brought for them.

The next morning, he arises and asks them to send him on his way. They hesitate and suggest he stay a few days, even ten. This makes sense, since it is likely they will never see her again. It also may be a cultural practice in such marriage arrangements. Eliezer keeps things in focus, though. He is not there to enjoy days of rest, a well-earned vacation, or anything else that would delay his departure.

He wants to be on his way. It is a long journey. He has already been gone a long time, and it may be longer, because he will now have to consider the needs of a woman. And he has no idea if he will find his master alive when he returns. Abraham is at least 130 years old or more by now. Eliezer wants to be on his way. He stays focused on the purpose of his journey and the need of his master to see his son married.

His focus makes it clear what needs to be done. They call Rebekah and she agrees to leave. One day she is with her family, the next day on a long journey far away. I believe it was a result of Eliezer's being focused on his task and in the ability of God to grant him success.

This idea of focus is found in many scriptures. Our eyes are often used to help explain this concept of focus. Here are a few texts:

- 2 Cor 4:18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.
- Heb 12:2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

The Greek words used here are *skopeo* which means to “take aim at or consider carefully” and *aphorao* which means to “consider attentively.” Both of these involve being able to focus on one's goal.

Paul uses the ideas of pressing on, not looking back, and having a clear goal in mind in describing the idea of focus.

- Phil 3:12-14 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. 13 Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

In Colossians, he uses the words ‘to set’ to indicate focus. It is in learning to focus our heart and mind that we will grow. The second part of this is the content that needs to be part of this focus, the things of heaven and not the things of earth.

- Col 3:1-3 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

These are but a sample of the texts that can be used to reinforce the importance of being focused and not letting the things of this world distract us or draw us away from what is more important. Life is like that, and it is not hard to become weary in keeping our eyes on the goal.

Imagine Eliezer and the long journey. Day after day, walking and riding, maybe for months. Then the thought of repeating that journey back. The idea of a rest could have been very appealing. Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, talked about our preoccupation with food and clothing. Things that could easily distract a person from keeping our eyes on what is more important, the things of the kingdom of God.

Yes, a key quality of a good steward is the ability to keep one’s focus. That ability will influence others as they learn to trust God, even as Eliezer had watched Abraham do the same in his life.

For further study – Read Je 35:1-18

What can we learn from the Rechabites about focus?

Read Lk 10:40-42

What can we learn from Mary and Martha about focus? Was it wrong for Martha to focus on preparing the food?

Steward 4 – Jacob – (Ge 29:18-28; 30:25-43; 31:38-42)

I know what you are going to say. How can you even think about Jacob as a steward? He was such a shyster and cheater. Remember that he cheated his brother out of the birthright? Then, with his mother, he fooled his father, so he could receive the blessing that his brother should have received. As a result, he had to flee for his life, under the guise of seeking a wife from the family just as his father had done.

Yes, and you are right. Up until the time he left to escape his brother's wrath, there is little that suggests we would have any desire to employ Jacob as a steward or manager. Once we knew his past, we would be constantly rechecking the books and records to be sure everything was correct. And even if it were correct, we would still suspect that somehow, someday he might have managed to skim something off for himself.

Likely that would all be true, except after his last act of skullduggery, several critical things have occurred that would profoundly affect him and his future behavior. The first is that he made his brother furious enough to want him dead. Imagine remembering the story of Cain and Abel and hearing your brother declare that he is going to kill you. Imagine looking into his eyes and seeing the seething hate within them. Unless you are completely dead emotionally, that would impact your thinking and you might begin asking yourself why had you been so foolish?

Then there is the dream he had as he fled for his life. The dream of a stairway ascending into heaven with angels going up and down. To make it even more powerful, to hear the voice of God repeating the promise he had heard his father talk about. Most importantly, God was making that promise

to him! The dream was enough to make Jacob fully accept the reality of God and make a promise in return ...if God would watch over him on this journey, then he would commit himself fully to God and begin to tithe all that he owned.

Finally, he arrives at his destination, and what is the first thing he sees? Well, it is not actually the first thing. He sees sheep and shepherds and a well, covered with a large stone, heavy enough to require the strength of several men to move it, so that all can water their flocks. As he observes all of this, Rachel arrives, and he is smitten with her beauty. Love is powerful, so they say. In this case, it gives him the strength to move that large stone by himself. Great way to impress a girl, right?

He kisses her. There is no way of knowing what kind of kiss it was. But that kiss has such an impact that she takes him home to meet her father, who turns out to be a relative of Jacob. He is, in fact, a brother to his mother. Things go well, and after a month of living and working there, Laban offers to pay Jacob for his labors. Their next discussion is about those wages, and Jacob has a unique request, at least to our way of thinking. He offers to continue to work for Laban for the next seven years in order to have permission to marry Rachel.

Laban agrees, and I imagine Rachel is satisfied with the arrangement as well. Now here is where the steward part appears. Jacob's task is to take care of the herds of Laban, and we learn that, because of Jacob's efforts, the herds of Laban prosper. We also hear that, for Jacob, those seven years were like a few days. His love for Rachel made them a joy.

All goes as planned, until Jacob is tricked by Laban on his wedding night. Laban sneaks his older daughter, Leah, into the bedroom instead of Rachel. One would think this would

be impossible, but apparently, Jacob may be drunk, and the switch doesn't register until the light of morning. Obviously, Jacob is not happy when he discovers he has been tricked, and Laban uses his culture as an excuse for the switch. Another reason could be that, because Jacob has done so well that Laban hopes he can underhandedly get another seven years of service from Jacob, as a result.

His scheme works, and Jacob agrees to work another seven years in order to marry the woman he loves. This time, though, he doesn't have to wait seven years for the wedding to happen. This time it comes to pass only a week later. Along with the two sisters he also receives their two handmaids.

We are not told how well these seven years went. At the same time, we are not told that his work was burdensome or difficult. The story simply says that he completed the contracted seven years. It is still likely that, while the work was a source of joy, his family life may not have been. There is a battle between the two wives to produce children and it also includes the handmaidens. Eleven boys and one girl are born in quick succession.

At the end of the second seven years, Jacob decides it is time to leave. However, Laban wants him to stay, because he has learned that he is being blessed because of Jacob's presence. So Jacob stays, and they come to an agreement. This time, joy is not Jacob's focus. Instead, he is building something for his growing family. I will not recount the rest of that part of the story, except to say that when Jacob finally leaves and is confronted by Laban, we learn that his work under this contract had not been quite so joyful.

Now, let's get back to the point of this discourse. When a person has the right focus as a steward, it makes the work

joyful and easy. Remember, we are told that Jacob's focus and his love for Rachel made the first seven years of labor seem like days. It may be true that the next period of time, working again for Rachel and longer, to allow time for his family to be created, was pleasant as well, except for the battle between the wives over having children, that is. What father doesn't enjoy the birth of his children and watching them grow? So, it was very likely a pleasant time.

When our heart is correctly aligned with what we are doing and why we are doing it, then there is joy. The work becomes a joy and pleasure, because we have a clear view of why we are working, and what the results will be. If there is no joy, then the work will be difficult, and life will be a struggle. Truthfully, if this is an issue, it may not matter if you are working for yourself or someone else. If you can't enjoy the work you do, or the relationships involved, or the amount of time spent, then the work will be a burden and create strain and stress. This will impact you first, then others.

So, learning to have joy, as you serve and work, is critical. It makes a difference. Now let us see what the Bible may tell us about this truth.

First, we need to be clear about the fact that work is not always easy nor without pain and suffering. He 12:2 states that Jesus accepted his Father's plan because of the joy that would result from his crucifixion. James tells us that we should be joyful when we suffer trials and tribulations because it will produce patience, which allows you to become perfect and complete (Ja 1:2-3).

Paul put it like this in Ph 2:17, "But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice." Paul saw the results

of what was happening. Or at least he knew what goal he was aiming for. He was in prison. He was in chains. He was serving his Lord, and it was not easy. But he knew what his goal was and what could happen if he was faithful. Joy. Joy in his life and in the lives of those around him.

Jesus tells a parable, well two, one about a pearl the other about a treasure in Mt 13:44-46. The person who found these treasures sold everything so they could gain the treasure. Imagine their joy when they successfully obtained their goal. And they didn't worry about the cost, the price paid, to have that joy.

Read these two passages from 1 Thessalonians

- 1 Thess 2:19-20 For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? 20 Indeed, you are our glory and joy.
- 1 Thess 3:9 How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you?

As a steward of God's gift and message, Paul suffered in many ways, but what kept him focused was the joy that he knew would be the result of all that happened. All the pain and suffering and struggle were worth it, because people would respond and receive God's salvation.

The goal we work towards, in the kingdom of God, is to hear the words "well done my good and faithful servant." The joy of hearing those words will cause all the struggle and pain to fade into the background, and we will be satisfied.

We are to focus on the joy that is part of what we are doing, which will keep the why before us. Just like Jacob, who I am

sure suffered while caring for the sheep, but because of the goal before him...his love for Rachel...all that suffering became nothing.

A critical quality of a steward is just that: to know the purpose of the work and the joy it will bring. That makes him able to do what is necessary, because of the joy that awaits the successful completion of whatever task has been given. There will also be the ability to enjoy the work as it is being done, because of that knowledge, and to be better able to receive and express joy when the goal is reached.

For further study

Read the parable of the owner of the vineyard in Matthew 20. Think about the level of joy experienced by each worker hired at different times of the day. Then reflect on how that changed, and why their level of joy changed when they received their pay.

Read Nehemiah 8:10. Why did he tell people that the joy of the Lord was their strength?

Read Eccl 5:18 and Ps 118:24. What do you learn about joy in this passage?

Finally, read the three parables about what was lost and then found in Lk 15.

Steward 5 – Joseph – (Ge 39:1-6, 20-23; 41:37-45)

Joseph ends up being made a steward three different times. In each case, he had a key choice to make.

Joseph is, in my eyes, a spoiled brat. His father gives him special gifts and gives him freedoms that are not given to the brothers, except maybe Benjamin. Even though he is the younger brother, he has authority over the others and on occasion is sent to check on them to see if they are doing their work.

He is willing to squeal on them, if it will give him more control and result in more privileges. He is not expected to work like his brothers. They are sent out to care for the sheep, but he stays home. He is only sent to see how things are going and then report back.

This creates a very negative and dangerous situation. So dangerous that, if it were not for the arrival of the Ishmaelite traders his brothers might have killed him. This level of anger is due not only to his being daddy's favorite, but also because of the two dreams he has and his attitude about them. In those dreams, all the brothers bow to him, as well as his father...something that pushes his brothers to the point of not only wishing him dead but also wanting to kill him if possible.

Fortunately, Joseph is sold as a slave and is bought by Potiphar. We don't know what his original work assignment was, but it probably wasn't very nice. It is at this point that Joseph has to learn some difficult lessons. If he wants to have a reasonable life, then he will have to humble himself. He will have to learn to do what others want, instead of what he wants. That is not an easy lesson to learn.

Two things happen. First, God has a plan and works in Joseph's favor. Second, this is only possible if Joseph actually accepts his status and does what he needs to do, not for his benefit but for his master. He is clearly successful, because the next thing we learn is that he is in charge of the household of Potiphar. And because he continues to be humble and do what is needed, he is placed in charge of virtually everything.

One thing he does not have control of, though, is Potiphar's wife. She creates a problem that Joseph tries to manage. For a while, he is able to avoid her advances and keep himself out of harm's way. In the end, he makes a mistake and she, in a fit of rage and rejection, lies to her husband about what has happened. The husband is so angry there is no chance for Joseph to defend himself, and Joseph is once again at the bottom of the heap. He is in jail.

The only good thing about this is that it is pharaoh's jail. That means the conditions may be better than any other jail. Now Joseph has another decision to make. He can complain about what has happened, cry foul, and make the jailor miserable with his whining. Or he can bow to the situation. We are again told that God favored Joseph. This is great, but only if Joseph humbles himself once again and learns how to serve in the new situation.

He succeeds, and over time, and we are not told how long, the jailor is so pleased with the attitude of Joseph that he places the prison authority into Joseph's hands. Once again, Joseph is in charge. He is even in authority over those who are imprisoned by the pharaoh, who were in the royal court. What is interesting, is that these same people do not reject Joseph's authority over them and are willing to share openly their thoughts and, in one case, their dreams.

Joseph is astute and blessed by God. He understands the dreams and correctly interprets them. His interpretations are fulfilled, but he is forgotten. The difference in this situation is that his actions do not result in further pain and suffering. The people who are friends and family of the baker do not react and cause him trouble for a negative interpretation. At the same time, the wine taster manages to forget about Joseph until Pharaoh, himself, has two dreams. Then the wine taster remembers, and Joseph is summoned.

It must have been quite a situation for the jailor to be told to prepare a slave prisoner to be presented to the pharaoh. That meant Joseph had to submit to all that was involved. I imagine it was not just taking a bath, but much more.

Now we see how much Joseph has learned about humility. He admits clearly that he is not the one with the ability to interpret the dreams. That is something only God can reveal. He humbly suggests a plan, and then we see the humility he has learned revealed. He suggests they find someone, but he does not recommend himself, who will be able to form a plan and administer it.

Pharaoh quickly sees that Joseph's plan is astute and puts him in charge of all Egypt. He is given a new wardrobe and presented to the people as second in command, and then he is given a wife, daughter of a priest, to confirm his new status.

