



# Enough to Be Stewards

Isaiah 49:8-16; Psalm 131; Matthew 6:24-34; 1 Cor. 4:1-5

We don't like the idea of stewardship. We want to be the landlords, owners, and bring others under our direction. We want to be the ones in charge. We don't want to be anyone's servant. After all, the American Dream is that we might rise above others and become the power brokers, sufficient unto ourselves. The Biblical concept of stewardship is just not very appealing. Why should we settle for something less than full ownership of everything in our grasp? Could anything less be enough?

Part of our problem with stewardship is the concept of trust. We do not trust those who would lord it over us. We do not trust others who would charge us rent and fail to maintain the property in which we live. We do not trust those who would exact our service yet fail to provide sufficient resources to meet our needs. We do not trust those who would ask us to increase productivity so they might lower employment costs, including our own jobs. We don't trust, because others are too much like ourselves. We don't trust, for we are too insecure.

It is interesting that Jesus would link stewardship with anxiety and trust. We don't often think of the Sermon on the Mount as a connected narrative, but there is logic behind the arrangement of its various concepts. We are anxious about our issues when we focus on ourselves, especially our inability to control the unknown variants in life for our benefit. Should we assume the role of a steward in service to a master, concerns over control begin to dissipate. There is no longer anything of ours to protect. Life with all its trappings belongs to another. While we are in charge of managing another's interests, ultimate control over those interests is not our own.

Regardless of what society says, it is not my responsibility to meet my own needs. That is not my responsibility unless I am my own master. As servant and steward of God, it becomes God's responsibility to meet my needs. This does not release me from the need to work, but it takes me out of the position of responsible provider. I am rather servant of the One providing. My work may provide a portion of my needs, but the rest is up to the master.

Slavery was a dark period in this country. People were used and abused to further the interests of others. There are, however, a few lessons we can learn from laws pertaining to a slave owner's responsibilities. A slave must be provided with shoes. A slave must be provided with clothing. A slave must be provided with food and a place to sleep. Arrangements were obviously not the best for slaves, but the basic necessities were provided as a legal requirement and responsibility of the master. A slave's status was also tied to the status of the master served. In these respects, we would do well to recognize our dependence upon God as Lord and Master.

It is not within the purview of a slave to provide for his own needs. It is not up to a slave to meet his economic needs. It is up to one's master to provide for one's needs. This is where we are given a choice. We can choose who will be our master. We have the option to make self the master of our lives. We can seek and defend to the death the right to direct our own steps. We can make our own way in life, be the master of our own fate. The other option is to bow as stewards of God's provision.

We would rather struggle against those who oppress us than bow to the charge of living up to the stewardship of life entrusted us by God. This struggle to take charge of one's lot in life against those

who would control us is a major theme in the 1992 Ron Howard film, “Far and Away”.<sup>1</sup> The Irish uprising in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century led many to emigrate to America for a new opportunity in life. They struggled to make their own way against those who would use them for their own ends. In the process, some shifted from oppressed to oppressor. Behind the whole, however, was the drive to be in charge, the servant of no one.

This is one of the two options we have for lordship of our lives: there is God and there is self. I can choose to be in control of my life and provide for my needs (or die in the attempt). I can choose to allow God to be in control and provide for my needs. I can choose whether to be a steward or a master. If master, I must assume responsibility for those things over which I have no control.

We do not want to trust. We do not want to serve. We do not want to accept the sufficiency of God’s provision. We want control—to have it our own way. “No exile for me! As long as I am in charge, no way I am going to Babylon! I will make my own way. I will take charge of my life and do it my own way!” Too easily do we forget that this attitude is what took Israel to captivity in the first place. It is because they refused to assume their station as servants of *Yahweh* that God sent them out of the land of promise in order to bring them back to himself. Even in exile, however, God provided for their needs. They tried to be in control, but control was simply beyond their grasp. It is more than we can attain or handle.

In writing the Corinthians, Paul sets a great pattern for self-understanding. He speaks of the apostles of Christ, but in truth, his words apply to the entire body. We are servants of God and stewards of God’s mysteries—the gospel of grace. As such, there is a requirement for stewards. We are to be demonstrably trustworthy. We are to fulfill our obligations as stewards in caring for the message and purposes of God placed under our charge.

We can trust in ourselves and build our lives upon the unsure foundation of the things we can see, touch, taste, and measure. Or we can follow the psalmist in quieting our anxiety to trust in *Yahweh*. This is what Jesus was getting at in speaking of God’s faithfulness in contrast to our anxiety. A child on its mother’s breast may have many things to worry about, but contentment, provision, and trust override the uncertainties of life. The child rests in sweet oblivion to the things over which we worry and fret.

Can we so learn to trust God’s provision against the unknowns of life? The fact that we may not know how or where God will meet our needs is not really cause for anxiety. If we surrender our lives to function as stewards of God’s mysteries, we are freed to place our worries, anxieties, and future in the hands of the One who truly can provide for our needs.

The question remains, however, whether we can accept that as enough. Is it enough that we be stewards of God, instead of owning the store? Is it enough to cast our cares and concerns in the hands of God, trusting that our needs will be truly met? Is the depth of God’s love enough to trust that placing our lives in service to the Almighty is sufficient security, regardless of rising oil prices, global warming, and threats of economic disaster? We still have the option of placing ourselves in charge. We can also decide that it is enough to be stewards of God’s mysteries and provision for us as well as the world.

—*Christopher B. Harbin*

---

<sup>1</sup> Ron Howard, *Far and Away*, Imagine Films Entertainment, 1992, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0104231>.  
<http://www.TheoTrek.org/sermons/>