

# WHO'S IN CHARGE HERE?

A THIRTEEN WEEK LIFE STEWARDSHIP STUDY

Study Guide

# SAMPLE Week 3

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STEWARDSHIP  
MINISTRIES

# SAMPLE Week 3

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This study guide is the text for the Life Stewardship Study Series.

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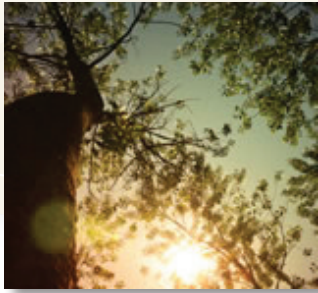
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## The Characteristics of a Steward



### The Defining Characteristics of a Good and Faithful Steward

Tragic as it is, the concept of stewardship is so poorly taught and so poorly practiced among followers of Jesus that it is necessary to provide a clear description of how a good and faithful steward should live. The life of an obedient steward possesses three dominant life-characteristics. As we consider each of these characteristics, may it enable us to better assess how well we are personally living the life of a good and faithful steward.

#### **A Good and Faithful Steward Lives an Examined Life**

This practice of living a life of regular self-examination is often referenced in the Bible. In II Corinthians 13:5 Paul told the believers in Corinth, “Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves...” He also tells them in I Corinthians 11:28 that, “A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup (communion).” Even Jeremiah exhorts his people in Lamentations 3:40, “Let us test and examine our ways.”

There is nothing more appropriate for a faithful manager of someone else’s resources than to routinely examine how effectively he is carrying out his responsibilities. A steward will continually examine his behavior, his motives, his thoughts, his attitudes, the direction of his life and how well he is imitating the life of Jesus.

Unfortunately, we often only examine our lives when something is going wrong or we face some significant crisis. In the midst of that trial, we finally pause to take stock of our lives to determine what might have caused this difficult situation. Crisis examination is certainly better than no examination at all, but may I suggest that a good and faithful steward will be doing routine self-examination as part of his daily life.

I have been told by more than one pilot that a plane when in the air is off course about 95% of the time due to wind currents, barometric pressure, etc. Because of this, the pilot must be vigilant in making continual minor course corrections to bring the plane back on course. If he does not, he will find, after several hours of flying that his plane is actually hundreds of miles off course.

The good and faithful steward is like the attentive pilot in flight – continually examining the course of his or her life to determine if it is still following the flight pattern that has been set by the “Tower.” The steward will routinely make whatever midcourse corrections to his life that are needed regardless of how subtle or how dramatic they need to be. He recognizes that the gravitational pull of this world and the unpredictable winds of temptation can very quickly get him off course.

Socrates correctly concluded, “The unexamined life is not worth living.”

So, would the word examined describe your life?

# WEEK THREE

## THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A STEWARD

### **A Good and Faithful Steward Lives a Controlled Life**

Living a controlled life is a foundational characteristic of a good and faithful steward. Self-control is one of the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:23). Paul repeats several times in his letter to Titus that believers are to live a controlled life. Elders are to have their lives under control (Titus 1:8). Older men are to be self-controlled (Titus 2:2). Young men and women are to be self-controlled as well (Titus 2:5-6).

Paul uses the discipline and self-control of an athlete in training to illustrate the controlled life of a steward (I Corinthians 9:25). Just two verses later he applies self-control to himself when he says, "But I discipline my body and keep it under control..."

I think Solomon makes this point best when he says in Proverbs 25:28, "A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls." There is nothing to contain him and he lives a life that is out of control in one or more ways.

We all know people who lack self-control. They cannot control their tempers. They cannot control their appetites. They cannot control their emotions. They cannot control their tongues. They cannot control their sex drives. They cannot control their spending. In one or more ways they are lacking self-control. They are "like a city broken into and left without walls."

