

Developing Stewardship
Matthew 25:14-30
November 11, 2012

“Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money. After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.’ His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’ The man with the two talents also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.’ His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’ Then the man who had received the one talent came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’ His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. ‘Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’”

Grace, mercy, and peace from the One who provides us with everything we need for this life and the life to come, our Triune God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today we are going to talk about three things that should be very high on the priority list of every Christian; values, morals, and integrity. To be sure that we are all on the same page, the first thing we must do is to define these terms.

- ! Value: The worth or importance of something.
- ! Morals: Principles of right and wrong behavior.
- ! Integrity: Adherence to a code of moral values.

That sounds pretty cut and dry, but it’s not. These terms can be applied differently depending upon our standard. These same definitions would produce widely different results depending on whom you are talking to – let’s say between a grounded Christian and a terrorist suicide bomber.

The standard by which we define and apply these words must be the Word of God. Our standard can’t be society, because society changes. Our standard can’t be knowledge,

because knowledge changes. The only standard that has remained firm through all ages, and will remain firm for all time, is the Holy Word of our unchangeable God.

Every person in this world lives in one of two very different worlds. In the letter to the Colossians, we read: *[Give] thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves* (Col 1:12-13 NIV). Two worlds, each having its own system of truths and values. Therefore, the child of God and the unbeliever have radically different world views.

The Bible uses the word darkness to refer to this world of sin. That darkness entered the world with the first sin in the Garden of Eden. Since that sin, this world has been the domain of Satan and his minions. Paul tells us: *Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms* (Eph 6:12 NIV). The source of this world's secular, materialistic, man-centered, and often immoral philosophy is Satan.

Like physical darkness, spiritual darkness brings blindness. This spiritual blindness prevents people from seeing the truth. They can't see the truth about where they have been, where they are, or where they are going. This darkness clouds their thinking about the meaning of life. It warps the true priorities of life. Therefore, because these people have blind eyes, clouded thinking, and warped priorities, their lives are unproductive.

Unfortunately, we believers must live in this darkened world and we must endure this world's evil value system. We must suffer through this until we are called home by our Father. However, just because we must live in this world, that does not entitle us to join in with this world's perverted thinking that runs contrary to God's Word. There is no way to mix truth and error (2 Cor 6:14-16).

To counter the world of darkness, there exists the world of light. John tells us this about the origin and foundation of this world of light: *This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all* (1 Jn 1:5 NIV). God sent his Son, the Light of the world, to rescue us from Satan's world of darkness and to deliver us into his eternal world of light. In the book of Thessalonians, we are told who and what we truly are: *You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness* (1 Thess 5:5 NIV).

Since we are believers, our world view has been transformed by God's Word and the Holy Spirit. As God's children, we are to reject Satan's values. We are to adopt God's values as our own and let those values become the guidelines of our lives.

To help us realign our value system, God has given us all we need to know in Scripture. God has given us role models, both good and bad, to help us learn. The life of Moses is a good model to follow in forming godly values. Listen to what the author of Hebrews has to say about Moses: *By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born,*

because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict. By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible (Heb 11:23-27 NIV).

Using Moses' life as our example, let's look at some principles for developing godly values.

Moses had a foundation of faith in his life. That foundation was God and his holy Word. Moses trusted that, though God is invisible, God was still at work in his life and in the world. The foundation for Moses' life was outside of himself. Our value-building principle here is: Our view of all life must rest on the foundation of faith in God and his truth.

Moses valued the things of God more than the riches of Egypt. Moses based his value-system on his foundation of faith in God. Moses knew the value eternal things. In today's world, it is vitally important that our homes become schools that teach values and godly living. Places where children learn from parents who say, "Do as I do." Our principle here is: Values are shaped by the truth we learn and live by.

Moses rejected the life of ease that Pharaoh's palace provided. Instead, he chose to identify with the suffering Israelites. Most people today would scoff at Moses' choice to turn his back on a life of wealth, status, power, and fame to live with a bunch of slaves. But Moses was basing his choices on God's value-system not the world's values. The principle here is: Our choices demonstrate our values.

Finally, Moses was a man of good character. His character was the final product of a life shaped by God. Because of his faith in God, Moses' life followed a specific pattern. It went like this.

- ! The truth of God shaped Moses' value-system.
- ! Having the proper value-system led Moses to make the proper choices.
- ! That pattern of proper choices led to Moses developing a good character.

This sequence makes it possible to live a life of commitment to Christ. The value principle here is: A pattern of right choices results in good character.

About now, some of you should be questioning, "Wait a minute. The sermon title is *Developing Stewardship*. What does all of this have to do with stewardship?"

Believe it or not, all that I have said was just a necessary introduction to a very short sermon on developing stewardship. Since we have been delivered from darkness to light, and since we have adopted God's values as our own, our lives should be dramatically changed.

We now have the very important job of being good stewards, or managers, of the things God has entrusted to us. A good steward recognizes God's holy trust in him or her and responds accordingly. To properly develop stewardship in our lives, we must understand three things: Ownership, responsibility, and accountability.

In our Gospel reading, God is the master of the house. God's ownership is complete. Everything belongs to God. Nevertheless, God entrusts to his servants, that's all believers, the responsibility of managing his resources. He does this by sovereignly choosing what resources he will give to each individual. No two people are the same and God treats each one according to how he has gifted that person.

Today's Old Testament reading tells us: *Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture* (Ps 100:3 NIV). That means that God knows each of us personally, just like a shepherd knows his sheep. God knows the gifts he has given each person. Those gifts have been selected according to the role God has for each believer.

Knowing that God gifts people according to his unfailing wisdom, brings home our responsibility. Each believer is like one of the servants in the parable. What remains to be decided is if we are faithful servants or unfaithful servants. Faithful servants accept the gifts and talents that God has given them and work hard to make those gifts and talents work for God.

Each believer must ask, "Am I faithfully using my gifts and talents to further God's kingdom, to serve my church, to serve my neighbor, to spread the Good News of God's salvation? Or, have I buried the things God has entrusted to me, hoping no one will notice; no one will want my time or my possessions?"

When the master returned to his kingdom, he called his servants to account for how they handled their trusts. That brings us to accountability. Like those servants, we will answer for what we have done and what we have not done. The Epistle reading tells us: *We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad* (2 Cor 5:10 NIV).

It may not be a popular thought, but Scripture is clear. Everyone must account for how they managed their time, money, spiritual gifts, and all the other possessions God has entrusted to them.

In the parable, the unfaithful servant didn't get away with his laziness. Even though he gave lame excuses and rationales, he was held responsible for his lack of action. How easy it is for us to justify what we want to do and rationalize away what we don't want to do. But success, joy, and lasting fulfillment can only be achieved when we acknowledge God's ownership of everything, including ourselves, and then work hard to fulfill our responsibility to be honest, faithful stewards. May God grant you the will to do the good works he prepared in advance for you (Eph 2:10).