Joseph is successful in carrying out all the plans to save Egypt from the coming famine. He has learned humility and is now able to serve others effectively. I say this, because no one questioned his actions. Something that could easily have happened during the seven years of abundance. No one doubts him. This would not be true of a proud man, a selfish man.

People will not be happy with the actions of such a person, but they will listen and follow a humble man.

So what does scripture tell us about the importance of humility?

Let's start with false humility. It is a dangerous thing to give the impression of humility. These scriptures give us a description of this kind of pretense and its results.

Col 2:18-19 Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions.

Col 2:23 Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

This mock humility tries to create the illusion of selflessness, but in reality, it represents selfish ambition, a desire to place one in a position in order to gain the most possible. The goal is to make myself look better than anyone else. Christ warns about what will happen to those who exalt themselves. They will be brought down, humbled. The focus here is not on becoming humble and so to be honored, but rather in being made humble, forced into submission. An action that has no honor (Mt 23:12, Lk 14:11, 18:14).

True humility is that which puts others first (Ph 2:3), whose actions flow from wisdom (Pr 11:2). In Titus 3:2 we are called to show true humility to all men. James describes this as showing true wisdom through deeds done in humility (Ja 3:13). He follows that by saying envy and selfish ambition are

from the devil and not from heaven (3:14-15) and will bring disorder and every evil practice (vs 16).

In the following texts, we will discover God's attitude and response to the humble.

- He will save them - Ps 18:27
- He will guide them - Ps 25:9
- He will sustain them - Ps 147:6
- He will crown them with salvation - Ps 149:4
- He gives grace to them - Pr 3:34

Humility and a humble attitude are included in several lists that describe the proper behavior of a Christian. 1 Pe 3:8, Ep 4:2, Col 3:12.

Jesus tells us to accept his yoke and learn from him, because he is gentle and humble in heart. It is in this act of submission or humility that we will find rest and the help we need with whatever task or burden we are called to do or carry (Mt 11:29). Jesus provides the example. He, not thinking about his status, humbled himself and came to our world to show us the way to true life (Ph 2:8ff).

A true steward knows his place. He knows who he serves. He knows the purpose of what he does. He knows that this type of humility will bring true honor before man and especially before God. A true steward is humble.

For further study

Study these scriptures and think about what they add to your knowledge and understanding of what it means to be humble.

- Isaiah 66:2 – humble and contrite
- Mt 11:29 – humble in heart

- Ja 1:9 – the brother in humble circumstances
- Ja 4:10 – humble yourself before the Lord
- 1Pe 5:5 – gives grace to the humble

Steward 6 – Steward of Joseph (Ge 43-44)

We do not have a lot of information about this person. He is not mentioned until the second visit of Joseph's brothers to Egypt to buy food during the drought. It is quite likely he was involved in Joseph's planning from the beginning. It is not likely that Joseph would ask anyone to secretly return the brother's payment into their bags of grain (Ge 42:25) who didn't know why. Joseph needed someone he could trust with his secret. Otherwise, his actions might have been misinterpreted.

The truth of this possibility is seen later when the brothers ask the steward a question. His answer suggests he has been privy to the planning behind the scenes (Ge 43:23). He encourages the brothers to not be afraid because their God is caring for them. It is this steward who is told to once again place each man's payment in their bag and Joseph's personal cup in the bag of Benjamin. He does not question the directions. So, either he is very submissive and obedient or knows what is happening.

The issue here is having a steward that can keep secrets, a person who knows how to handle the private matters of the one he serves. Anyone who spends enough time in the house of another person will begin to learn about the real person and the real life of those in the house. I imagine there are many housekeepers, gardeners, and others who could share many a story, gossip if you will, about their employers. This is a frightening reality for many who employ people to provide services in the context of the home, who can observe them at a personal level. People who will see them as they really are.

Those who are looking for such people are always concerned about whether they can be discreet. Will this person be one I

can trust not to go to the tabloids and tell them, truthfully or falsely, how we live and relate to each other? I expect many of those employed in this manner are often fired for their inability to be discreet. Finding such a person, loyal and discreet, is a treasure.

A good steward is one who knows exactly what goes on in the life of his master. A good steward sees everything, both the good, the bad, and the ugly. A good steward understands the importance of being discreet and protecting those they serve. This also gives them a unique position to advise and comment. Only a discreet steward will have such freedom. This steward also knows the difference between true insults and deprecations and the careless comments of an angry, upset, or frustrated master.

This person also knows what they are free to share and when they may do so. So, Joseph's steward tells his brothers at one point that they need not be afraid. Later, he is the one searching the bags and declaring the judgment and punishment of the one found with the cup, even though he knows better. In the one case, it was alright. In the other, it was not. Interestingly, the brothers did not understand the comment of the steward, nor did they let it help them when they were accused of stealing.

Being discreet means to have a clear understanding of the person you serve and the goals they have in each event or encounter. Knowing what can be shared and with whom, as well as when it is appropriate. Some might like to use the word trustworthy but that is not adequate for this context. Discreet implies being trustworthy but more. I am not just trusted, but I am also wise in how I use what I am trusted with, in reference to my knowledge of the one I serve and his household.

The word discreet is not found in scripture. Three other words are used: “to be careful” is the most common and appears in newer translations. It does not carry the same idea or at least all of the content. To be discreet implies being careful, but it is the manner and reason for such carefulness that is not clear. You need more context for this word to function in place of discreet. In the older translations, two other words are used: “prudent” and “circumspect.” Circumspect implies an awareness of boundaries and risks in a given situation. A circumspect person understands the need to be watchful and cautious in what they do or say. Prudent carries the idea of understanding the what and when of whether an action or sharing information is appropriate or inappropriate.

The KJV uses the word circumspect in translating Ep 5:15, “See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise.” If we substitute the word discreet then it may read, ‘Take care to walk discreetly not as the foolish but as one who is wise.’ A discreet person is a wise person and knows how to avoid foolish actions and comments.

In Mt 10:16 Jesus helps us understand what this means. He tells us, that as we minister, we should be as shrewd (another possible word for discreet) as serpents but harmless as doves. The discreet steward makes sure that he is astute, knows what is going on, shrewd (or discreet), knows the proper use of what he knows, and is harmless, makes sure that what he does with what he knows will not bring harm to others.

In NIV the word “prudent” is used in a number of the proverbs. Here are several of them that are related to this characteristic of a steward:

- Prov 1:3 (the proverbs are good) for acquiring a disciplined and prudent life, doing what is right and just and fair
- Prov 12:16 A fool shows his annoyance at once, but a prudent man overlooks an insult.
- Prov 12:23 A prudent man keeps his knowledge to himself, but the heart of fools blurts out folly.
- Prov 13:16 Every prudent man acts out of knowledge, but a fool exposes his folly.
- Prov 14:8 The wisdom of the prudent is to give thought to their ways, but the folly of fools is deception.

In each of these, we see the contrast between the wise use of knowledge and the careless use of it. The one produces a fool, the other produces wisdom and discipline in the life of the one who is prudent.

There is another word we can use to understand this concept. It is the word “gossip.” This is the negative side of the idea of discreet. A gossip gives little or no thought to the consequences of what they share and do. Here is a list of scriptures that helps us understand this truth and highlights the value of a discreet person:

- Prov 11:13 A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy man keeps a secret.
- Prov 16:28 A perverse man stirs up dissension, and a gossip separates close friends.
- Prov 20:19 A gossip betrays a confidence; so avoid a man who talks too much.

This word also appears in the list of things Paul was afraid he would have to deal with on his return to Corinth:

- 2 Cor 12:20 For I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be. I fear that there may be quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance, and disorder.

These words describe an indiscreet person, who has no idea of how his words and actions can and will impact the people around him, and as a result, himself. This is not the kind of person we want to trust and place in control of any aspect of our lives.

Instead, we look for one who is discreet. One with whom we can be at liberty to be who we are without fear of being betrayed. This is the type of person we need to be, if we are to be a good steward; one people want to be around, because they know that who they are is safe with us. This person will be given greater freedom to manage what they have been given and greater areas of responsibility.

For further study

The indiscreet steward is described in these proverbs. I have reworded them using the word indiscreet. Study each and then rewrite them so they describe a discrete steward. The proverbs use the word “gossip” but consider them with the word gossip replaced by the word indiscreet.

- Pr 11:13 – An indiscreet person betrays the confidence of others
- Pr 16:28 – An indiscreet person stirs up dissension
- Pr 26:20 – an indiscreet person throws wood on the fire
- Pr 26:22 - the words of an indiscreet person are like sweet candy

Review your words and think about whether or not you are slow to speak. If you are a person who heeds James' instruction in Ja 1:19.

Steward 7 – Ziba – Steward of Saul and then Mephibosheth (2 SA 9: 1, 16:1, 19:17)

This person is not one who presents a positive attribute, but from him, we can learn the value of honesty and an unselfish pattern of living.

So here is his story. To begin with, we do not have much information related to his time as Saul's steward. We do know that he survived the death of his master and sons. Likely, he did better than survive, because he didn't disappear. As soon as David remembered his promise to Jonathan, he began a search for any child of Jonathan's that may have survived. While people did not know if there were any survivors, they did know that Saul's steward Ziba had survived, and they knew where to find him.

Fortunately, Ziba could provide the information as to who had survived and where Mephibosheth could be found. I find it interesting that as the steward of Saul's household, Ziba was not with Mephibosheth. Instead, Mephibosheth is staying with another person in another location. What is also interesting is that he is not living on or near the property of his grandfather. Saul was from Gibeah, a town in Benjamin, and Mephibosheth is in Lo Debar a town located in Manasseh.

Ziba has kept informed of this fact and of another fact. He shares the information that Mephibosheth is lame. He knows a lot and yet is not caring for his master's grandson. Again, if this information is true, why is Ziba not caring for his master's grandson?

David brings Mephibosheth to the court and then returns all of Saul's land to him and puts Ziba and his 15 sons in charge of the property. Ziba is instructed to farm the land and harvest

the crops, so that Mephibosheth will always be cared for. Suddenly Ziba is no longer independent, and he and his household are made servants of Mephibosheth. (2 Sa 9:1-12)

The next time we encounter Ziba is when David is fleeing from Absalom. He arrives with supplies for David. When asked where Mephibosheth is, he tells David that Mephibosheth stayed home, hoping that David would be killed and his family's land would be returned to him by Absalom. David reacts and gives all the lands of Mephibosheth to Ziba (2 Sa 16:1-4). Ziba has come to help David and gets a big reward.

David does not die and successfully overcomes Absalom. As he returns to Jerusalem, Mephibosheth meets him, as well as Ziba. He arrives unkempt. His explanation for his appearance is that he wanted to come with Ziba the for the first time, but Ziba refused to let him come. He states that Ziba betrayed him and then slandered him. As evidence of his honesty, Mephibosheth is willing to cede all of the land to Ziba if only he can stay at David's side from now on.

This makes it clear that Ziba has not been happy about the arrangement to care for the land and then turn over the profits. It suggests that, maybe from the beginning of this story, he was living on Saul's land and enjoying its fruits. So, when David told him to care for it and turn over the income to Mephibosheth, he may not have been pleased. He had been free to live his own life, with great benefits, and then it was gone. Once again, he was a servant. So, when he saw the opportunity to recover what he had lost, he took it and so lied to David. To strengthen his position, he and his 15 sons arrived shortly before Mephibosheth to help David cross back over the Jordan.

The end result is that Ziba gets the land. Mephibosheth is telling the truth. Clearly, Mephibosheth does not want to return to how life was under Ziba. He may have been adequately cared for but not as the master of the house. He would rather sit at David's table than be under Ziba's influence and control. David concedes.

One wonders how Ziba was handling his work. Was he honest or deceitful? Did Mephibosheth receive the proper care under Ziba?

We know that honesty is important. It is a focus of a law regarding using honest scales in Le 19:36 and Dt 25:15.

It is a focus of several Proverbs:

- Prov 12:17 A truthful witness gives honest testimony, but a false witness tells lies.
- Prov 16:11 Honest scales and balances are from the Lord; all the weights in the bag are of his making.
- Prov 16:13 Kings take pleasure in honest lips; they value a man who speaks the truth.
- Prov 24:26 An honest answer is like a kiss on the lips.

A related word is truthful and is used in several Proverbs:

- Prov 12:17 Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue lasts only a moment.
- Prov 12:22 The Lord detests lying lips, but he delights in men who are truthful.
- Prov 14:5 A truthful witness does not deceive, but a false witness pours out lies.
- Prov 14:25 A truthful witness saves lives, but a false witness is deceitful.

These help us understand the importance of honesty and truthfulness. But there is another approach to this. It has to do with why we are willing to be honest. Honesty is not about what we gain but what we give. Being honest gives control to others. Being dishonest is an attempt to gain control.

There is also the fact that it is impossible to deceive or be dishonest with God, because he knows your heart. It is the pure in heart that will see God (Mt 5:8). They are the ones who seek God and turn their hearts to Him. They know that God already knows the truth and sees what is in their heart (2 Sa 17:7). But this means that, even when we are honest, we know that even our best is like a filthy rag (Is 64:8).

A true steward knows all this and is, first and foremost, honest with themselves about why they act. Secondly, they are honest with those around them so that people will be able to place their confidence in them. Finally, they are honest with God and, like Isaiah, declare their sin and the lack of value of all they do and say (Is 6:5).

