

Stewardship: Motives of the Heart

The Marks of a Steward

Lesson #6 for February 10, 2018

Scriptures: Hebrews 9:14; 11:8-12; Romans 4:13,18-21; Matthew 6:24; 1 John 5:2-3; Luke 16:10-12; 1 Corinthians 4:1-2.

1. It is our goal this week to identify certain characteristic traits of true stewards of God. These are the kind of people that will make up God's final end-time church. They will have a deepening relationship with the One who came to seek and save the lost. The more we understand and study these basic characteristics, the deeper they will be a part of our lives. We will see love in action.
2. One of the prime characteristics of a true steward is faithfulness. *Faithfulness* means staying true to what we know is right, especially in difficult times and especially in the heat of spiritual battles. Spiritual battles take many forms. They are part of the great fight of faith. They make up the individual battles in the great controversy.

If you love wealth, be sure to remain faithful to God and what He says about the dangers of loving money. If you crave fame, remain faithful to what the Word of God says about humility. If you struggle with lustful thoughts, remain faithful to the promises of holiness. If you want power, remain faithful to what God says about being a servant of all. The choice to be faithful or unfaithful often is made in a split second, even if the consequences can be eternal.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Sunday, February 4.

3. Read Hebrews 11:8-12,17-19 and Romans 4:13,18-21. Every good Bible student understands the challenges that Abram/Abraham went through from the time he left his homeland until he died. These verses teach us that Abraham trusted God even when the promises of God seemed impossible to be fulfilled. The Hebrew word for *faithful* means "trust." It is the same root for the Hebrew word which gives us the word *amen*; it really means to be "solid" or "firm." Are you solid and firm when temptations come your way?

Preparing to speak before the emperor, the Reformer Martin Luther "read the word of God, looked over his writings, and sought to draw up his reply in a suitable form. . . . He drew near the holy Scriptures . . . and with emotion placed his left hand on the sacred volume, and raising his right toward heaven, swore to remain faithful to the gospel, and freely to confess his faith, even should he seal his testimony with his blood."—J. H. Merle d'Aubigné, *History of the Reformation* (New York: The American Tract Society, 1846), vol. 2, book 7, p. 260.—[as quoted in *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Sunday, February 4].

After giving his response in German, Luther was asked to repeat it in Latin!

4. Read Revelation 2:10. What does it actually mean to be "faithful unto death"? Compare 2 Timothy 3:12. Are we persecuted today? Or, is persecution a thing of the past and possibly a thing of the future but not today?
5. A second characteristic of true stewards is loyalty to their Master. Matthew 6:24 makes it

clear that we cannot serve two masters. That surely implies that our true loyalty can only be to one master.