The good and faithful steward, to the contrary, is constantly restraining and retraining his natural impulses to keep all of these fleshly desires (both good and bad) under control. He is diligently working day-by-day and often minute-by-minute to keep his head in the game and not allow "the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions..." (I John 2:16) to break down the walls of self-control that is a defining characteristic of a good and faithful steward.

John Milton said well, "He who reins within himself and rules passions, desires and fears is more than a king." The steward who is in control will be both useful and effective in obediently serving his Master. So, would the word controlled describe your life?

## The Characteristics of a Steward

### **A Good and Faithful Steward Lives a Sacrificial Life**

The third characteristic that will always be commonly seen in the life of a good and faithful steward is sacrifice. We simply cannot be good and faithful stewards if sacrifice is not a part of our lives.

Paul calls us to be “living sacrifices” (Romans 12:1). Jesus challenges every steward that if he wants to follow Him, “let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23). The cross in Jesus’ day was used for only one purpose, to kill someone. So the imagery He is giving us is quite dramatic. He is not calling us to a one-time sacrificial death for “the cause.” The sacrifice He is describing here is to be a daily sacrifice. Each day, we are to put to death our wishes, our desires, our agenda, our comforts, our free time and our hopes for the greater good of the Kingdom and the world we seek to win.

In his book *The Kingdom and the Cross*, James Bryan Smith suggests that, “If our God is self-sacrificing and seeks to bless others who have done nothing to merit it, then we should be people who are self-sacrificing and who bless others who have not earned it.”

There is no more powerful demonstration of a good and faithful steward than when he willingly and sacrificially gives to others without any consideration of their worthiness to receive his gift.

Regardless of how great or small the need or opportunity, he gladly sacrifices whatever he currently manages for the good of others.

John gives us the ultimate extent to which we must be willing to live a sacrificial life. He said in I John 3:16, “By this we know love, that He laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.”

If sacrificing our lives is the maximum sacrifice we might be called to make as a steward, it seems to put into a clear context the modest sacrifices we make when we give some of the money, or the time or the talents we have been given to manage to help others.

So, would the word sacrificial describe your life?

If we want to be identified as a good and faithful steward and someday hear those wonderful words, “Well done,” we must (1) routinely examine ourselves to be sure that our lives are on the right course that has been set by our Master. (2) We need to be vigilant that we control our appetites and impulses to ensure that they do not end up controlling us. (3) We need to be regularly and generously sacrificing what we have been entrusted with in hopes of bringing a little bit of heaven to those who are here on earth. Living the life of a good and faithful steward is a tremendous challenge. Are you up to the challenge?

# WEEK THREE

## THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A STEWARD

### Life Application Questions

1. What is your initial reaction to this video?

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2. Which of these three areas of life stewardship (the examined life, the controlled life, or the sacrificial life) do you personally most struggle with? Why?

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3. When do you most often find yourself willing and desiring to carefully examine your life? Are you more of a routine self-examination person or a life-crisis examination person?

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4. Why do we so seldom take the time to do a thorough self-assessment of our lives and the direction we are headed?

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## The Characteristics of a Steward

5. Share some examples of people you know who are living examples of what Proverbs 25:28 says, "A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls."

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6. In what areas of your life do you currently struggle most to keep under control? (We all have them, so you are not alone.)

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7. What do you think Paul means when he says in Romans 12:1 that we are to be "living sacrifices"?

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8. How does the ownership issue of our possessions hinder us from living a more sacrificial and generous life than we do now?

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## THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A STEWARD

9. What would be the hardest material thing for you to let go of (sacrifice), if the Lord were to call you to release it?

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10. For you, what is most challenging about John's statement in I John 3:16, "By this we know love, that He laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers"?

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11. How do you react to what James Bryan Smith wrote, "If our God is self-sacrificing and seeks to bless others who have done nothing to merit it, then we should be people who are self-sacrificing and who bless others who have not earned it?" If we really believed this statement and really applied it to our daily lives, how might this change how we actually give to others?

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12. Share with the group what has been the most sacrificial gift you have ever made in your life?

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