Peter exhorts us to put away deceit (1 Pe 2:1) and seek, crave spiritual milk. And David declares for us that blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him and in whose spirit, there is no deceit (Ps 32:2).

It is so easy to deceive ourselves and think we can deceive God. A wise steward knows the folly of this thinking and does his best to be honest about himself and the purpose of his actions. It is a challenging goal but one worth the effort.

Paul gives us great guidance in this process in Ep 4:25, "Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body." Our honesty can enhance or damage how people view

the one we serve as a steward. A good steward knows this and knows that sharing the truth will benefit all.

For further study

Review 1 Jn 4:4-6. What is the difference between the steward who serves the world and one who serves God? (Other related texts: Jn 14:17; 1 Ch 29:17; Pr 24:26)

Steward 8 – Stewards in the administration of David (various) (1 Ch 27:25-31)

Many of us are not aware of a key ability of David. That is because we transfer it to Solomon. But it was David's administrative ability that was the basis of Solomon's request for wisdom. David was an incredible administrator and organizer. He knew what needed to be done and who could do the task involved. He wisely saw that if his friend Hushai returned and could block or undermine the advice of Ahithophel to Absalom, then there was a high probability that David would survive and return to reclaim the throne. Hushai succeeded, and David did indeed return (2 Sa 16-17). David knew the abilities of both men and willingly entrusted this task to the right person.

Just how good David was at administration is seen in 1 Ch 25-28. In this passage we see David organizing all the administration of the temple, of the army and their time of service, the treasuries, security, administration of the country, and the gathering of resources for the construction of the temple. He also developed all the plans for the construction of the temple and handed all of this over to his son Solomon. Little wonder Solomon was a bit frightened. David knew how to administer and run a country. Solomon saw his limits and asked for wisdom.

As part of all of the planning and administration, David identified key people to be responsible for specific areas. The list of people and their areas of responsibility is found in 1 Ch 27:25-34. David was able to see who had what skills and then assign them appropriately. Many of them likely served well into the reign of Solomon, and a few may have been among

the older advisers present when Rehoboam asked for advice on how to begin his reign.

The important factor is that those selected had key skills and gifts that would allow them to carry out the task assigned to them. Not all people who serve as a steward will be responsible for everything, like the steward of a household. Even that person would be wise to seek others with critical abilities to care for specific areas. That is wisdom.

Another part of wisdom is having a steward who knows his abilities and knows his limits. They also know the limits of their authority. They do not try to undermine or infringe on the authority and responsibility of others. David chose well, and Solomon began his reign with a well-prepared and capable administration.

This piece of truth is important for any organization, from the home to an international business. It is important to have the right people in the right place...people who have the right skills and know how to use those skills for the benefit of all they are to serve. These people value what they do, because they know how it makes the whole structure, group, or organization function and do so effectively.

We see this truth in Paul's discussion of the body of Christ, the church in (1 Co 12:12-31). Everyone has been given abilities and gifts, so that they can serve. A key focus of that service is providing what the entire body needs. No one part can provide everything, and each must understand the importance of what they are doing in relation to the entire body.

There is another factor that is important in all of this. There is one ability that all stewards need, no matter what their specific

skill and area of responsibility may be. Paul explains this in detail in 1 Co 13. Without love, then all we do is tainted by our own sin, selfishness, and desire to be recognized. Verses 4-7 lay out for us key attitudes, that each person needs to practice if they are to be effective in administering (being a good steward) in the area of their skill and responsibility.

It is worth the space to list them for you to see and consider each one in light of being an effective steward in one's area of responsibility:

- Patient with those they lead
- Kind to those under their care and direction
- Not envious of others and what they may have or receive
- Not boastful about what they do or have accomplished
- Not proud of their abilities, because they know their source
- Not rude or short with those who need instruction
- Not self-seeking, because they know who they serve
- Not easily angered, because they know we all make mistakes
- Forgets offenses and allows room for growth and learning
- Rejoices in the truth, because they want to reveal God
- Protects those in their care
- Trusts those they work with
- Hopes for the best in every situation
- Perseveres in order to carry out the task

A good steward knows his abilities. A good steward knows how his attitude and actions impact the work of others. A good steward can see the bigger picture. A good steward rejoices in the opportunity to serve, and so is effective. A good steward

knows who is in charge of all that is being done and seeks to bring honor to that person through service, done in love.

He is a good administrator.

For further study

The word “administer” is used in a number of contexts. Study these texts and identify the results of good administration:

1 Ki 3:28

2 Ch 19:8

Je 21:12

Eph 3:2, 9 talk about a critical area of administration. What is it? How important is it to be a good administrator?

Steward 9 – Obadiah – Ahab’s Steward (1 Ki 18)

To begin with, I must admit that the story of Obadiah, the steward of King Ahab, has often perplexed me. I have wondered how Obadiah could successfully pull off the feat of feeding 100 prophets of Yahweh without creating suspicion among the household and the king. It seems a bit unlikely that he would have the personal resources to do so, or even if he did, to not have drawn attention to himself.

Think about it. Jezebel is hunting down the prophets and killing them. Why is she doing this? Two reasons: 1. She sees them as a threat to the establishment of her religion, the worship of Baal and Asherah, 2. She sees it as a way to punish Elijah, and thereby God, for the famine, as evidence of the power of her god. But how do 100 prophets manage to escape her notice for up to three years?

I have been reviewing the life of Ahab as part of another study, and I think I am seeing the reason why Obadiah could do what he did.

The first thing I realize is that Jezebel was only one of many wives. She did not have control over everything in the palace, at least not at first. Ahab had 70 sons (2 Ki 10:1) and at least one daughter, Athaliah (2 Ki 8:26). This is far too many children to be the offspring of one wife. This means there are areas and activities outside of the influence and control of Jezebel.

This allows Ahab to choose a known follower of Yahweh as his steward, Obadiah. I doubt Jezebel would have allowed someone, whose name means “servant of Yahweh,” to be her steward. But that is only an opinion.

What is more telling, is the fact that at key times Ahab calls on, or responds to, a true prophet of God. The first instance is his submission to Elijah's challenge. Ahab doesn't have to respond, but he listens to Elijah and assembles all of the priests of Baal and Asherah for the challenge. Jezebel is noticeably absent.

At another time, in preparation for battle in conjunction with Jehoshaphat, he calls on Micaiah to tell them how the battle will go. As part of that encounter, Ahab insists that Micaiah tell the truth and not hide what God has to say. Micaiah does so. It does not change Ahab's actions, but it is interesting that he consults a prophet of God nonetheless (1 Ki 22).

Another key event relates to when Jezebel kills Naboth so she can give his vineyard to Ahab. Elijah confronts Ahab (yes, he is still alive, despite Jezebel's threats to kill him). When Ahab heard God's judgment, he repented and humbled himself before God. God responded and delayed the punishment. Again, we see that Ahab was concerned about God up to a point, but not enough to completely change and return to following the true God.

All of this opens the way for the possibility of Obadiah's being able to provide for 100 prophets for a period of up to three years, the time frame of the drought. This still requires a fair bit of courage and careful planning. And while Ahab is allowing this, Obadiah still must make sure that Jezebel does not find out. This required skillful management of the household and its supplies.

It is also possible that Jezebel has an idea that something is afoot but is unable to catch Obadiah in the act of sending out the supplies. It may be that the supplies never arrive at the palace but are diverted to some secret place, or those bringing

the supplies may have instructions to drop them at a given place but with no knowledge of what happens next.

There is no question that King Ahab is a wicked man. What seems apparent, is that he is also a man who explores all avenues to maintain his power and position. He has divided loyalties. He is going to serve Baal and enjoy all the power and its practices, but at the same time, he wants to be careful about not overly offending Yahweh.

At this point, you may wonder who is the subject of this study? Is it Obadiah or is it Ahab? It is Obadiah, but we cannot understand what his task was like as a steward, if we don't understand the context in which he served. Obadiah is serving in a treacherous position. He is a follower of God, serving a vile and wicked king who knows this. He must keep things in balance, if he is to continue serving as a steward and still be able to protect the 100 prophets...something he manages to do very well.

Keep in mind that after Elijah returns from his journey, Obadiah has fewer problems. Upon his return from fleeing Jezebel, Elijah starts up a school of prophets. It is not known if any of those who Obadiah saves became part of this school, but it is highly likely. Obadiah kept his balance and walked the tightrope until he was no longer needed. Additionally, Jezebel is no longer trying to kill them.

This is a key piece of the work of a steward: balance. The ability to keep all the different aspects of life, belief, and work in perspective, results in balance. This allows one to know what can and cannot be done, and for how long their involvement will be necessary. He knows when to say "yes" and when to say "no," and there is no confusion about what he means.

We are exhorted to always say what we mean. Let our "yes" be "yes," and our "no" be "no" (Ja 5:12). Did Ahab ask Obadiah to hide 100 prophets? Probably not. But at some point, he had to decide if he could do it. He had to say "yes" or "no." He said "yes" and kept his word, until he was freed from the commitment.

Paul refers to this idea in his second letter to the Corinthians. Take a moment to read what he has to say.

2 Cor 1:15-22 Because I was confident of this, I planned to visit you first so that you might benefit twice. 16 I planned to visit you on my way to Macedonia and to come back to you from Macedonia, and then to have you send me on my way to Judea. 17 When I planned this, did I do it lightly? Or do I make my plans in a worldly manner so that in the same breath I say, "Yes, yes" and "No, no"?

18 But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not "Yes" and "No." 19 For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by me and Silas and Timothy, was not "Yes" and "No," but in him it has always been "Yes." 20 For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God. 21 Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, 22 set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

Paul had a decision to make. He was concerned about a proper balance in his response while being faithful to God. He also tells us that when it comes to our service to God, we need to be ready to say "yes." It is this level of commitment that will

give the needed balance to carry out what God asks us to do. It also means we will be able to see how it can be possible to do so.

Dealing with difficult situations and still serving God is a challenge. It may mean first knowing who we are to serve, saying yes, and then letting God help us keep everything in balance, as we carry out the work assigned, even when it could be dangerous. A good steward knows and follows this truth: keep things in balance.

For further study

Balance, as a steward in the kingdom of God, requires the ability to distinguish between what is good and bad in a situation, in order to maintain your balance and so your direction.

Le 10:10 between holy and common (Ez 22:26)

Le 11:47 between clean and unclean (Ez 44:23)

We live in a world filled with sin. How do we keep this in balance? Read Jn 17:11-19. How can we be *in* the world but not *of* it? Balance.

Steward 10 – Arza – Steward of Elah (1 Ki 16:9)

We don't know much about Arza, other than where he was the night his master was killed. He was in his own home, and the king was with him. 1 Ki 16:9 tells us that Arza was in charge of the palace at Tirzah. But on the night of the story, he and king Elah were together in the house of Arza getting drunk, when Zimri entered and assassinated the king. Nothing is said about whether Arza survived or was killed as well.

If you like conspiracy theories, then Arza was a co-conspirator and was intentionally getting Elah drunk. But there is nothing to support such an idea. It sounds like they had a party with little thought about what was happening in the world around them. A clear lack of capacity to be a good steward.

Conspiracy or not, Arza was not doing well at looking after his master's affairs. It appears that instead of there being clear lines of authority and responsibility, there was an uncommon level of familiarity. This meant that Arza did not keep himself apart from his master. As a result, he and the king were drunk and easy prey for the attackers.

Maintaining clearly defined lines in this relationship is important. This is not about social class or discriminatory behavior. That would be the case, if the one in charge made it a point to denigrate and demean his servant. And it is not to say that there cannot be familiarity and friendship. What it means is that a steward knows when it is appropriate to observe, and when it is fine to participate in the life of the one they serve.

There is a popular platitude that describes this situation: Familiarity breeds contempt. This may not always be true, but it is a useful guide in understanding how to manage the relationship of a steward with the one they serve. It can result

in a powerful relationship and partnership. In this case, the steward becomes a bridge between the two worlds.

At the other end of the spectrum, such familiarity can also result in carelessness, thoughtlessness, and loss of awareness of how others perceive what is happening. There are many books that deal with employer and employee relationships. The point is that such relationships, not properly handled and clearly defined, can bring confusion, misinformation, and loss of perspective, among a whole list of issues.

Clearly, in this situation, Arza and Elah were not thinking about the consequences of setting aside the normal protocols, so they could do what they wanted and get drunk. Elah failed to keep in mind his need for security and the need for the respect of those around him. Arza failed to see the same thing and more. He also did not make sure they could enjoy the moment undisturbed and in safety.

The friendship of a steward can be a valuable resource, as long as it doesn't compromise the roles, responsibilities, and functions of either party. The word for this is "propriety." Knowing when a given action or relationship is proper and acting accordingly. It is knowing what is appropriate in each setting and situation. In the scripture, the word often used for this concept is the word "proper."

Ecclesiastes has several references to this, and what it means. This one is appropriate to our topic.

Eccl 8:5-6 "Whoever obeys his command will come to no harm, and the wise heart will know the proper time and procedure. For there is a proper time and procedure for every matter, though a man's misery weighs heavily upon him."

This one relates to how one responds to a king or leader.

Jesus, when being baptized by John, had to encourage him. John was reluctant to do so, because he understood who Jesus was as the Lamb of God. Jesus was over him in so many ways, as the Messiah. John considered himself unworthy to even clean his feet. In this case, though, Jesus said it was the proper thing to do (Mt 3:15). Jesus knew, that at that moment, it was proper for him to submit to John to be baptized, to place John on an equal level, so to speak.

