

**Lexington Presbyterian Church  
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*Committed Stewardship*

Rev. Dr. Thomas P. Groome III

Most people assumed Bertha Adams was just another welfare victim, but an autopsy revealed that she had severe malnutrition and evidences of poverty were abundant in her apartment . . . the lack of heat, lack of food, the lack of basic necessities of life. There could only be one conclusion . . . Bertha Adams was an example of one who was missed by the national safety net of social spending. Then there came the surprise. While taking inventory of her personal effects, authorities found two keys. They trusted a hunch and took the keys to a neighborhood bank. There they found a safety deposit box. In that box they found \$800,000 in cash, hundreds of valuable and negotiable stock certificates, bonds and other securities.

Ms. Adams had a misguided perspective when it came to stewardship. In her view, her possessions were something to be hoarded. She did not understand that the blessings of God were given to her to be used to meet the needs not only of herself but also of others. She did not understand that the purpose of life was to manage her resources and not selfishly clutch them for herself.

The Christian is the steward of all the resources God has given, including time, talent and treasure. The faithful steward manages all resources for the glory of God. Yet, tragically there are many of us who have misunderstood stewardship and are poor managers of the resources of God under our control. I know it seems a bit strange to be preaching about stewardship on the first Sunday of October, but stewardship is not a three or four week season, but it should be an everyday attitude for all of us.

It's easy for us to have misguided perspectives of stewardship . . .

First, there is the wrong idea that stewardship is fund-raising. Many often think that a stewardship program in a local church is raising money much as community agencies raise money. Even though the money is raised for the church budget that should never be the bottom line. Stewardship teaches us how God wants us to spend our money. When we realize that all of our money belongs to God, then we will spend it as stewards for God. Stewards are not hoarders of money, but rather money-managers.

Second, many of us think that stewardship is giving money rather than managing assets for God. We can only give what we own. When we begin to realize that we don't own something in the first place, it becomes much easier for us to give it back to God. We do not own our money, our possessions, or even the clothes on our backs, for everything belongs to God.

A third misguided perspective of stewardship is the permanent possession perspective. We think we can keep things indefinitely. Though we all know we can't take it with us, we often think we are the exception. Scripture teaches us that we leave this world as naked as we entered it. When we begin to view stewardship as the management of God's resources rather than permanent personal ownership then we are on the right track.

Jesus described a landowner who found and purchased a field, tilled the soil, planted a vineyard, planted a thick hedge around the perimeter and dug wells to irrigate the vineyard. The vineyard was equipped with a tower that not only provided housing for the workers but also was part of the security system designed to protect the vineyard from thieves and wild animals. He did everything to make the vineyard productive, then committed it to its workers. They were to produce a crop and pay him rent in the form of some portion of the crop. The owner then left the vineyard and went away.

In Jesus' day it was commonplace for wealthy people to purchase and build well-equipped vineyards, then rent them out to tenant farmers. Because of the civil unrest in Judea at that time, most wealthy Greek or Roman landlords preferred to live elsewhere and viewed property in Judea as income property. As in most of the parables, there was nothing foreign to the setting of this parable that his listeners would have had difficulty understanding.

In actuality, the parable may be as much based on the OT as it is on the NT. In the OT, Israel was described as the "vineyard of God." The context of Jesus' parable was obvious to the chief priests and Pharisees who first heard the story. They all knew this simple story had specific application to the nation of Israel and her response to the servants of God. They realized that Jesus was accusing them of being poor stewards or managers of Israel and the vineyard of God. In this parable Jesus reminded the Jewish leaders of several important stewardship principles. These same principles apply as much today as they did when Jesus first told it.

The first principle is the principle of blessing.

In this parable the landowner saw to it that the vineyard was completely equipped, lacking nothing necessary to run the business of the vineyard efficiently. Like every vineyard in Palestine, this one was equipped with a winepress probably carved out of solid rock, although occasionally these were made with bricks. The tower provided housing for the workers and also served as a watchtower where a worker could ensure that the vineyard was protected. The fence around the vineyard was probably a thick thorny hedge that would discourage the wild animals that might damage and destroy the vineyard. The owner expected the workers to manage the vineyard for him.