6. Read **Exodus 34:14**: “Do not worship any other god, because I, the LORD, tolerate no rivals.”—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., Exodus 34:14). New York: American Bible Society.
7. Why was it that God said bluntly: “I, the LORD, tolerate no rivals”? Is God just determined to be the King of the mountain? Or, does He recognize that if we allow other loyalties to creep into our lives, it is dangerous, maybe even deadly?
8. Read 1 Kings 8:61. Near the end of his fairly lengthy prayer at the dedication of the temple in Jerusalem, Solomon exhorted his people to be “faithful to the LORD our God, obeying all his laws and commands.” Think how different the history of Israel would have been if they had followed Solomon’s instructions in that prayer.
9. Read 1 Chronicles 28:9. Earlier in his experience, Solomon received these words of wisdom from his father:
1 Chronicles 28:9: And to Solomon he said, “My son, I charge you to acknowledge your father’s God and to serve him with an undivided heart and a willing mind. He knows all our thoughts and desires. If you go to him, he will accept you; but if you turn away from him, he will abandon you for ever.”—*Ibid.** (1 Chronicles 28:9).
10. What is the relationship between loyalty and betrayal? Can you think of a Bible example of real loyalty? Look at Job. What was it that so inspired Job that he was able to say: “Though he slay me, yet will I trust him”? (Job 13:15, *NKJV*) The experiences that Job went through were almost beyond belief. How did he survive all of that? He did not have a church to attend, or a pastor, or any Bible! Did he have any direct contact with God like Abraham did? Are we prepared to be loyal to God no matter what comes? Could we be considered truly loyal if we are afraid to admit when in association with others that we are Christians? Or, Seventh-day Adventists?
11. True stewardship requires a clear conscience. Read Hebrews 10:19-22 and 1 Timothy 4:1-2. Few, if any, of us have not experienced in ourselves or in someone close to us a person who lies and then lies again to cover it up. Such a string of events always leads to trouble. People can almost become immune to lying. How can we avoid such a pitfall? The only safety is to avoid that first lie. That will allow us to live with a clear conscience.
12. What is the role of the conscience? It is a kind of internal compass that serves to monitor our outward activities. But, a clear conscience needs a high and perfect standard to which it looks for guidance.
13. Read Hebrews 9:14. Paul suggested that a good knowledge of the life and death of Jesus symbolized by His “blood” is the only solution to a bad conscience. How does that work? By studying the life and death of Jesus, can we become so changed that our consciences serve as a more or less perfect guide? Or, do some ignore their own conscience so much that it becomes unreliable?

Every room in the soul temple has become more or less defiled, and needs cleansing. The cobwebbed closet of conscience is to be entered. The

windows of the soul are to be closed earthward, and thrown wide open heavenward, that the bright beams of the Sun of Righteousness may have free access. The memory is to be refreshed by Bible principles. The mind is to be kept clear and pure, that it may distinguish between good and evil. As you repeat the prayer Christ taught His disciples, and then strive to answer it in the daily life, the Holy Spirit will renew the mind and heart, and will give you strength to carry out high and holy purposes.—Ellen G. White, *Mind, Character, and Personality*,* vol. 1, 327.4-328.0; *Ms 24*,* 1901, p. 12. (Untitled, typed March 4, 1901.); *5MR** 215.2.

14. God, in fact, promises us that if we will be loyal to Him, He will write His law in our hearts. See Jeremiah 31:31-34; and Hebrews 8:10; 10:16-18. When we realize all that Jesus has done for us, how can we be disloyal to Him?
15. Probably the earliest hint of a guilty conscience noted in the Bible is found in the story of Cain and Abel. While Abel brought the lamb required by God as a sacrifice and shed its blood, Cain chose to bring only the vegetables he had grown.

The death of Abel was in consequence of Cain's refusing to accept God's plan in the school of obedience, to be saved by the blood of Jesus Christ, typified by the sacrificial offerings pointing to Christ. Cain refused the shedding of blood, which symbolized the blood of Christ to be shed for the world.—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*,* vol. 6, 1109; *1SM** 233.2. Compare *1MR* 131.5.

16. All true obedience starts in our thinking. (Compare the tenth commandment.) We must struggle in our minds with the challenges of being perfectly honest in all that we do and say. It may often seem like being slightly dishonest is an easier way to go; but, it often leads to trouble. Obedience to God is our only safety.
17. Is it dishonest to say to someone we greet in the morning that we are "fine" when we really are not? What might happen if we always told the truth?
18. Read 1 John 5:2-3; and Romans 1:5; 10:16-17. These texts make it quite clear that we are saved by faith and not by works. The Bible authors did not think that God's laws were difficult to obey. But, they recognized that true understanding and obedience comes only through a careful hearing and receiving of the Word of God.
19. Read 1 Samuel 15:22. Why is it that obedience is more important in God's sight than any ceremonial sacrifices or religious activities?
20. It is important to notice that in the New Testament the Greek word for *obedience* is *hupakoe* which means "a humble willingness to listen." The thief on the cross could not do anything to prove his obedience; but, Jesus knew that his heart and mind were willing. For various reasons, that same thing may be true of some of us. Think of the stages that one goes through to be obedient: 1) One must first hear the command or direction; then, 2) One must understand what is implied by the command; and then, 3) One must be able to do what the command suggests. The thief on the cross will be in heaven even though he was not able to do anything to prove that he had accepted what Jesus had commanded.
21. The faithful steward is also trustworthy. Read Luke 16:10-12. Why do you think it is that those who are faithful in small matters will end up also being faithful in larger matters? How

often do authorities choose to give assignments to those who prove even in small matters that they are faithful?