In Ga 6:9 we are encouraged to do what is good, because at the proper time we will reap a blessing, if we do not give up. Propriety is not something that happens once; it is a lifestyle that must be developed and maintained. It involves understanding the person you serve and the context in which you serve.

1 Pe 2:17 encourages us to show proper respect to everyone. We are to love our brothers and sisters in Christ, fear God, and honor the king. Propriety knows who is who, and what action is necessary, at what time. Why? Because the king can also be a brother in Christ and is also under the authority of God. A steward knows all of this, behaves accordingly, and helps others to understand and respond properly.

For further study

Depending on the translation, the words “sober” and “propriety” are used for the same Greek word *sophrosune*. The idea is being of sound mind and having self-control. It means to behave properly in each setting, with propriety. Read 1 Pe 3:16-17 and think about how propriety can affect your life and testimony in the world.

Steward 11 – Steward of Hezekiah – Shebna (2 Ki 18: 18, 26, 37; Is 22:15; 36:11, 22)

Shebna begins as the secretary of King Hezekiah (2 Ki 18:18, Is 36:22). At some point, he is also identified as a steward, who is in charge of the palace (Is 22:15). He is one of three people sent to represent the king and receive the envoy of Sennacherib. Upon receiving the delivered message, they tear their robes and then report all that has been said to King Hezekiah (2 Ki 18:37ff, Is 36:22ff). Upon hearing the message Hezekiah tears his clothes and puts on sackcloth, after which he enters the temple.

Shebna and the other two, as well as the leading priests, are then sent to Isaiah to inform him of what has happened. They are also told to ask Isaiah to pray (2 Ki 18:37, Is 37:2ff). Before they can speak, Isaiah tells them not to worry, because God will take care of the Assyrians. Briefly, God destroys the Assyrian army and Jerusalem is saved.

The next time we see Shebna, is in a prophecy of Isaiah, who condemns him for trying to live above his position and assume rights that are not his (Is 22). As a result, God has pronounced judgment on Shebna.

Shebna holds a position of honor and respect as secretary to King Hezekiah. He is authorized along with two others to act as representatives of the king, not a small honor. At some point, he manages to replace Eliakim as the steward of the palace. Eliakim had been the steward or administrator of the palace during the events of the threat and demise of the Assyrian Army.

It is not clear what may have happened. For some reason, Eliakim has been demoted, or set aside, and his position given

to Shebna. Based on the prophecy and judgment given by Isaiah, Shebna seems to be aspiring to climb the social ladder and advance himself in order to gain access to more benefits.

In Isaiah's prophecy, we learn that Shebna is trying to construct his tomb among the elite or royalty of the country. A right that he has not earned nor deserves. The place where he is doing this is reserved for the king and members of the royal family, of which Shebna is not a member. He has become arrogant. He is trying to draw attention to himself by his actions. Maybe he is thinking he can gain even more, if he successfully constructs his tomb among those he wants to be like.

This type of arrogance is unacceptable, and his position as steward is given to another. What is needed is a meek person. One who is not thinking about how to gain attention but instead places the needs of others first.

This topic and attitude are covered extensively by Jesus in his teachings. He had many great examples of what not to do all around him, and he used them.

Matt 6:1-8

"Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. 2 So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. 3 But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees

what is done in secret, will reward you. 5 And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. 6 But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. 7 And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”

He talks about not trying to be first or to have the best place. “The first shall be last and the last first,” was a phrase he used (Mt 10:31; 19:30; 20:16; Mk 10:31; Lk 13:30). He also states clearly that those who wish to be seen must be the servant of all (Mt 20:17; Mk 10:44). And to make his point clear, he says “don’t seek the place of honor lest you be humiliated by being asked to move to a lesser place” (Lk 14:8). It is the one who exalts himself that will be humbled.

Jesus places the meek in his list of beatitudes. It is the meek that will inherit the earth (Mt 5:5). As a result, they will enjoy peace. This reflects what one can read in Ps 37:11, which says the same thing. These are people who are content in and with who they are. They know the value of what they have and are not tempted by the idea of being other than who they already are.

This is not about a lack of ability to advance or even a desire to improve their situation. It is about who they are, at any given moment. While there may exist the possibility of advancement or better options, it does not drive their decisions

and actions. They seek to be the best at what they do, and in who they are, and that is sufficient motivation for doing the work assigned.

A steward who is meek knows the danger of self-promotion. That is not based on skills, ability, or doing one's best. Self-promotion is about doing what will make me look good. This may have little to do with the work I do but more about my appearances. It is about changing how people perceive me, and at its core, it is false. Self-promoters think that having the right car, house, friends and other stuff is the key. In the case of Shebna, it was having the right tomb in the right place.

A steward who is meek, knows this, and avoids such false appearances. In fact, a truly meek person may be well off and in a high position, but if you didn't know those facts, you would not be aware of this. They avoid fanfare, the exorbitant, and showing off, because that is not the purpose of their life and activities.

A good steward is meek and unpretentious. He blends in, and yet, people know exactly who is doing the work, and he is satisfied with that.

For further study.

Read the following scriptures. What can you learn about being meek from these passages?

Abishai - 2 Sa 19:34-38

Jonathan – 1 Sa 20:32-42; 23:15-18

Steward 12 – Steward over the care of Daniel and friends (Da 1:11, 16)

Daniel and his three friends are taken captive. The king of Babylon wants young, healthy and bright people to serve in his court. They are to be selected from the royal family and nobility and be trained toward this end. The king assigns the chief of his court officials, Ashpenaz, to make these selections and then prepare them for their tasks. The training will last three years.

When you read the list of requirements, it almost sounds as if they are going to be sent to an Ivy League school, or one of the elite universities. Only the best are selected and will receive a full scholarship. They are the best of the best, are smart, well informed, and quick learners. They are also to be physically fit and handsome. The training and diet have been set with a final product in mind: a qualified person who is attractive, can speak the language, and carry out the tasks given to them.

Now, this is where things get interesting. Ashpenaz is an experienced official. He has probably watched over this process many times. The Chaldeans have conquered many countries, including the Assyrian empire. He knows what he is to do and how it is to be done. Until Daniel and his friends arrive, no one has questioned his program of diet, exercise, and studies. Not until Daniel. Daniel recommends a change.

Ashpenaz rightfully warns Daniel that changing a successful program and risking failure would be disastrous, not only for him but for Daniel and his friends, who are proposing a new diet. The king has ordered the current diet, and deviation is not usually approved. I am sure Daniel understands this, and still, he feels that a diet which observes the dietary rules and

regulations laid out by God will prove beneficial and may even produce better results.

He is walking a very tight line here. The food is coming from the king's table. Rejection of the food could easily be seen as an offense and be severely punished. The truth is that Daniel and his friends might actually escape punishment, because it would likely fall on the steward Ashpenaz for even permitting this experiment.

Ashpenaz, therefore, is understandably skeptical and hesitant. But he is listening. The conversation does not result in immediate sanctions but creates interest. Why? It is hard to say. Maybe he has seen how others do on different diets, or maybe he has been in the courts of other rulers, as part of his responsibility. But, whatever the reason, Daniel's compromise of a test period is sufficiently intriguing, so that Ashpenaz agrees to it.

A risky call, but the results are so clear and evident, that he completely changes the diet for these four permanently. In the end, they prove to be the healthiest, best looking, and most intelligent among all those being training. They are given better postings, and Daniel fares even better. He has proved to be a wise person and ready to do what is necessary to excel.

We do not know if Ashpenaz ever explained the changes to the king. He probably did. If not, he could have risked someone else reporting the changes, which would have made his life difficult. Mainly because he had not consulted the king about the change, the dietary test, and the results. King Nebuchadnezzar was not a king to trifle with, based on a number of descriptions of his power, and how he used it.

Ashpenaz does what is necessary. How it is done is not critical. The point in all of this, is that he is adaptable. He has the ability to see when changes are necessary and makes them. This also means he knows how to defend his decisions in such a way, that the one in authority over him listens and accepts the changes. This means that he was trusted by his master.

“Adaptable.” It is not a word we often see in scripture. More often than not, the teaching is on keeping the law, or at least the spirit of the law. We are told over and over in the Old Testament that the law needs to be taught and obeyed. Such obedience would result in success (Joshua 1:7). A lack of obedience could have dire consequences (Dt 28:15).

The Apostle Paul does help us understand how and where we can be “adaptable.” In 1 Co 9:18-23 he talks about the ways he has adapted in his life. He has done this in order to effectively share the gospel. In this willingness to adapt, he makes one thing clear. It must not violate the law of Christ. The key phrase is found in verse 22, “I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.”

Paul also gives some good advice that applies to this in 1 Co 10:23-24, “everything is permissible – but not everything is beneficial. Everything is permissible – but not everything is constructive. Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.” A good steward understands how to adapt to a setting without losing sight of, or damaging, the tasks they are given. They succeed without losing sight of what they are doing and why. They also know that the long-term goal is to benefit others. If that is accomplished, the good steward will be satisfied, because he has done his work well.

Being adaptable is not simple. It involves risk, and it involves a clear understanding of what is being done, so that goals are

accomplished without corrupting the truth. A good steward knows how to identify what will or won't work, and then he is capable of making the adjustments needed to gain the desired results.

For further study

David wanted to build a temple. Read the following texts related to this goal and what David did in relation to building a temple. 1 Ch 17:1-15; 22; 28:11-19.

- What did David want to do?
- Who was selected to do the work?
- How did David adapt to this?

Read chapters 2-6 of Nehemiah.

- What was the work he wanted to do?
- Did he have to adapt to carry out the task?
- What can you learn from his example?

Steward 13 – Nehemiah – wine taster to Artaxerxes (Nehemiah)

While we are aware that Nehemiah was the food taster for Artaxerxes, it is also likely that he had more responsibilities than that. In all probability, he was in charge of some aspects of palace administration. A likely one would be involvement in the preparation of the food and purchase of the groceries. This makes sense, since a wise man does not want to taste something if he has no knowledge of who prepared it, how it was prepared, and how the ingredients were obtained.

His king had a great deal of confidence in Nehemiah. We see this first, in the fact that he was allowed to carry out his duties, when the queen was present. Next, is the level of confidence the king had in him. He trusted Nehemiah so much, that he was willing for Nehemiah to be gone for twelve years the first time, and then he permitted a second trip at a later date. You do not let someone be absent that long, unless all is well-organized and planned, so that you need not fear the possibility of being poisoned.

Again, we see the evidence of these skills in how Nehemiah managed the work and situation, once he arrived in Jerusalem. He knew how to organize people, how to evaluate the work and its needs, and to see and deal with threats before they became a serious problem. All good qualities of a steward. He also was very wise in how he handled the finances and what he used, or didn't use, for his personal needs.

There is a thread that runs through both aspects of his history and activity: the ability to deal with threats. As cupbearer, he was expected to taste wine, and maybe food, for the king to be sure it wasn't poisoned. In the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls,

he had to deal with the threats of his opponents. Both of these situations involve the ability to anticipate.

In tasting food and beverages, you need to know the source of the beverage and food, who has handled it, and who may have access to the storage areas. Anticipating possible points of access and forms of poisoning would keep Nehemiah safe and able to taste the food or wine with no fear.

In building the wall, Nehemiah had to understand the ways in which his enemies could be a threat. Could they create problems with the king, local political and military structures, social relations, or access to supplies? Could there be issues with those being asked to do the work? Would they be willing, would they have time, how would they respond to a physical threat? How do relations between the two groups-- enemies and his people-- impact and create threats?

If you take time to read the book of Nehemiah, you will see that he faced many kinds of threats to himself, the work, and those helping him. You will note that he has a very clear idea of the threat and how to handle it when it arises. He has thought through the work and seen where the challenges and threats will be, and he has planned accordingly.

As good stewards, we need to realize that there will be threats to deal with. Threats can take many forms: people, resources, time, and place. A good steward identifies what could create problems and has a plan or good idea of what to do, if a problem arises. A key aspect of this ability to counteract problems is to have a clear knowledge of the work to be done. This clarity makes it easier to see where problems might arise.

There is one more area that is critical in understanding how to deal with threats. This is the ability to understand the people

one is dealing with. Imagine if Nehemiah had not taken time to evaluate the people he was to supervise. Knowing how people respond to warnings, suggestions, supervision, and inspection can be crucial in avoiding threats from within. Nehemiah shows this ability in how he handles key issues in the reconstruction of the wall.

Does this sound like a lot to be dealing with? Yes, it can be. Most of us, though, will not be dealing with protecting the king against being poisoned or rebuilding a defense perimeter of a large city. And yet, no matter what the scale of our responsibility may be, the issues remain the same. A good steward makes sure he understands what the possible threats may be, as well as their potential sources.

In the Old Testament, the word “threat” is used in a limited way. It is used to refer to the threat of an enemy in Ps 64:1. In Isaiah 30:17 this word is used to describe the fear that will exist for the people of Israel. At the threat of attack by one enemy, a 1000 will flee, and if there are five, all will flee.

Proverbs 13:8 tells us that the rich will face threats and may need to use his own wealth to ransom his life, but a poor man will never even hear such a threat.

There are other similar uses in the Proverbs, but the idea is that there is someone or something that creates fear or danger that must be dealt with.

