

24.03.2018 HABITS OF A STEWARD

“How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word. With my whole heart I have sought You; oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You.” Psalm 119:9-11.

A faithful steward is recognised by his character and his habitual behaviour. He has developed habits and a way of life that reflect his faithfulness to his heavenly Father. His life is marked by distrust of self and trust in the faithful God who has promised to keep him faithful.

Our study this week looks at some of the habits of faithful stewards. Faithful stewards have the following characteristics:

1. They put God first in every aspect of life.
2. They live life in the expectation of Jesus’ soon return in glory.
3. They use time wisely.
4. They commit body, soul and spirit to God so that He will keep them in optimal spiritual, mental and physical health.
5. Their lives are controlled at all times by the Holy Spirit.
6. They walk with God.

Seek God First

Because of sin, we live in a world and a society that is self-centred and selfish. The Christian, in contrast, has died to the world and its ways and is called to live a God-centred life. This is a call to make God first in every aspect of life; to desire to know His will and then do it for His glory.

The Bible passage above (Psalm 119:9-11) beautifully encapsulates the mind of such a steward of God. He recognises that he needs to be cleansed from self-centredness and sin. Therefore, he seeks God with all his heart, recognising that God’s will (commands) are intended for his good. He learns to know God’s will so well (as written in His Word and by the voice of the in-dwelling Holy Spirit) that it becomes a deterrent to sin and sinning.

Below are further passages that call us to put God first:

“You shall have no other gods before Me.” Exodus 20:3.

Jesus said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the first and great commandment.” Matthew 22:37, 38.

When we read the First commandment, the god that we must fear most to put ahead of Jehovah, is the god of ‘self’. When ‘*what I want, what I need, what I have achieved, the riches I possess, the power I have,*’ becomes the highest priority of my life, there I have raised ‘an image to the beast’ – the idols of my soul.

The sin which is indulged to the greatest extent, which separates us from God and produces so many spiritual disorders, and which are contagious, is selfishness. EG White.

‘We live in an age of lost faith and lost hope and empty hearts. Today the Commandment, “Thou shalt have no other gods before Me,” must include, “Thou shalt have Me.” *Joy Davidman: Smoke on the Mountain.*

“Little children, keep yourselves from idols.” 1 John 5:21.

Look for the Return of Jesus

“Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them.” Luke 12:37.

Many of the parables of stewardship given to us by Jesus were in the context of His second coming.

The best motivation for being a faithful steward, we saw in earlier studies, is the recognition that we are not only stewards; we are also heirs of God, heirs of the riches of His grace.

Paul tells us that we not only await the return of the Master from the far country; we are also citizens of that country – heaven.

"For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ." Philippians 3:20.

"We do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal." 2 Corinthians 4:18.

"Therefore, you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect." Luke 12:40.

'Christ's teaching on the subject (the second coming) quite clearly consisted of three propositions, (1) That he will certainly return. (2) That we cannot possibly find out when. (3) And that therefore we must always be ready for Him. *Note the 'therefore'. Precisely because we cannot predict the moment, we must be ready at all moments.* Our Lord repeated this practical conclusion again and again; as if the promise of the Return had been made for the sake of this conclusion alone. Watch, watch, is the burden of His advice. 'I shall come like a thief. You will not, I most solemnly assure you will not, see Me approaching'. If the householder had known at what time the burglar would arrive, he would have been ready for him. If the servant had known when his absent employer would come home, he would not have been found drunk in the kitchen. But they didn't and nor will you. Therefore, you must be ready at all times. The point is surely simple enough.' CS Lewis. *From: The World's Last Night.*

"Therefore, do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry." Hebrews 10:36, 37.

Use Time Wisely

"For what is your life? It is even a vapour that appears for a little time and then vanishes away." James 4:14.

"The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet their boast is only labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away..."

So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." Psalm 90:10, 12.

"See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore, do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is." Ephesians 5:15-17.

"God has put eternity in their hearts..." Ecclesiastes 3:11.

Sin shortens life in this fallen world of ours. But we are called to use the time we have wisely. God has put eternity in our hearts, and during the time we are given on earth, we are called to make the choice that will give us eternity, immortality and incorruption that God in His great love has provided for us through His Son, Christ Jesus. Once we have made this choice, the rest of our life and energies should be devoted to telling others of the great gift of salvation God has prepared for them.