22. See 1 Chronicles 9:26-27. Being trustworthy means that we have grown up and are demonstrating a mature set of character traits. How seldom do we find men like those in 2 Kings 12:15 who were completely honest and could be trusted with the money needed to carry out their work? Is that kind of responsibility common in our day?
23. Consider the case of Daniel who was so trustworthy that he rose to the highest positions in two world governments. In fact, trustworthiness might be the most important characteristic of ethics. Moral principles are the guide for those who are trustworthy. That kind of trustworthiness must be developed by faithful stewardship over a long period of time.
24. When we are faithful to God, will other people notice? (Matthew 5:16) How does the faithful steward respond to differences of opinion? Fads? Or, even flattery?
25. Remember that this earth is where we are to prepare ourselves for living eternally with God.

We are to be faithful, trustworthy subjects of the kingdom of Christ, that those who are worldly-wise may have a true representation of the riches, the goodness, the mercy, the tenderness, and the courtesy of the citizens of the kingdom of God.—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*,* vol. 6, 189.3-190.0.

26. True faithful stewards demonstrate individual accountability.

It has ever been the design of Satan to draw the minds of the people from Jesus to man, and to destroy individual accountability. Satan failed in his design when he tempted the Son of God; but he succeeded better when he came to fallen man. Christianity became corrupted.—Ellen G. White, *Early Writings** 213.2.

27. In light of the other characteristics of true stewardship that we have discussed, individual accountability is surely an essential biblical principle. Think about Jesus's individual accountability to the Father. (John 8:28) We are accountable even for every idle word we speak. (Matthew 12:36)

Let it be borne in mind that it is not our own property which is entrusted to us for investment. If it were, we might claim discretionary power; we might shift our responsibility upon others, and leave our stewardship with them. But this cannot be, because the Lord has made us individually His stewards.—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*,* vol. 7, 177; *CWE** 163.3.

28. The characteristics we have studied this week are: Individual accountability, trustworthiness, obedience, loyalty, a clear conscience, and faithfulness. How are they related to each other? Could we fail in one area and not in others among this group?
29. Would it be possible to be loyal to someone in a bad way? Could we be loyal to someone who would lead us into trouble? What about the evil angels who followed Satan?
30. Stewardship is not the easiest principle to teach. How should we as a group of faithful Christians pass along the importance of stewardship to our children and to our friends in

the church? How can we actually nurture the maturation of the next generation of Christians? Is it possible to make stewardship attractive to young people? How do we make it clear to people why the characteristics of true stewardship are so essential? It is all about developing a love relationship with Jesus. To have the privilege of working with someone and finally seeing them baptized is a tremendous motivator!