In the New Testament, we see the word “threat” used twice by authorities in relation to believers, in Acts 4:21 and Act 9:1. In Acts 4:29 we hear the apostles praying that God will consider the threats in the first case and enable them to speak the truth with great boldness. This is another aspect of the

ability to deal with threats, because sometimes they cannot be avoided and must be faced and dealt with.

Jesus dealt with threats to his life on several occasions. On at least one occasion, we are told that it was not time for him to face the final threat and die. Here are some of those events:

- Pharisees plot to kill him after healing a man's hand on the Sabbath (Mt 12:12; Mk 3:6) – Jesus withdraws from there.
- Pharisees tell Jesus that Herod wants to kill him (Lk 13:28-33) – Jesus tells them his exact plans for his ministry.
- Herod kills John the Baptist (Mt 14:1-13) – Jesus withdraws to a solitary place.
- Jews in Judea were waiting to take his life (Jn 7:1-6) – Jesus moves ministry to Galilee, because the right time for his death has not come.
- Pharisees bring adulteress to trap him (Jn 8:1-11) – Jesus keeps on teaching and no one seizes him, because it is not time yet (vs 20).

Knowing which threats to avoid, and which to face, is something that needs to be understood. There are times when a threat must be faced, and the reality of attack dealt with, not in fear, but because we know who we serve and what the phrase 'at the right time means.'

Up until now, we have dealt with the person's ability to deal with a threat. As we close this topic, there is one other source of help in dealing with a threat...the Lord. There are times when God will intervene and help us deal with, or face, a threat to fulfill his plans. We see this in the protection of the baby Jesus and the message to flee to Egypt (Mt 2:13). We see it when God tells Paul not to be afraid to preach in Corinth,

because God is watching over him (Ac 18:1). We could list many more examples of how God sometimes intervenes.

What needs to be kept in focus, is the purpose in facing a threat. Sometimes God protects, and sometimes God allows the threat to be carried out. Whichever God chooses, the good steward understands the threat and what God has in mind. Our role is to be a good steward and correctly deal with the threat.

For further study

Paul gives us several examples of what it means to understand the threats we face and how to deal with them. Read the following texts and consider how God used the threats.

Ph 1:15-30

Ac 21:10-14

Consider Peter's comments about being threatened for your faith.

1 Pe 3:13-17

Steward 14 – Wine Stewards of Xerxes (Es 1:8)

There is only a brief mention of this group of stewards in Es 1:8. In the first chapter of Esther, we are told about a huge party that the king decides to have. This party will last 180 days and includes a colossal number of people. What we are told is that all of the wine stewards--remember it was a gigantic party--were to make sure all of the guests had exactly what they wanted to drink. And it had to be the best, because it was coming from the king's supply.

It is hard to imagine the size of this gala. Who throws a party that lasts 180 days? And who has enough stuff that would take that long to display it all? But Xerxes did, and it would require a group of stewards, to be sure all guests had the beverages they wanted without limit. One other thing to keep in mind is that the partygoers came from all over the Persian empire, which was huge and included vastly different cultures and preferences.

This means that the group of stewards had to know what drinks were preferred in each of those many regions and to make sure they obtained enough of those beverages to keep the guests supplied and satisfied. It also meant that if a guest desired to try the beverage of another region and enjoyed it, requesting it along with their preferred beverage, the stewards would have to adjust the orders and be sure the suppliers provided the best of each one.

These men had to be very knowledgeable about all of the guests, their likes and dislikes. It would be an incredible offense to give a person the wrong beverage. Culture creates that type of issue. So, these men had to have a vast knowledge of three things: the cultural preferences of the invitees, the amount of beverages needed, and what types of beverages

could cause offense. Something you wouldn't want to happen and somehow spoil the king's party.

I am not sure how they would obtain this knowledge. I am not sure how many people they had to involve in obtaining all that was required. I am not sure how they could maintain a smooth flow of every type of drink to the correct person for 180 days. What is clear, though, is that they know how to obtain a knowledge of preferences and how to obtain those beverages. They also had the skill to keep the party moving smoothly in this key area for a very long time.

Not only that, but when the party is over, the king decides to give a banquet to bring the celebration to a fitting end. Oh, and did I mention that the queen held a separate banquet for the women of the palace? It is not clear how long this one lasted. What is clear, is that one aspect of the queen's banquet was held alongside the banquet of the king. Again, a knowledge of the likes and dislikes of a large group, with many different preferences, was necessary.

By now, I think you can see the word in focus here: "knowledge." Knowledge is a powerful tool and affects so many of our decisions. We want to find people who are truly knowledgeable to help us. We want a knowledgeable builder, plumber, electrician, accountant, teacher, and on the list goes. The more knowledgeable, the more likely we are to trust the advice and direction they give us.

Solomon requested knowledge and wisdom, so he could properly rule the people of God (2 Ch 1:10). God gave special knowledge to Bezalel and Oholiab to build the tabernacle and to teach others to help them (Ex 35:30-34). It was a constant point of contention between Job and his friends. They each

had their sources of knowledge, but they were not in agreement, which created the conflict.

In the proverbs, we are told that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge (Pr 1:7). In fact, the topic of knowledge, how to obtain and use it, is prominent in the proverbs.

- Pr 10:14 – wise men store up knowledge
- Pr 13:16 – a prudent man acts out of knowledge
- Pr 15:7 – the lips of the wise spread knowledge
- Pr 18:15 – the discerning acquire knowledge
- Pr 22:12 – the eyes of the Lord keep watch over knowledge

There is also a warning in Ecclesiastes, that if we focus to excess in gaining knowledge, that focus will bring grief (Ec 1:18). For me, the reason is obvious. If we are only trying to gain knowledge, with no ability to use or apply it, then the effort will cause futility and frustration, mostly in others, who see and hear us and realize we have no capacity to correctly use what we know.

Crucial for a steward in the Kingdom is a knowledge of the Word of God. We all are familiar with these key scriptures.

- Dt 11:18 – Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds...teach them to your children
- Ps 119:11 – I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you
- 2 Ti 3:15 – and from infancy, you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise
- He 4:12 – For the word of God is living and active...it judges the thoughts and actions of the heart.

- Co 3:16 – let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another

We are exhorted and reminded that the knowledge of God's Word is essential, if we are to carry out the task we have been given. We are also promised the help of the Holy Spirit in accessing this truth (Jn 14:26). The good steward is expected to be well-informed, to seek the knowledge needed to carry out whatever task he is given, and then to use it correctly.

For further study

Read Eccl 2:26 and Eccl 7:12 and consider what the writer is trying to teach you about knowledge.

What can you learn about the function of knowledge from Da 1:17?

What is Hosea trying to tell us about knowledge in Ho 4:6?

Steward 15 – Chuza – Steward of Herod (Lk 8:3)

We barely know anything about Chuza. Even the reference we have is not really about him, but his wife, Joanna (Lk 8:3). We are told that she helped Jesus from her substance. Chuza is mentioned as being her husband, and we are told that he is the steward of the house of Herod Antipas.

Beyond that, everything we might say is surmised. We know Herod A was responsible for the death of John the Baptist. We know that Herod's is interested in Jesus, he has heard of the fame of Jesus, and possibly shares with his servant how he thinks that maybe Jesus is John the Baptist resurrected. Some may believe that he does so, because there are followers of Christ among his servants. We also know from Ac 13:1 that his foster brother appears in the list of Christian prophets.

With this information, we can begin to create a picture of Chuza, but only a limited one. Chuza allows his wife to use her resources to help support the work of Jesus. He does not block her activity and may actually facilitate the process. He is able to do this, because of Herod's interest in Jesus and who he is.

Even if that is not the case, we do learn one thing: he does not prevent his wife from doing so. He may even facilitate what she is doing. How it is made possible will remain a mystery, but in the world of first-century women, even women of means, and especially women of the Jewish culture, a woman could not carry out such activity without the permission of her husband.

Chuza makes it possible, directly or indirectly, for his wife to minister among Jesus' followers and aid that ministry through her resources.

The word "facilitate" is a critical word to understand. A good leader, and in this case a good steward, makes it possible for others to do their work. It actually makes the work go smoother, if you are helping others grow and develop their skills. They gain confidence, and you gain a more capable worker.

The word I can find closest to "facilitate" in scripture is the word "assist." In Numbers, as they set up the assignments related to the tabernacle, a number of people are selected to assist in the operation of the tabernacle (Nu 1:5). On three occasions the Lord identifies people to assist in the ministry of the tabernacle (Nu 3:6; 8:26; 18:2). If Aaron was wise, he would facilitate the priests and Levites in carrying out the ministry of the tabernacle.

Paul, in writing to the Romans, hopes they will be able to assist him on his journey to Spain. To restate it, they would be able to facilitate his work and travel.

This action of facilitating others can be a leader facilitating those who work for him, or workers facilitating the work of their master or leader. Barzilai does this for David when he brings supplies to help David in his journey (2 Sa 17:27-28), and then David facilitates the entry of Kimham into the court (2 Sa 19:31-38).

This ability benefits both those above you and below you in any area of responsibility. The steward makes the work of his superior easier and helps those below him to grow and accomplish their work, or some other important task.

For further study

One scripture stands out in relation to this concept. Read Ro 12:3 and consider how the idea of not thinking too highly of yourself applies to being a good facilitator. Keep reading down to verse 8 and consider what qualities will help a person be a good facilitator.

Do the same for the following scriptures

- 1 Co 3:10
- 1 Co 4:7
- Ph 2:3-4

Up until now, we have been studying the lives and actions of real people, people who served others as stewards.

We are going to switch now and look at how Jesus uses this word in his parables. There are six parables that we will look at, in which Jesus uses a steward to teach the disciples, and others, key attitudes in the Kingdom of God.

Stewards 16 – Stewards in charge - Parables of the minas and talents

On two occasions, Jesus told a parable regarding a master, who gave his servants (stewards) key resources to care for.

In Mt 25:15-28 we learn that three of his servants are given talents (a talent had a value of about \$5000). One is given five talents, another two talents, and the last, one talent.

In Lk 19:13-27 we learn that the master gives minas (about three month's wages). In this parable, there are ten servants, and the amount given to each of them is one mina.

In both of these parables, the master goes on an extended journey. The reasons for the journeys are different, but what happens when he returns, is the same. In Matthew, we are told that the master entrusted his property to his servants and gave specific amounts to three of them, based on his knowledge of their ability. We are not told what he expected them to do with this gift. In Luke, he gives the minas to ten servants, but nothing regarding what they are to do with those funds is revealed. It is when he returns, that we learn that he had expected them to do something with the money.

In both stories, the master returns from his journey and calls in his servants, to inquire about what they have done with what they were given. The one difference would be that the master

in Luke only reviews three of the 10 who received finances. Let's look at how the master responds in each parable.

Matthew – The master calls each of the three, one by one, for a report. The one who received five talents has doubled the amount given, and the one who received two has doubled it as well. The master is pleased with their faithfulness in managing these few things. He then invites them to share in their master's happiness, with the promise that they will be placed in charge of many things. The one who received one talent was afraid of his master and so feared to risk the loss of what he had been given. Instead of using the money to do something, he buried it in the ground, hiding it from all. The master is not pleased with both the reason for his fear and his lack of results. He is told he should at least have given it to a bank, to earn interest. So, this man's talent is given to the one who received five, and the fearful servant is cast out of his master's house.

Luke – The master calls three of the ten servants for a report. One of them has been able to use the one mina to gain a profit of ten more. Another servant has done the same and gained a profit of five. The first is given charge over ten cities, the second is given charge over five cities. They are both praised by their master, for they have been trustworthy with a small matter. The third servant returns the mina he received with the explanation that the master is a hard man, a man he fears. He is criticized for this evaluation and for the fact that he didn't put it on deposit, so he could at least have earned some interest for his master. His mina is to be taken away and given to the person who earned ten.

Two further lessons are stated. The first is that, those who do well with what they are given will receive more, and secondly,

those who are careless will lose more than they were given. The first is obvious and is stated clearly. The second is not so obvious. The judgment of both masters was not about how much was earned, but about whether they had used wisely, what they had been given. In Matthew, we are told that each received an amount according to their ability. In Luke, each received the same. In Matthew, they were promised more, but exactly what is not specified. In Luke, the promise is in accord with what they have accomplished.

The last person in each story is judged for two things: for fearing the master and believing that his master is a hard man, who is dishonest; and for failing to do anything of value with what has been given to them.

A wise steward understands the intentions and purposes of the master and knows how to make wise use of his master's resources. This wise use will result in improving the status of his master. In this case, it results in increased finances. It could also result in the master being honored, because of how well his household is managed. It could bring him more respect, because people would trust his servants and their actions, seeing this to be a result of the master's actions. Having good stewards always yields blessings for both the steward and the master. He will be seen as a wise person, because he demonstrates wisdom in the training and development of those who serve him, and that yields benefits.

A key topic in this study about investing is the word "gain." It is not hard to find scriptures dealing with the idea of gain based on greed. Here are a couple:

Isa 56:11 They are dogs with mighty appetites; they never have enough. They are shepherds who lack understanding; they all turn to their own way, each seeks his own gain.

Ezek 22:12 In you, men accept bribes to shed blood; you take usury and excessive interest and make unjust gain from your neighbors by extortion. And you have forgotten me, declares the Sovereign Lord.

