

# SESSION 1: STEWARDS OF THE KINGDOM

## FOCUS

*As a child, I wondered why God didn't just whisk us off to heaven as soon as we were saved so we could immediately start experiencing eternal life, thus eliminating the long wait. If all life was about getting to heaven, why did God create the earth, anyway?*

*Much later I learned the first basic principle of Christian teaching from the Westminster Catechism: "The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever." It was something of a revelation to learn that even though making it to heaven is a worthy goal, there's a lot of life to be lived before the train pulls out, and God has something to say about that life.*

*Implied in the creation was God's intended destiny and purpose for all of His creation to bring glory to himself. That purpose was perverted in the fall of humanity into sin. The choice to follow Christ, to be reconciled to God, is to enter into the kingdom of God and to be restored to that purpose.*

*No, I wouldn't have said it that way at age seven. But to me it would have meant that God had a plan for my living in the here and now; that eternal life, was to begin here on earth. He had plans for the way I lived my life as His creation, on His creation, with His other creations; plans that would involve the way I used my time, my money, my body, and my corner of the earth for His glory.*

*This session lays the foundational principles of stewardship and provides a basis for the following four lessons of the unit.*

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*Access the online version of the Leader's Guide at [Sundayteacher.com](http://Sundayteacher.com) using the password:*

## BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Genesis 1:26-28; Matthew 24:45-51; Acts 17:24-28; Philippians 3:17-21

## COMMENTARY

*Use the Commentary as background information and discussion material as you prepare and facilitate this session.*

Most of us probably first came in contact with the concept of stewardship as it relates to money. Yet it's a much broader truth—so broad that, depending on what version you use, you may not even find the actual word stewardship in the Bible. But it's there, from the first chapter of Genesis to the teachings of Jesus and on through the writings of Paul.

### The Image of God

"Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule'" (Genesis 1:26a). Much like a mirror reflects the image of the person in front of it, humanity reflected the image of God in the creation.

Due to sin entering the world, all of humanity's relationships were tainted: our relationship to God, to others, to the earth, to each other. Thus, marring the image of God we were created with.

H. Ray Dunning, in *Grace, Faith, and Holiness*, writes, "The New Testament and John Wesley speak with one voice in proclaiming that the great purpose of redemption is to restore [us] to the image of God. . . . The total process of . . . the new birth, . . . entire sanctification, and its progressive development toward final salvation has as its objective the restoring of [humanity] to [its] original destiny. . . . [This restoration of the image of God redeems the] fourfold relation: to God, to other persons, to the earth, and to self. . . . [The result is] holiness, . . . wholeness, . . . shalom (peace)"<sup>1</sup>

Being restored to the image of God brings us not only to what we were, but also to what we are intended to become.

When restored to the image of God, humanity again has the possibility for dominion over the earth and community with others. Only in proper relation to God can true stewardship be possible.

### Servanthood

"Who . . . is the faithful and wise servant . . . ?" Jesus asks in Matthew 24:45. One who, having been put in charge of his fellow servants, gives them their food at the proper time, is His reply. The servant of God is put in charge of all God's possessions and is given a trust to carry out his or her duties in obedience. The Christian word for that is stewardship.

The servant in Matthew 24 had not made any claim to ownership. Nei-

ther must we. “The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it” (Psalm 24:1). Yet it has been entrusted to us, and we must conscientiously apply the best of our abilities to caring for God’s creation—including ourselves, others, and our world.

### **Citizens of the Kingdom**

Paul writes in Philippians 3:17-21 that there is a pattern to life in Christ. Though we live on earth, our citizenship is in heaven. We are to create a counterculture in the world. Our intent is to create a “revolutionary new society, a new and just socioeconomic order, a kingdom populated by people who incarnate the nature and values of the King, who transform them into His character and likeness” (Tony Campolo).<sup>2</sup>

Campolo goes on to say that Jesus has broken into history to initiate the kingdom of God. His parables teach us the principles, and the Sermon on the Mount provides ethics. Just as Jesus’ stirring up of the people got Him into hot water with the “status quo crowd,” our attempts at living life to bring about the kingdom of God will go against the grain of current society. The way we manage our time, our bodies, our money, and our environment won’t make sense to many. But we will be serious about it if we want His will to be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Being a whole life steward is more than just making the best use of what God has given you to manage. It is making His use of it. He has given everything to us so that we might accomplish His purposes in our world. It’s time we set about doing just that!



## IN-SESSION COMMUNITY BUILDING OPTIONS

*Select one or more of these activities to begin building bridges between group members as you introduce today's subject.*

### **1. Can I Borrow?**

Prepare several 3" x 5" cards with names of items written on them. These items should range from the inexpensive to the extravagant. Examples might include: paper, book, toothpaste, phone, computer, car, etc.

Distribute the cards, and instruct the group that someone has asked to borrow this particular item from them this week. Ask: How would you as the owner wish for that item to be treated? Take a moment and allow the students to discuss. Note the difference between costly and cheap items, between items that are used up when loaned and items that show little sign of wear when used in the right way. Also ask, "Who would you be willing (or not willing) to loan these items to?"