31. Certainly, we would all recognize that these characteristics of true stewardship are not the easiest things to attain or to maintain. But, just as a target for the archer provides a specific place to aim, these characteristics should serve as guiding principles for the Christian. They should give us a sense of belonging, loyalty, and closeness to our God.
32. Read 1 Corinthians 4:1-2. Why is faithfulness such an essential requirement of the divine government? Imagine God admitting people to heaven who had not developed the characteristics we have to discuss this week! We know that those who want to excel in any athletic sport need practice and practice and more practice. Some skills come easily; others do not. But, those who master those skills to the point where they come almost naturally will succeed.
33. So, if it is important to develop key skills to engage in an athletic sport, shouldn't it also be important to develop the skills we have discussed this week when living a Christian life? Have we developed the skills necessary to correctly represent Jesus?
34. No doubt, there could be other characteristics that some could think of that should be added to our list; but, these are certainly very important.
35. By way of review, consider *faithfulness and loyalty*: Read 1 Corinthians 4:1-2; Hebrews 11:8-12,17-19; Revelation 2:10; Matthew 6:24; and 1 Chronicles 28:9. 1 Corinthians 4:3 tells us that Paul did not even trust his own judgment. It is only God's opinion that really counts. So, the opinions of peers, fellow classmates, friends, even local church members are not what really matters. Faithfulness is not a popularity contest. It is a committed loyalty to God.
36. Review the stories of Ananias and Sapphira as recorded in Acts 5 and the rich young ruler as recorded in Matthew 19:16-22. Unfortunately, these three individuals wanted to split their loyalties. But, God cannot accept split loyalties. We must make Him first in everything.
37. *Integrity*: Read Hebrews 9:14; 10:19-22; 1 Timothy 4:1-2; Romans 2:14-15; and Psalm 40:7-8. In order to have a clear conscience, we must exhibit integrity in all that we do and say. The word *conscience* comes from a Latin word which is a translation of the Greek word *syneidesis* which is a combination of the word *syn* meaning "with" and *oida* meaning "to know." Whenever we portray to others the idea that we are something other than what we really are, we are moving into dangerous territory. It can even lead to psychosis or mental deterioration. And it is particularly important that we are honest and truthful with God, especially in prayer.
38. *Obedience and trustworthiness*: Read 1 John 5:2; Romans 1:5; 10:16-17; Luke 16:10-12; and 1 Corinthians 9:26-27. As we discussed earlier, in God's eyes obedience involves a "humble willingness to listen." We may not be able to carry out all that we wish we could do. See Romans 7:14-25. But, our wills and our wishes need to be aimed in the right direction.

39. Another scary motivation is fear. Sometimes, people can say or do crazy things when motivated by fear. God does not want us to be motivated by fear. It may lead to temporary forced obedience; but, it is not acceptable to God.
40. Each time we open the Bible or the Spirit of Prophecy and read more about the life and death of Jesus, we have the opportunity to develop a closer relationship with Him. The more complete and accurate our picture of God is, the more we will love Him. We will see Him as He is.
41. Stewardship involves two-way communication. That is what leads to trustworthiness. God sees that we are trustworthy, and He gives us greater responsibilities.
42. Ultimately, the mark of a true steward is his/her relationship with the Owner. In the beginning as newborn Christians, that relationship may not be very good. But, as we come to know God better, it must grow. What can we do to help ourselves to understand God better and to trust Him more? What changes do we need to make in our own lives?
43. Back in 1893 after going through some of the most difficult days of the early history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Ellen White wrote to the General Conference in session:

In reviewing our past history, having traveled over every step of advance to our present standing, I can say, Praise God! As I see what God has wrought, I am filled with astonishment and with confidence in Christ as Leader. **We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history.** We are now a strong people, if we will put our trust in the Lord; for we are handling the mighty truths of the word of God. We have everything to be thankful for. If we walk in the light as it shines upon us from the living oracles of God, we shall have large responsibilities, corresponding to the great light given us of God. We have many duties to perform, because we have been made the depositaries of sacred truth to be given to the world in all its beauty and glory. We are debtors to God to use every advantage he has entrusted to us to beautify the truth of holiness of character, and to send the message of warning and of comfort, of hope and of love, to those who are in the darkness of error and sin.—Ellen G. White, *General Conference Bulletin*,* January 29, 1893, par. 5; *GCDB*,* February 20, 1899, par. 16. See *Life Sketches* 196.2; *RH*, October 12, 1905, par. 22; *Testimonies to Ministers* 31.1; 3SM 162.3; *LDE* 72.1. [Bold type is added.]

44. What would she say today? Could she still say those words about us?

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