Hab 2:9 Woe to him who builds his realm by unjust gain to set his nest on high, to escape the clutches of ruin!

Jesus knew the danger of misunderstanding this word “gain.” He also understood that an incorrect understanding of the purpose of investing what we have, can gain dangerous results. He talked about the idea of focusing on gaining the things of the world and losing your soul (Mk 8:36; Lk 9:25). Then in John 7:18, he defines what we should seek to gain by our actions. First, he states that most people speak and act to gain honor for themselves, but a man of truth works to gain honor for the one who sent him. This is key to helping a steward know how to invest what they have received. Is my focus on receiving honor for myself, or in bringing honor to the one who entrusted me with his property?

Paul expands this idea in 1 Co 13:3, when he says if I give everything, even my life, with the wrong motive, without love (in this case, the love of God) then I gain nothing. In fact, if you review the prior statements in vs 1-3, it becomes clear that if my motive is not to share God’s love and his Kingdom, then my abilities will produce nothing, no gain of any true eternal value.

A steward in the Kingdom knows that a true investment will bring the results requested in the Lord’s Prayer: honor to God’s name, the accomplishment of His will, and the realization of His Kingdom. It will also allow God to provide his word to us daily, give us the ability to forgive correctly, and protect us from evil (disobedience). This type of

investment will always produce the desired results. So that when we stand before our Lord, we will hear the words, “Well done good and faithful servant (Mt 25:21).”

For further study

Read 1 Ti 6:3-10.

Now explain how godliness helps us understand how to properly use what God has given us.

Reflect on the things of this world and how they can limit true gain in your life and your ability to invest correctly what you have received from God.

Steward 17 – Steward of Vineyard in Parable of the laborers (Mt 20:8)

In Matthew 20:1-16, Jesus tells another parable to describe the kingdom of God. It is about a landowner, who is hiring workers to harvest the grapes of his vineyard. One of two things must be true, in order to explain his hiring practices: it is either a large vineyard with a bountiful harvest, so that he is constantly looking for more workers, or this is a compassionate man, who is concerned about the needs of those looking for work. Probably both are true, but that is not what we want to review at this point.

At the end of the day when it comes time to pay, we finally learn that there is a foreman overseeing the work. This word is translated as “manager” or “steward”. The focus is on one who has oversight of the work on behalf of the owner.

I am going to make an assumption in describing this person and his work. I am going to assume that the landowner had a great deal of confidence in him. Why do I say that? The landowner is constantly heading to town to find more workers, which means he leaves the steward in charge of all that is happening in the vineyard.

If you don't trust your steward with that work, then you would send him to town to find workers, while you continue to supervise the work. It also means that you trust the steward to properly assign the work of those being sent. Again, I say this because of how often the landowner is probably in town at his house. In verses 3& 5, it says “he went out,” which suggests he may have been in his home, dealing with other matters, so the work of the vineyard was left in the hands of the steward.

It is not until evening that he actually speaks with the steward, and that is to give instructions on how much to pay the workers. He has left his house, having the money needed to do this, and gives the steward a brief instruction: pay each man his wages. We are not privy to the whole conversation, but the steward pays out one denarius to every man, no matter how long they have worked. There was likely agreement or an understanding, because the workers don't query the steward, only the landowner.

This brings us back to the reason behind hiring people at such odd hours and so late in the day. He is a generous and kind man. His steward knows this, understands this, and carries out his work without debate or contention. He is part of the process of blessing those in need.

This steward was not concerned about how many workers came, when they came, or other such details. His focus was to put every person to work and include them in the harvest. This quality is called "magnanimity." Okay, that is a really big word. There are others: generous, benevolent, and altruistic. This describes the landowner, and in this case, the steward also.

Why do I say that? It is an assumption on my part, but it makes sense. What landowner does what this one did, unless his steward fully understands what is happening and knows what to do when workers keep arriving, even shortly before the day is done? They are both generous, which makes this parable even more powerful.

Paul praises this attitude of generosity by the church in Philippi (1 Co 8:2). In their poverty, they chose to be generous. Then in 2 Co 9:11- 14 he explains the importance of such generosity:

1. It will allow them to be made rich in every way, so they can continue to be generous
2. Their generosity will result in thanksgiving to God
3. It supplies the needs of God's people
4. It is a confession of the gospel of Christ and one's trust in God

Sacrificial giving is the basis of such generosity. It is a willingness to risk what one has, to benefit others. The immediate blessing is evident in the help it provides in the moment. The longer, greater blessing cannot be seen until later, as those who were blessed in turn bless others.

These days, there are many small videos talking about "random acts of kindness" and the idea of "paying it forward." The random acts of kindness concept is that you do something kind for someone, so they will do the same for someone else. The idea behind paying it forward is that if you help someone in this moment of need, a time will come when they will remember and help someone they meet who is in need.

I realize the parable has a focus, which is that everyone who seeks forgiveness and pardon for their sin will receive it. It does not matter if one spends a lifetime in service as a result of that action or makes that decision minutes before their death, they will receive this gift from God and enter into heaven.

Those who labored all day (or for a lifetime), can lose sight of this reality and the blessings they received as they worked. They knew their wage and could fulfill their task in peace, knowing they would receive what they needed, to maintain the life of their family.

And that leads us to one more aspect of the work of the steward in this setting. It was his responsibility to make sure that they could do the work and feel good about it. He had to be sure the work was done right; and the best way to do so was to encourage his workers, to let them know he was satisfied with their work and the effort they were making to carry out the tasks assigned to them.

Generosity in the form of encouragement, direction, and praise would be important, if the work is to be completed. The best way for that to happen is to be generous with your words and presence, as the work progresses.

A steward understands the value of generosity at many levels and practices it in his work.

For further study

According to Ro 12:8, a key aspect of generosity is the ability to focus on the needs of others.

As a steward, how does one do this?

How does Eccl 11:6 apply to this concept of generosity?

What more can we learn about generosity from He 6:10-11

Steward 18 – Parable of Wasteful Steward (Lk 16:1-8)

This man was a fool, stupid, and careless. He had been put in charge of a vast realm. This seems apparent when we see the numbers involved in the accounts he altered, so that people would grant him special favors after his current employment ended.

First of all, he was careless and cavalier in his actions. He clearly was abusing his position and enjoying the wealth of his boss. We are not sure how he was being wasteful, and why someone reported his actions. Parties, gifts, and other things come to mind. Maybe the fact that he snubbed someone, or they expected to share in what he was enjoying, but he didn't share it with them.

We are only told that he was accused of wasting his master's possessions and now had to give an account of what he had done with them. The fact that we are told that he seeks to find a way out of the situation, something that will not result in his having to do menial labor or beg, is proof that he indeed has done what he was accused of. We have no idea what was being wasted and how, but it was sufficient to create a need for him to make some major alterations to his master's records.

We don't know if, in fact, what he did was successful. Did he escape being punished? Unknown. What we do know, is that his actions were considered shrewd by the master. Then we learn the point of the parable which is more important than where this man ended up and in what state.

If you can be trusted with a little, then you can be trusted with more. But if you are dishonest with a little, you will be dishonest with much. If you cannot be trusted with handling

the wealth of this world, then who will trust you with true riches? The last one is the hardest of them. If you are not trustworthy with the property of others, then who will give you property of your own? If you can't handle the one, you will not properly handle the other. (Luke 16:10-12)

This is the real test of a steward: can you be trusted with the property of anyone, even your own? The use of one will indicate how you will handle the other. How you live as an individual, will be reflected in how you live when working for others.

While the concept of trust is a prominent topic in the scripture, it is generally about issues related to the person's trust in God, or lack of it, and the fact that they often put their trust in other gods (Je 13:25), countries (Is 20:5), their own wickedness (Is 47:10), and even their own beauty (Ez 16:15). This results in God's

judgement for not trusting in Him.

This same point was part of the debate between Job and his friends. They went back and forth, debating why Job was suffering. A key point in this debate was their belief that he had put his trust in the wrong thing. While they were wrong about Job, they were right about not placing trust in what will fail and what is fundamentally worthless, untrustworthy.

Our task is to learn to be trustworthy. This will be gained by what we choose to trust in our own lives. The following passages suggest some possible avenues that will help us learn to be trustworthy and so be seen as people who can be trusted.

- Ex 18:21 But select capable men from all the people — men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate

dishonest gain — and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens.

There are two key concepts in this passage. First, they are capable men. This is an important concept and relates to the idea of being able to manage a small thing, which can lead to doing the same on a larger scale. If we want to be trusted, then we need to demonstrate that we are capable of managing what we already have. This is about being teachable and correctable. We must be willing to practice, accept criticism, and work until we have learned how to manage a key skill or ability.

The other concept is learning to fear God. This is not about terror but about respect and authority. This person understands the source of his life and the purpose of his life. This knowledge teaches them to honor and respect the source of all they have and to care for it properly.

- Neh 13:13 I put Shelemiah the priest, Zadok the scribe, and a Levite named Pedaiah in charge of the storerooms and made Hanan son of Zaccur, the son of Mattaniah, their assistant, because these men were considered trustworthy. They were made responsible for distributing the supplies to their brothers.

Nehemiah selected key people to administer the tithes and offerings being brought to the temple. In this passage, we are not given any information about these people, but earlier in the book we see that each of them was responsible for rebuilding a portion of the wall. They already had experience in managing supplies, workers, and the distribution of goods for a task. Experience is an important factor in learning to be trustworthy. We need to find opportunities to gain experience.

We can start by helping someone who already knows what to do and learn through observation and participation.

- Prov 13:17 A wicked messenger falls into trouble, but a trustworthy envoy brings healing.

The lesson to learn here, is that a trustworthy person does not harm or damage what is being done. Their actions are beneficial to those for whom they are working or supervising. It is not just about getting the task done, no matter what the cost, but to complete it in a way that blesses those involved.

- Titus 2:9-10 Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them, 10 and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted, so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive.

In this passage, we encounter a few basic ideas that are critical to our being seen as trustworthy. The first is the desire to please those you work for. You need to do your best, so that those you serve will be satisfied and see you as capable of more responsibility and trust.

The second is the idea of not being disrespectful. This is not about whether or not to share the problems and issues that may occur but is about the manner in which that information is shared. Learning the proper way to communicate both positive and negative information.

The third one may seem obvious: not to steal but stealing may be about more than taking an object. A person can steal productivity, by how efficiently they work. A person can steal from the quality of the work, by doing shoddy work. A person can steal from the character of the workplace, by being indolent, abusive of others, and uncooperative.

As you learn what to do, and what not to do, you can develop into a person who is seen as trustworthy. This also follows the teaching of Jesus, after the parable of the unwise steward. If you can be trusted with a little, then you can be trusted with greater responsibility.

These examples help us see that there are people who can be trusted, and that you can learn what behavior is involved, so you can be identified as a person who can be trusted. Joseph was a humble steward, and both Potiphar and the jailor saw that he could be trusted. As a result, in the end, they put him in charge of everything related to the household and the jail.

A good steward can be trusted with the property and responsibilities they have been given to manage.

For further study

Another word for trust used in scripture is the word “confidence.”

Read the following scriptures and consider how your relationship with the Lord impacts your ability to be trustworthy.

Jer 17:7 “But blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him.

2 Cor 3:4-6 Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. 5 Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. 6 He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant— not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

Paul discusses his life and lists a series of things that people sometimes use to create confidence in oneself, in order to appear trustworthy.

Read Philippians 3:4-8

Write a description of yourself and the qualities you have that would make you trustworthy in the eyes of others.

Now reflect on Paul's goal in vs 7-8.

Steward 19 – Steward of a master on a journey an end-times parable (Lk 12:42)

This parable is about being a good servant. Jesus has just finished a teaching session, and one of the topics has been the need to be ready to serve. Good servants are ready at any time to care for their master's needs. He then states that if the owner of the house had known when the thief was coming, he would have done what was necessary to secure his house. He then concludes with the fact that no one knows when the Son of Man will come, and they must be ready. Lk 12:35-48.

They ask if he is telling a parable, and who is it for?

Now follows the parable of the wise manager or steward. The master has left and put him in charge. While he is gone the steward is to be sure everyone is fed properly and at the correct time. If the master returns and all is in order, then he will give the steward more responsibility.

Now comes the contrast between what happens to three different types of stewards in this situation, where the master has left and not stated when he will return.

1. The steward who understands all of what his master wants and intends, will be vigilant to make sure all is in order when he returns. No matter how long it takes, he is ready for the master's return, and he will be blessed.
2. The steward who is not vigilant and is unprepared when the master returns, has become lazy and careless, because of the delay in the master's return. If the master returns and all is in disorder, this steward will be punished and fired.

3. The steward who does not understand all of his master's plans and fails in some way, will still be punished but not as severely.

The final instruction is that to everyone who is given much responsibility, much will be required, and the one entrusted with much, much more will be asked.

There are two aspects to the concept of vigilance that are brought to our attention. The first is fairly obvious. The steward is to make sure everything is in order, so that no matter when the master returns, he will be satisfied. The second is a little less obvious and comes from the third type of steward. This steward does not take the time to learn what his master expected of him. He has some things ready but not everything. A wise steward takes the time to know all that is expected of him, to avoid failing to have everything in order for the master's return.