"The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." 1 Corinthians 15:56-58.

"For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Philippians 1:21.

"Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, before the difficult days come, and the years draw near when you say, I have no pleasure in them... Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil." Ecclesiastes 12:1, 13, 14.

Keep a Healthy Body, Soul and Spirit

"Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers." 3 John 1:2.

God created man to be holy (spiritual health), healthy (physical health) and happy (mental health).

Though this was lost by sin, God restores this to mankind through the gospel. So, the Psalmist sings of the three-fold restoration offered in the gospel:

Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits:

Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases, Who redeems your life from destruction?" Psalm 103:2-4.

A faithful steward experiences this restoration as he allows the in-dwelling Holy Spirit to control his body, soul (mind, emotions and will) and spirit.

“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.” 1 Thessalonians 5:23, 24.

Self-Discipline

“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind (self-control, moderation, self-discipline).” 2 Timothy 1:7.

It is essential that we understand what Biblical self-discipline is. The self-control or temperance that Paul describes in *Galatians 5:22* and *2 Timothy 1:7* is the control of the whole person, spirit soul and body by the Spirit of God. It is essentially, God-control.

This is not seen in the life of the unbeliever. Any self-discipline seen in the unbeliever (or in the Christian) that is due to the person’s own natural ability to discipline himself is NOT the fruit of the Spirit, but the works of the flesh. (Many non-Christian religions extol the virtues of self-control, discipline, and the control of the body by the mind e.g. ‘mind over matter’).

“Habits of sobriety, of self-control, of economy, of close application, of sound, sensible conversation, of patience and true courtesy, are not gained without diligent, close watching over self.” Testimonies 4: p.453.

Biblical self-discipline therefore occurs only in the life of a Christian who recognises that ‘in Christ’ he has passed from the old life of the flesh to a new life in Christ. His life must be daily surrendered to the Holy Spirit that the Spirit may control every sphere of life - spirit, soul and body.

“Solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.” Hebrews 5:14.

The Spirit of God also gives us discernment so that we may distinguish whether the origin of anything, whether it be belief or action, is of God or of satan.

“When He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore, I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you.” John 16:13-15.

“By the Spirit’s revelation we commence the course; by His discipline we complete it.” John Stott

Walk with God

“He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” Micah 6:8.

“And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul.” Deuteronomy 10:12.

“LORD God of Israel, there is no God in heaven or on earth like You, who keep Your covenant and mercy with Your servants who walk before You with all their hearts.” 2 Chronicles 6:14.

A faithful steward is one who has a daily walk with God. He recognises that to be found faithful he must never take his eyes off Jesus. *“The righteousness of God, which is His glory, is only made manifest in the life of the believer who lives by faith from first to last.” (Romans 1:16, 17).*

“And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.” Genesis 5:24.

“Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations and Noah walked with God.” Genesis 6:9.

“The heart of Asa was perfect all his days.” 2 Chronicles 15:17.

Such a steward is never alone. He has a great cloud of witnesses (Hebrews 11) who testify by their faith and obedience to the faithfulness of the God they have believed in. Walking by faith they obtained a good testimony (*Hebrews 11:2*).

“By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, and was not found, because God had taken him; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God.” Hebrews 11:4. Genesis 5:24.

“And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.” Hebrews 11:39, 40.

The people of God in the end-time, the people of the 3rd angel’s message will be marked by such faithfulness. God declares that they have the faith of Jesus, the faith that always seeks to please God. (*John 8:29*).

“Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.” Revelation 14:12.

The Master's Will, for this I Pray

The Master's will, for this I pray, Whatever it may be!
I do not want to miss Your best; Reveal it, Lord, to me.
My own desires may lead me wrong, I must consult my God;
His counsel will be justified, When all the way I've trod.
O soul of mine, delight in Him! His Word discern, obey!
The plan you seek to know will then unfold from day to day.
We do not live our lives alone: If I am in God's will,
The lives of others will be helped, His purpose to fulfil!
My all, O Lord, I give to You, My body, mind and soul;
May all the days that lie ahead, be under Your control.

Frances L Hess

God Bless

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