Now ask them to turn the tables a bit, and look at the item from the point of view of the borrower. What difference does it make in your treatment and use of the item when you know it belongs to someone else?

### **2. Debate That Tune**

Locate a number of gospel songs or hymns which focus on the theme of heaven. (Your church hymnal might have such songs as "Oh, That Will Be Glory," "When the Roll Is Called Up Yonder," "Where They Need No Sun," or "Beulah Land.")

Read the lyrics aloud or have them printed. While affirming belief in an appropriate hope for heaven, ask, "Does this particular song diminish the value and importance of life on earth? Does this encourage Christians to be so 'heavenly-minded that they're no earthly good?'"

Allow students to discuss differing views. Particularly draw out comments that focus on the purpose of life and the ability of believers to enjoy life on earth without being "of the world" (John 17:14, 16).

Lastly, ask, "What is the proper relationship between a Christian and the created world?"

## PRESENTATION OPTIONS

*Select one or more of the following activities to present today's topic.*

### 1. In the News

Look in the news for situations caused by misuse or misunderstanding of God's principles. Examples might include stories of theft, community unrest, addictive behavior, world poverty crises, ecological disasters, etc.

Divide everyone into small groups, and distribute these stories among them. Ask them to pinpoint how proper acts of stewardship might have eliminated or could help alleviate the problem involved. Ask, "What responsibility does a Christian have in addressing community and world problems?"

Then take time to review the highlights of the Commentary section, and allow for discussion and comments.

### 2. Back to the Future

After giving a brief overview of the Bible Commentary section, divide everyone into four groups, and assign to each group one of these passages:

- Matthew 24:45-51: The Wise and Faithful Servant
- Matthew 25:1-13: The Ten Virgins
- Matthew 25:14-30: The Talents
- Matthew 25:31-46: The Sheep and the Goats

Each group should read through the passage and discuss its implications on stewardship. Then ask each group to compose a modern-day version of the parable. Possibilities might include changes like financial figures, athletes, farmers, etc.

When finished, have each group read their contemporary rendition of the parable and an application of what it would mean to people today. Then as a group make a list of what areas of our lives stewardship principles might touch (money, material goods, time, physical body, job/career, earth's resources, etc.).

### 3. Whose Stuff Is This, Anyway?

There is a classic scene from the film *Shenandoah*, starring Jimmy Stewart. In the beginning of the film, he is gathered around the table at a meal with his family and begins to pray. In the prayer, he reminds God that he and his family did all the work involved in getting the food to the table, takes all the credit for himself, and acknowledges that he's thanking God only because he's supposed to.

If you have the ability, show the segment. If not, describe the scene to the group.

Divide them into two groups. Have one build an argument that humans have a right to determine how they will use their resources. Have the other group build a case for God's right of ownership and direction to use.

After a time of preparation, allow each group to present their case. Reflect on the results. Then give a brief minilecture on the material covered in the Commentary section.

### 4. Group Study

Divide everyone into four small groups and assign each one a concept and key passage as outlined in the Commentary Section (Image of God, Servanthood, Children of God, and Citizenship in the Kingdom). This outline is also listed on **Handout 1**. Give each group a handout and ask them to develop a brief three minute presentation on how they think that concept related to an understanding of whole life stewardship.

## SUGGESTED READING

*HEALTHY. HAPPY. HOLY.*  
(Joe Gorman: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2018)

## PRACTICE

*Invite each person to take time to practice one act of stewardship that directly touches the life of someone they know.*

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## SUMMARY OPTIONS

*Select one or more of these activities to summarize and to give opportunity for group members to apply the truth learned in this session.*

### 1. Declaration of Dependence

Ask each individual to take the time to write out a commitment statement of his or her understanding of God’s ownership of the world and all that is in it, his or her responsibility of stewardship, and how he or she chooses to respond to it. It may be structured somewhat like an article of faith. Here’s an example:

“I believe that God, as the Creator and Sustainer of all life and all things, is the rightful Owner and Ruler of all; that He has imparted life to me and placed me within the created order to be a part of that rule; that as Lord of my life He directs my use of my own life and the resources around me to reflect His nature and share His life; that in my daily life I will acknowledge His ownership and regard His wishes as the controlling factor in all my time, my wealth, my physical resources, and my environment.”

After everyone is finished, have several read their declarations, and work as a group to write a group statement.

### 2. Eulogy for a Good Steward

Ask the group to imagine that they were at a funeral—their own. What would they like for the eulogy about their life to say about the way they lived? Take time to hear their thoughts. Then ask, “Are you living your life so that those kinds of things can be accomplished in your life?” “Are you ordering your life under Jesus’ leadership so that these will become a reality?”

Perhaps the most tragic of all life’s situations is a life wasted, the opportunity missed to have lived a fulfilled life and to have made an effective contribution to others. Lead a discussion of commitment as individuals and as a group, on ways your young adults can become whole life stewards and make the most of their lives.

*by Bruce Oldham*

# Whole Life Stewards

Read the following passages, and discuss what the topic has to say about being a “whole life steward.”

- Image of God—Genesis 1:26-27
- Servanthood—Matthew 24:45-51
- Children of God—Acts 17:24-28
- Citizenship in the Kingdom of God—Philippians 3:17-21