The second aspect of vigilance is the more challenging and critical one. How does one learn what their master expects? I can think of a couple of ways. First, he has to be observant. He keeps a trained eye on the master to learn the preferences and patterns. Second, he listens attentively to be sure he hears and understands all the directions given. Third, he asks questions. If he has been careful in doing the first two, then it will not be a problem to ask questions for clarity and to gain more information. Fourth, he listens to what the other members of the household are saying. This can be a huge source of information to improve the work and accomplish all that is expected.

The last idea of this passage is that those, who are vigilant and carry out effectively the responsibilities assigned, will be given more, and more will be expected of them. At first sight,

this could be a little terrifying, but if the work is being done and organized correctly, that should not be an issue. You have learned how to accomplish the work and have now developed the skills needed to do your work correctly. It is just a matter of applying those skills and continuing to grow and learn.

All of this applies to our relationship and service to God. We are told, over and over, to study the scriptures. Paul tells this to Timothy and clarifies its purpose: to be an approved workman (2 Ti 2:15). Studying the scripture means we are listening to our Lord, watching his life, and asking questions. We are encouraged to have fellowship with others. This allows us to hear and observe others, to learn what they have discovered about our Lord. This is the focus of John's message in 1 Jn 1:1-4.

We could easily fill pages with this type of information. The point is that we cannot be truly vigilant, if we do not clearly understand the person we serve. You cannot be prepared if you don't know how to be prepared. It is not about when. It is about being ready all of the time, "vigilant." A good steward is vigilant, which means that no matter when the master returns or the Lord comes, all is ready and in its proper place.

For further study

Read Ph 4:8-9

Consider how each point of this passage can help you be vigilant in the Lord's work.

What have you received from others that can be used to do a better job of being vigilant?

Take time to consider the following scriptures: 1 Co 2:9; Ep 2:10; 2 Ti 2:21. How has God prepared you to do the work

you have been given? How does this affect your need to be vigilant?

Read 2 Ti 4:2 – Are you ready, vigilant? Could you clearly tell someone why you serve God?

Steward 20 – Steward over finances of Candace Queen of Ethiopia (Ac 8:27)

Here is Philip standing in the wilderness, no worse, a desert. It is hot and dusty, and you have been sent to meet someone. He doesn't know who is coming or what to expect. All he knows is that God has sent him to this isolated place, and he is obedient to God's direction. Because of this, he meets an Ethiopian Eunuch, who happens to be a powerful official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, the queen of the Ethiopians.

So, he shares with him God's word, and he believes. He sees some water and decides he wants to be baptized. Philip agrees, and down to the water he goes and carries out the act of baptism. As soon as he leaves the water, God carries him off to a place called Azotus. The eunuch gets in his chariot, rejoicing as he heads back to Ethiopia, and they never see each other again.

There are several interesting things to consider about this eunuch. He is a man who occupies a high position in the court of Candace. He is not just a treasurer but oversees the entire treasury of the queen. If he has such important work, why was he in Jerusalem? Why was he so focused on reading from the scroll of Isaiah?

There is only one word that I can think of for this, and that is "passionate." The problem with this word is it has another focus, about which we need to be careful. That focus relates to the emotions tied to sexual relations. To avoid this, we may need to use one of several other possible words like "fervent," "zealous," "dedicated," or "committed." This man was a combination of all of these. He had to be, to have convinced his queen to let him go, to travel such a great distance, to spend

a fair amount of money in the process, and be so focused as to not wonder why you are standing in the middle of a lonely dusty road waiting for him.

Possibilities. One wonders how he became so interested in a religion other than his own and was willing to risk traveling to a country and people that were unknown to him. It is possible to make an educated guess but only educated. Remember, that during the reign of Solomon, the Queen of Sheba came to visit and learn about his wisdom and more, which she did, and she may have taken that back to her people. The queen of Sheba could have brought back knowledge of the Jewish belief in one god to her people, and this belief had been passed along, until the current ruler of Ethiopia had learned of it and desired more information. There is some possibility that there was a connection between the two regions of Sheba and Abyssinia (Ethiopia). That is speculation that could explain how the information passed from Sheba to Ethiopia.

However, he got the information, he plainly wanted more. So, he makes the journey in search of more information, and he manages to obtain a copy of the scroll of Isaiah. That would have not been a cheap document to obtain nor something readily available. There is a real possibility that he had to spend a considerable time in Jerusalem. First, convincing the leaders to make such a copy. They would be reluctant, but the fact that he had the means to pay, and possibly was willing to pay their price, convinced them to do so. Still, they would likely make sure that he sincerely desired the copy and would not defile it, or their belief. they agreed to make the copy he would have to wait until it was done. This was an unusual request. I also wonder if they would have been willing to give him a new copy. It is more likely they gave him an existing

copy. It is also likely they didn't give him that either until they had finished its replacement. (Please keep in mind this is speculation on my part.)

There is also reason to believe that he has at least heard about the events of the Passover and is intrigued, but not quite clear, about what it all means. His interest is strong enough that he begins quickly to read the scroll of Isaiah, even as he begins his journey back home. He is so committed to learning more, that he has read a large portion of the scroll by the time he encounters the solitary man on the road. He is now reading about the suffering servant in Isaiah 53 and has questions. And here, on this lonely road, is one who can explain both the events he has heard about and the prophecy he is reading.

So now we have some background of the picture here. A steward, a highly trusted steward, has convinced his queen to let him go on a pilgrimage. He is so zealous about this, that she allows him to go in order to learn more about the beliefs of the Jewish people and their god.

This man is passionate and has the fervor and dedication to succeed. The queen is willing to place his work in the hands of others, so that he can go. He arrives, learns about the Jewish faith, obtains a copy of a key document, and takes the next step of baptism, to show his faith in the one who is the focus of his passion and worthy of his allegiance. He returns home rejoicing.

He has maintained his focus over a large distance and time. He has done the work of bringing back a document, that will help him share his passion with others. And he has taken time to seek a better understanding of what he is reading. It is this passion that will potentially encourage others to change their beliefs. Historically, the church in Ethiopia is the oldest in

existence. How this story and that piece of history are connected is not documented anywhere, but we know that a reliable witness can make a difference.

This kind of zealousness is well documented in scripture.

- Phineas is described as being zealous for the honor of the Lord in bringing an end to a plague. (Nu 25:11, 13)
- Elijah cries to God about how he has been zealous for the Lord and yet they want to kill him. (1 Ki 19:10-14)
- Paul talks about how he was zealous for the law (Ac 22:3; Ga 1:14).

The issue, though, is to be zealous about the right thing. This is the point of the following scriptures:

- Pr 23:17 tells us not to envy sinners, but to be zealous for the fear of the Lord
- Ro 10:2-3 tells us it is possible to be zealous for God, but with a zeal not based on the knowledge of righteousness, that comes from God and leads to submission to Him.
- Ga 4:18 tells us it is good to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and it keeps us focused on the correct person, God.

Titus was sent to Corinth to help in the collection of the offering, because of how he had demonstrated that he was zealous in his service to God and in his confidence that they would do their best (2 Co 8:22-24).

As you can see, this word expresses deep emotion and, if not directed correctly, can be subverted into its negative form, which is jealousy. To be zealous is to focus on having something for the benefit of others. Jealousy focuses on

having or possessing something but excludes all others from the benefits of what is desired and, in this case, controlled.

There is another type of jealousy that protects from error. God is described as jealous for his name (Ez 39:25), his honor (Is 59:17-19), and his people (Ze 1:14). Men and women are correctly jealous in relation to protecting each other from outside influence. Stated positively, we are to be zealous in encouraging ourselves, and others, in our love for the Lord.

For further study

This was part of a key instruction to Timothy in 2 Ti 2:2. He is to entrust what he has been taught to reliable men, who will then be qualified to teach others. This is how we live. We are not tied to forms and traditions but to the truth given by God and passed on from person to person. Even today, with so many translations of God's Word, it does not reach those who need to hear it and read it, unless zealous people are willing to do the work of making it available. The format does not matter, it still requires people who can be entrusted with the work, who will teach others to do the same.

Steward 21 – Steward as overseer – pastors

This section is a bit different from our previous studies, which involved a specific person or teaching about the person called a steward and their abilities. This is partly due to the fact that there is no specific word for steward in Greek. The word “steward” is our translation for a number of words like, “manager,” “director,” “governor,” “servant,” “trustee,” and “administrator.” The following scriptures all use the same Greek word, *oikonomos*, and the NIV uses a different word to translate it in each example, to capture the idea behind the Greek word.

- Luke 12:42-43 The Lord answered, "Who then is the faithful and wise **manager**, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time?"
- Rom 16:23 Erastus, who is the city's **director** of public works, and our brother Quartus send you their greetings.
- 1 Cor 4:1-3 So then, men ought to regard us as **servants** of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God. 2 Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.
- Gal 4:2 He is subject to guardians and **trustees** until the time set by his father.
- Titus 1:7-8 Since an **overseer** is entrusted (steward of God's work – various) with God's work, he must be blameless — not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain.
- 1 Peter 4:10-11 Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully **administering** God's grace in its various forms.

The KJV uses the word “steward” in each of these. Others like NAS, RSV, ASV use a mixture of overseer and steward. With all of this variation, it may seem difficult to secure an understanding of this crucial person and their work. But I think there is one verse that can help us sort through all of the information. That is Titus 1:7 where this word is brought along-side another word that is more uniformly translated as “minister, bishop, and overseer.”

- Titus 1:5 For a bishop, as God's steward - New Revised Standard Version
- Titus 1:5 For the bishop must be blameless, as God's steward - American Standard Version
- Titus 1:5 for it behoveth the overseer to be blameless, as God's steward – Young’s Literal Translation
- Titus 1:5 For an overseer, as God’s steward - English Standard Version

Here we have the two key words related to each other. The overseer or bishop is described as God’s steward. This allows us to use several passages to examine the life and character of a steward, the person placed in charge, or oversight, of the church or fellowship of believers.

The key passages are the one here in Titus 1 and the other in 1 Timothy 3. Both contain lists of qualities and traits that are important to be an effective steward. Here is the list, and we will use the passage in Timothy as our format for presenting them by the verse in which they appear. The items in parentheses are the items from the list in Titus.

- 2 – Above reproach (blameless – 7)
- 2 – Husband of one wife
- 2 – Temperate (not quick-tempered – 7)

- 2 – Respectable (upright – 8)
- 2 – hospitable (8)
- 2 – Able to teach (holds firm to message as taught, can encourage others and refute those who oppose it – 9)
- 3 – not given to drunkenness (7)
- 3 – gentle (not overbearing – 7) (not violent – 7)
- 3 – not quarrelsome
- 3 – not a lover of money (not pursuing dishonest gain – 7)
- 4 – able to manage his home
- 6 – not a recent convert
- 7 – have a good reputation
- (Loves what is good – 8)
- (self- controlled – 8)
- (holy – 8)

This is quite a list and has been the topic of many books on ministry. The point is that we have a good description of what we should expect to find, when we look at the personality of a good shepherd.

By now, you are probably saying it is impossible to be and do all of this. And you are right. Humanly it is not possible, but we have the power and presence of the Holy Spirit to help us develop into this kind of person. The more we grow in these areas, the better we will be able to serve as stewards of the resources that God has given us. As we grow in these, we will do a better job of understanding their purpose and properly develop and use them in accordance with God's will and purpose.

And that may be the most important quality of a steward: being teachable.

For further study

Take one of the words in the list above and do a scripture search to learn more about that personality trait, so that you can develop it more fully in your life.

A final thought on Being a good steward

There are two scriptures that use the Greek word *oikonomos*. Generally, this word is translated as administrator or steward, one who has oversight of a household. But there are two scriptures that expand this meaning to include a large responsibility. Here are they are in the American Standard Version:

1 Cor 4:1-2

Let a man so account of us, as of ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. 2 Here, moreover, it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful. ASV

1 Peter 4:10 according as each hath received a gift, ministering it among yourselves, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God; ASV

I use this version because it represents the most common translation of this word in these passages.

I was made aware of this term by a friend of mine, Jose Mckella, who, as a result of his interest in teaching good stewardship and sharing what he is learning established a zoom conference using this word as the title for the group. I have watched a few of the programs and he like myself is seeing that stewardship is much more than just managing resources. The topics of the program cover a wide range of issues. In all of that there is a clear concept being developed. Stewardship is first about how we manage our relationship to God, ourselves, and our relationships with others. If we are good stewards, then managing the resources will be a natural result of that development.

In the passages above we see further that there is a greater purpose for this process. We are to develop the qualities of a good steward so that we will do much more than administer what we have been given in the way of physical resources. We are also given the more important task of properly managing and using the spiritual resources that have been given to us. In Paul's passage he specifically speaks to the responsibility of those called to minister. Peter expands the context to include all who have received any responsibility from God.

To limit the topic to how we handle finances does a serious disservice to the fuller meaning of the word steward. As we have seen throughout these studies the work of a steward covers many aspects of life and many types of service. The most common being the responsibility for the care of the entire household of which a steward has oversight.

Peter states that we are further stewards of the grace of God to each other. Each of us has received this gift and we are expected to wisely use it for the benefit of others. Paul has a similar thought in that a steward is responsible to properly handle the mysteries of God, mysteries that have been revealed in Christ and are to be thoughtfully and carefully administered so that all may receive them.

Being a steward is a profound calling and responsibility. In the kingdom of God, we are all called to this vocation. We are called to properly administer the great gift of God so that all will hear and know the truth of His love and sacrifice for all humanity.