Everything in this world belongs to God, who created it and has redeemed it for Himself. God not only owns the resources in the world but also gives us good minds, good health, circumstances to get an education, and even initiative to provide for our families. God and God alone has given us everything, and God expects us to use these things for his glory. A good steward will manage these resources for the Kingdom's best interests.

Then there is the principle of revelation.

When the owner is out of sight, he is usually out of mind. The parable indicates that the landowner committed his vineyard to the workers and went into a "far country." Absentee landlords were very popular in Palestine because the area had a lot of civil unrest and lacked the luxuries common in other parts of the Roman Empire.

In many ways these workers are no different than us today. When we are not around people, we tend to forget the important things such as birthdays, anniversaries and things that are important to them. The longer the landowner is gone, the less we see of him, the more we forget about him.

Many of us realize that God has blessed us with families, homes, jobs, cars, furniture—all the blessings of life. But after we work hard for a promotion or other things, we, at times begin to think that we have attained these things by our own talents and abilities. The longer we see the things that God has blessed us with without recognizing God's ownership, the more likely we are to begin to see them as our own.

Third there's the principle of belief.

The owner of the vineyard had the incredible belief in his employees that they would bring a return on his investment. He gave them control over his resources. Further, he expected their full cooperation. Finally, he refused to believe his workers were in revolt against him. The owner kept sending people back to collect on his investment. The workers beat one, killed the second, and stoned the third. When additional servants were sent out, they met the same fate. The owner continues to think the best of the tenants and sent his own son, whom they also killed.

Until this point in the story everything has been credible. Many commentators have observed that no person would send his son into a situation where the servants had been repeatedly abused and killed. The natural response of the landowner under such circumstances would be to send in the authorities to deal with the delinquent tenants.

The contrast here is what we would do and what God has already done. God did send his son to a nation that consistently rejected the prophets and ultimately rejected the son.

Finally, there's the principle of judgment. We realize that we are accountable to God for what we have been given. We are not accountable for what we don't have, only for what is committed to us to manage as stewards. We will all have to give an account of our stewardship to God.

In the days of the American Revolution a Baptist pastor named Peter Miller lived in Ephrata, PA. Miller was a man who enjoyed the company of George Washington. In the same city lived another man named Michael Whitmann. Whitmann did everything in his power to obstruct and oppose the work of the pastor. On one occasion Whitmann was involved in an act of treason against the government of the US. He was arrested and taken to Philadelphia (70 miles away) to appear before General Washington.

When the news reached Peter Miller that this man, his enemy, was appearing on trial for his life, he walked the 70 miles to appeal for Whitmann's life. Miller was admitted to the presence of Washington because of their friendship. When he entered the hearing room he began without delay to speak for Whitmann's life. Washington listened to the story and then said, "No, Peter, I cannot give you the life of your friend." Miller responded, "My friend! This man is not my friend. He is the bitterest enemy I have!"

Washington said, “What? You mean to say that you have walked 70 miles through the dust and heat of the road to appeal for the life of your enemy? Well, that puts this matter in a different light. I will give you, then, the life of your enemy.”

This is what our Lord Jesus Christ has done for us continually. When we were enemies, when we were without strength, when we were helpless, when we were opposed to God, fighting God every way we could, leading self-centered lives without regard for God and others, using God’s goods and resources, Christ died for us.

That is the beauty of stewardship. That is the beauty of giving.

**Sources:**

Toler, Stan & Elmer Towns. *Developing a Giving Church*, Beacon Hill Press, Kansas City, MO, 1999.

[www.homileticsonline.com](http://www.homileticsonline.com)

The message is from sermons that I preached over the years that I have been in the pastorate. I have compiled them from the notes I made before they were preached. I do not know where I found some of the material contained here. I may have borrowed it, as a whole or in part, from others. I simply do not remember. If this is the case, I apologize right now, and that our combined efforts will glorify God.