

Stewardship Principles

Stewardship is a whole-life issue that includes generosity in the use of spiritual gifts, time, skills and experiences, as well as financial resources.

Understanding stewardship principles and its attributes gives a clearer picture of the concept of stewardship. 'Principle' is fundamental beliefs or basic truths or understandings that determine basic standard and values in order to live a generally good life in a society. Principles are foundations on which policy and objectives are established. Principles of stewardship are drawn heavily from a biblical world view: "Utilizing and managing all resources God provides for the glory of God and the betterment of His creation." The central essence of stewardship is managing everything God brings into our life today in a manner that honours God and impacts eternity.

Stewardship is a belief that humans are responsible for the world, and should take care of it. It has implications in politics as in democracy, management, governance, the care of the environment, and many aspects of human life. Stewardship is not a monopoly of religion; it has wider implications in what God has created. Stewardship begins and ends with the understanding of God's ownership of **everything**. It is on this basis that principles of good stewardship are derived. A brief citation of these principles gives the leader a desire to go on a discovering spree.

1. **God owns it all:** "The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for He founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters." Those who try to dispute this principle soon discover they were deceived and have no alternative but to accept that they themselves are wonderfully made by the creator. "Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?"
2. **Investing and managing that which belongs to another:** "The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants," says the Creator. Whatever the investment the source emanates from the manifold grace and gifts of God as given to humans to manage on His behalf. This must have been the beginning of the leasehold land ownership.
3. **The grace of God guarantees the ability and talent to serve:** "But remember the LORD your God, for it is He

who gives you the ability to produce wealth ... which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today." The billions of funds invested in human medical research has failed to add any iota to the life of mankind and cannot contradict what Moses spoke to the children of Israel as a reminder to the future generations.

4. **Enjoy but do not destroy creation's fruitfulness:** "For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving." It is for this that the LORD took man and put him in the Garden of Eden to "work it and take care of it". Man always enjoyed the ecosystem, a combination of all that God has made to be enjoyed. You cannot enjoy and destroy at the same time.
5. **Serve in excellence even when no one is watching:** "Those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone." Man was given the stewardship responsibility of the universe to "work it and take care of it", the expectation was excellence and the human being was own boss without a supervisor.
6. **Rest is essential to renew the strength to serve:** "If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please ... then you will find joy in the Lord, and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land ..."

These are, only but some of, the eternal principles forming the foundation of stewardship from which have permeated consciously or unconsciously influencing the ethics of our society and the universe. It is no surprise that *Principles for Good Governance and Ethical Practice: A Guide for Charities and Foundations* was released in 2007 outlining an expanded 33 practices designed to support board members and staff leaders of every charitable organization as they work to improve their own operations.

These have been articulated over the years in countless statutes, legal decisions, and commentaries to emphasise. A little online search yields much more discussions, with layers of complexity and interpretation.

The essence of the principles of stewardship guides fiduciary responsibility of board members to work exclusively for the benefit of the organisation and its mission, consistently excluding any and all other considerations. The word "fiduciary" has been introduced in corporate and non profit organisations' accountability. It signals a

responsibility to care for the possessions of someone else—a person or an organisation—under a strict requirement to focus exclusively on the interests of the other.

Derived from the principles of stewardship and ethical standards arise the duties of the board members:

The Duty of Care: expectation of the board to *pay attention* to what is said at meetings, what they see and the way the organisation serves the best interests of the community through its services.

The Duty of Loyalty: expectation to consider *only* the interests of the organisation and steering clear of any transaction for personal gain.

The Duty of Obedience: expectation to focus on complying with the law and other external requirements that may apply on behalf of the owner and beneficiaries. In finality the Creator is the owner.

The root of these principles is not only in the law, but the Creator wrote them on the heart of the human being. The real focus is on doing the right thing.

"Some people, in order to discover God, read books. But there is a great book: the very appearance of created things. Look above you! Look below you! Read it. God, whom you want to discover, never wrote that book with ink. Instead He set before your eyes the things that He had made. Can you ask for a louder voice than that?" St. Augustine

Stewardship is the responsibility of maintaining and using wisely the gifts that God has bestowed. God wishes human beings to be his collaborators in the work of creation, redemption and sanctification. After many centuries of destruction, there is increasingly the sensitised advocacy on environmental protectionism.

In summary, leaders being stewards is a privilege and a responsibility. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.

The characteristics of faithful stewardship include the fear of God, the respect of others, and the respect of the law of the land; giving priority, being persistent, paying attention to details, and seeking no worldly gain or expediency; being kind, honest and encouraging each other; submitting to the headship of Christ; and building up each other in an orderly fashion "until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."