Being a steward is so much more than simply managing a few resources. It is about accepting the commission to be a servant to all of creation. And don't let that frighten you or cause you to faint at the thought of how enormous that sounds. God is not asking us to take on the entire world. What he is asking is that each of us where we are become his stewards to administer his grace to those we meet each day, wherever he may send us. Some of us will stay right where we are and serve. Other will be sent to dusty roads far away. But wherever that is we are called to be good steward because God has gifted us to serve.

Appendix 1

Brief summaries of Stewards and terms used for each Code

- First area – Key characteristic being studied
- Second area – a brief overview of the person
- Third area – key words used to define or identify steward
 - Numbers related to Strong's numbers in OT and NT

Steward 1 – Adam (Ge 1:26, 28; 2:18-21)

- Subdue
- He was placed in a garden and there he was asked to name all of the animals. He was also told to fill and subdue the earth. This direction was given before Eve was created. We are not told if he had to do much work in the garden of Eden. It is also not clear when the work of subduing and filling the earth was to begin. What is clear is that sin intervened with the original plan that God had intended.
- Term – earth - 7287 – to have dominion
Garden - 8108 – to attend to

Steward 2 – Noah (Ge 6:11-7:5; 9:1-3)

- Administer
- His first job was to carry out a task that was designed to preserve the life of his family and a large number of animals. This task would take 100 years of faithful service to accomplish. After the flood, he is given the

instruction to multiply, but the idea of subdue is not included in this instruction.

- Term – no specific term

Steward 3 – Abraham’s Steward – Eliezer (Ge 15:2; Ge 24)

- Focused
- We are told that Abraham considered him a potential heir to all his possessions because Sarah had not provided a son. He is called Eliezer of Damascus and also one who had been born in the household of Abraham. It is likely this person who is sent to prepare certain foods for the three men who come to meet Abraham when God announces the future destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. He is likely present at many other key events in the life of Abraham and is later sent by Abraham to find a wife for Isaac among the extended family in the country where they had come from in Mesopotamia.
- Terms – a combination of 4943 and 1121 – the one who holds possession

Steward 4 – Jacob – Ge 29:18-28; 30:25-43; 31:38-42

- Joy
- One may question whether, in fact, Jacob served Laban as a steward, but we are clearly told that he was placed in charge of Laban’s flocks. In response to a comment by Laban Jacob states that under his care the flocks have increased, and Laban has prospered. This relates to the 14 years Jacob worked to pay the bride price for his two wives. Laban realizes this and readily agrees to a new arrangement

As a result of the new arrangement and relationship a change begins to occur. Jacob is still in charge of the flocks of Laban but now he will be paid for his effort. They have come to an agreement of what Jacob will receive in payment for his labor. At the end of this time Laban and his family are quite concerned by the difference in the condition of the flocks of the two men.

Laban's flocks have not prospered as well as those of Jacob. We also learn that Jacob covered the cost of any livestock lost or robbed from his own. He also states he suffered greatly in caring for and protecting the flock of Laban. We also learn that during this time the wages agreement has been revised several times.

In the end Jacob and his wives decide that Laban has become unhappy with them and so they choose to leave.

- Terms – 5647 – serve or be a husbandman

Steward 5 – Joseph – Ge 39:1-6, 20-23; 41:37-45

- Humility
- Joseph serves as a steward in three very different contexts.
- First, he purchases as a slave by Potiphar. Joseph manages to impress his owner and is moved from slave quarters to the house in order to supervise its activities. Joseph does so well that he is placed over much more. The improvements result in Joseph having control of every aspect of Potiphar's life and activity. Only two things are not included in this, the choice of what to eat, and Potiphar's wife.

It will be the actions of the wife and Josephs' clear adherence to the guidelines of his work that will create

the situation that ends his role as steward in this place. A jealous and embarrassed wife lies to get rid of Joseph in vengeance for being rejected.

Second, he becomes the steward of Pharaoh's jailer. This may seem strange to us. But we are told that in some way Joseph impresses the jailor who then places him in control of the jail. This continues until the jailor no longer concerns himself with what is happening in the jail. It also allows Joseph access to a special section of the jail where those who have displeased the Pharaoh are sent. Joseph has access to all areas and activities of the jail.

As a result, when the baker and wine taster are sent to the jail by Pharaoh, they are willing to talk to Joseph. He interprets their dreams and his interpretation is correct. One other thing to note is that in the process Joseph impresses the wine taster. We see the evidence of this when he risks being punished once again. He had forgotten about Joseph until Pharaoh has his two dreams. He openly admits his failure to share information about Joseph in the beginning.

Third, he becomes the steward of all Egypt. His interpretation of the dreams and wise council result in him being placed in charge of all of Egypt. Pharaoh relinquishes control of everything but matters of the throne and religion to Joseph. No one disputes his decisions, and all are pleased by his actions, even when the drought and famine are at their worst.

- Terms – Potiphar – 6485 (6496) – to watch over, be overseer
 - Prison – 5414 – committed to
 - Egypt – no specific term

Steward 6 – steward of Joseph (Ge 43-44)

- Discrete
- Joseph had a person who oversaw different aspects of his household. We are not told specifically what all this person is responsible for or when he begins his service. It is clear that he cared for food preparations for the guests. He was part of Joseph's plans related to his brothers. When the brothers queried him, his response indicates that Joseph included him in the plans, and he had some knowledge of who the brothers were.
- Term – a combination of terms 5921, 834, 376 – protector of the house, male in charge of the house

Steward 7– Steward of Saul and then Mephibosheth – Ziba (2 Sa 9: 1, 16:1, 19:17)

- Honest
- He was a servant in the household of Saul. David consults Ziba to see if any son of Jonathan is still alive. He learns that there is one and decides to bring Mephibosheth, son of Jonathan, into his house in fulfillment of his promise. He then assigns Ziba as steward over the family land to care for it on behalf of Mephibosheth.
When David is forced to flee Jerusalem because of his son Absalom Ziba comes with supplies and animals for transport. He tells David that Mephibosheth did not come because he hoped David would die and he could take the kingdom of Saul. David later learns that Ziba had lied and that Mephibosheth had been abandoned by Ziba. David then divides the estate between them.
- Term – 5288 – servant

5650 - servant

Steward 8 – Stewards in the house of David (various 1 Ch 27:25-31)

- Skilled
- In this passage, we find a number of people mentioned and the responsibilities that have been given to each of them to oversee. While the word steward is not used in relation to the people placed in charge of these different areas their role would be much like that of a steward in carrying out their responsibilities.
- Term – 5921 – to be over

Steward 9 – Ahab’s Steward – Obadiah (1 Ki 18:3)

- Balance
- His story is interesting in that he manages to continue serving God even though he is the steward in the house of Ahab, the most wicked king of Israel. We first meet him when he has been sent by Ahab to search for grass to feed the horses during the drought announced by Elisha. It is while searching for grass that he meets Elisha who tells him to carry a message to Ahab to meet him for a showdown. Obadiah is frightened by this encounter and during their conversation, we learn that he has managed to hide 70 prophets of God from Ahab and Jezebel, who has been trying to eradicate all the followers of God. Many feel he is also the author of the book with his name, Obadiah.
- Term – 5921 – to be over

Steward 10 – Steward of Zimri – Arza (1 Ki 16:9)

- Propriety

- Arza is an example of an unfaithful steward who is more concerned about his safety than carrying out his responsibilities. He hands over all the sons of the king, Zimri, to be murdered by the leader of a rebellion.
- Terms – combination 5921, 834 – protector of the house, male in charge of the house

Steward 11 – Steward of Hezekiah – Shebna (2 Ki 18: 18, 26, 37; Is 22:15; 36:11, 22)

- Meek
- He is identified as the person who is over the house of Zedekiah and is called steward in various translations. According to the words of Isaiah he is misusing his position and access to resources to construct a beautiful sepulcher or tomb in a place assigned to royalty. He may also be involved in plans that would negatively impact the government. He is to be replaced by Eliakim.
- Term – 5532 - treasurer

Steward 12 – Steward over the care of Daniel and friends (Da 1:11, 16)

- Adaptable
- This man has been assigned the task of training and caring for a select group of people who are to become administrators or workers in the palace. Among these are Daniel and his friends. He risks his life to follow Daniel's instructions regarding the food they are brought. He allows them a chance to prove what they are saying and when he sees the improvement changes the diet for Daniel and his friends.
- Term – 5921 – to be over

4453 – Melzar or butler or official of the court

Steward 13 – Nehemiah – wine taster (Nehemiah)

- Courage
- While we are aware that Nehemiah was the food taster for Artaxerxes it is also likely that he had more responsibilities than that. In all probability, he had involvement in the preparation of the food and purchase of the groceries. This makes sense since a wise man doesn't want to taste something if he has no knowledge of who prepared it, how it was prepared, and how the ingredients were obtained. His king had a great deal of confidence in him. So much that he was willing for Nehemiah to be gone for twelve years the first time and permit a second trip at a later date. You do not let someone be absent that long unless all is well organized and planned so that you will not need to fear the possibility of being poisoned. Again, we see the evidence of these skills in how Nehemiah managed the work and situation once he arrived in Jerusalem. He knew how to organize people, how to evaluate the work and its needs, and to see and deal with threats before they became a serious problem. All good qualities of a steward. He also was very wise in how he handled the finances and what he used or didn't use for his personal needs.
- Term – no specific term

Steward 14 – Wine Stewards of the king in the story of Esther (Es 1:8)

- Knowledgeable

We are told that the wine stewards are to provide the guests of the king with whatever type of drink they desired.

- Terms – combination 7227, 3245 – officials appointed

Steward 15 – Chuza – Steward of Herod (Lk 8:3)

- Facilitate
- We learn about this person briefly as part of a description of the action of his wife. She is one of those supporting the ministry of Jesus through her gifts. We are not told the source of her resources nor what she supplied. What we are told is her husband is a steward in the house of Herod. That means he has access to resources and has a certain amount of freedom in how they are used. We are not told if he receives a salary or other income. But it is clear that he is not afraid to allow his wife to use what he has or has access to. Further to do this without fear of what Herod may do or say.
- Term – 2012 – domestic manager

Parables of Jesus

Stewards 16 – Placed in charge

- Investor
- Mt 25:15-28
- These three persons appear in a number of the parables of Jesus. One is about ten people who are given responsibilities by the king, of these three are selected for review. On another occasion, it is about three people who are given varying amounts of resources, 10, 5, and 1 talent.

- In each case, their work is reviewed to see how well they have managed what was given to them. One is criticized and punished for failing to make use of the resource. He produces nothing and only manages to return what was received. The others are given more responsibility.
- Term – 1401 - servants
- Lk 19:13-27
- In this version, ten people are given 10 minas to invest. We only learn about what three of them have done and how their chief responds to each. As above the issue is not how much they gain but whether they have used the resource wisely and multiplied it. Each is rewarded responsibility for a number of cities depending on how they have done. The one who failed loses what he was originally given.
- Term – 1401 - Servants

Steward 17 – Steward of Vineyard in Parable of the laborers (Mt 20:8)

- Generous
- We are told that the owner of the vineyard calls the steward or foreman of the work and instructs him in how the workers are to be paid. He is probably responsible to make sure all of those hired throughout the day are gainfully employed even if they arrive and only work for one hour.
- Term – no specific term

Steward 18 – Parable of Wasteful Steward (Lk 16:1-8)

- Trustworthy

- In this parable, the steward is wasteful in the use of his master's resources. When this is discovered he comes up with a plan to win the favor of those who have done business with his master so that they will be willing to employ him or at least treat him favorably. He is praised for coming up with a plan to survive being fired.
- Term – 3623 – house manager, overseer

Steward 19 – Steward of a master on a journey an end-times parable (Lk 12:42)

- vigilant
- In this parable, a steward is discussed, and his responsibilities are mentioned. The focus is the responsibility to care for the household and have everything in order for the day the owner returns. A key aspect of this is to always be ready because the owner could return unannounced.
- Term - 1401 – servant
2525 – to make ruler

Steward 20 – Steward over finances of Candace Queen of Ethiopia (Ac 8:27)

- Passionate
- We are told that the eunuch that Philip encountered on the desert road is in charge of the finances of the Queen of Ethiopia. His trip implies that he has a great deal of freedom to travel. This suggests that he must be an astute person and has people he trusts that can care for things when he is away.
- Term – combination – 1413, 1047 – authority over the treasury

Steward 21 – Steward as overseer – pastors

- In the letters of Paul, we learn much about the qualities of an overseer. The Greek word for steward can be translated as overseer. In this context, the overseer is one who is responsible for a church or group of people. It is said by James that one who desires to be an overseer desires a good thing. We are also told clearly that his person must be very careful because much will be expected of them.
- 1 Ti 4:6 worthy steward and good minister
 - Term - 1249 – minister, deacon
- Tit 1:7 bishop as God's steward (KJV)
 - Oversee is entrusted with God's work (NIV)
 - Bishop, as God's steward (various)
 - Term – 3623 – steward, house manager, governor
 - 1985 - bishop
- Romans 16:23 – Erastus
 - term 3623 – steward,
- 1 Co 4:1, 2 - stewards of mysteries
- Ga 4:2 – under tutors and governors
- 1 Ti 3:1 sets his heart on being an overseer (bishop- in other translations)
 - Term 1984, 1985 bishop overseer
- Acts 20:28 Holy Spirit has made you overseers
 - Term – 1985 - overseer