

WHAT IS STEWARDSHIP?

"The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it..." - Psalm 24:1

As Christians, we sometimes use "churchy words" with the assumption that everyone who hears them knows what we mean, but this might not actually be the case. "Stewardship" is one of those words. So to begin, what is a steward? A simple definition would be: one who manages the possessions of another. This was more common in Biblical times than it is in our modern world, though the term "manager" would be an apt comparison. Thinking in this way, we can probably call to mind a number of managers both on an individual level (a financial advisor who manages a person's money and investments), and more corporate ones (a city or county manager who is responsible for services and resources for a group of people).

While this term appears a number of times in scripture, there are a few well known examples. In the Old Testament, the story of Joseph stretches across the book of Genesis. Joseph ends up rising to prominence in Egypt as the steward for Pharaoh by wisely counseling him to store resources in preparation for a time of famine. In the New Testament, in the gospel of Luke, Jesus tells a parable about a dishonest steward (or manager). Accused of squandering his boss's property and faced with losing his job, he acts quickly in order to set himself up following his dismissal, and in what appears to be a surprise twist, ends up being commended for it!

In both of these stories, attitude is key. Joseph endures a number of difficulties, some of which he certainly helped create, yet he never loses faith that God is with him. Just as he believes God does not and will not abandon him in difficulty, he also believes and acknowledges God's guidance and influence in his successes. While the aforementioned parable at first glance doesn't seem to have an expected ending, if we view Jesus' story as metaphor intended to illustrate a bigger point about our understanding of God, then we find a lesson. Jesus wants his followers to be just, righteous stewards. If we believe everything we own is a gift from God, then we realize that God owns everything of which we are stewards. As such, we are to use God's resources to help further God's goals. With this story, we understand we are to be generous with our wealth and use it for the benefit of others.

As Americans, part of our country's ethos involves hard work and the idea that we are self-sufficient. This can often be a good and healthy thing, but having success can also lead us to believe that we really *are* in complete control. If we believe that, then what do we need God for? Good luck? Reward for that hard work? At its core, stewardship is about our attitude. If we believe that we cannot go it alone, that our successes and achievements are the result of the gifts and abilities God created us with, then we attribute those successes to God and not solely to ourselves.

Scripture mentions that we love because God first loved us. We also give freely because God has given freely. When Jesus was asked the most important commandment, he answered simply and succinctly, "Love God and love your neighbor". There are certainly many ways to do both of these. As Christians, a fundamental belief is that one way to show our love involves giving our time, talents, and financial resources to God and the church. In doing so, we are not "giving up our hard earned money." We are gratefully offering a portion of the gifts God has given us out of love for God and others.