

A Good Steward

"as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."

A Steward is a person who manages or administers property of another. The concept of stewardship encompasses management of assets put under your charge by someone else. In the Scripture, everything belongs to God; and humans were created with the sole purpose of taking care of the creation of God: To manage the 'the manifold grace of God'.

Clarke in his Commentary of the Bible explained 'Stewards of the manifold grace' as: Whatever gifts or endowments any person may possess, they are properly speaking, not their own; they are the Lord's property to be employed in His work, and to promote His glory.

Others have contributed to the meaning of the manifold grace to entail justifying grace, sanctifying grace, stabilising the inner man, edifying ability, strengthening capacity, fruit producing role, ministry developing function and sustaining grace.

Jon Wesley in a sermon in Edinburgh, May 14, 1768 speaking on 'good stewards' goes into detail to highlight areas of expectations of stewardship, he mentions the following among other things:

- Our soul entrusted to us by God with an immortal spirit, endowed with various powers and faculties of understanding, imagination, memory, will, affections;
- Our body with all the parts, different applications, health and strength;
- The worldly goods placed in our hands money, power, positions, dwellings and other conveniences;
- The talents of a mixed and unique nature at our disposal, some through learning and some as gifting from God, immeasurable talent of time, opportunities, and weighing the value of every moment.
- The environment of the creation the Almighty God which man was given responsibility as He created us in 'His own image'; nature, family and friends.

"The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it."

God appointed humanity as the steward of creation.

In Joseph's example, a steward is a selfless servant with high moral values, managing assets without owning them, anticipates future trends and devises grand plans. Joseph clearly understood the boundaries.

Whatever the situation, a steward is not at liberty to use what is lodged in his/her hands as he/she pleases, but as the master pleases. It is expected that a steward be faithful and trustworthy and do it to the best of his/her ability, but at all times taking cognisance that he/she is only a manager.

Stewardship means being good managers of the resources earned and the life given through the abundance of His grace. As good stewards we know that when we choose to spend our time or money unprofitably, results to opportunities down-stream. We consider our choices and use our resources in keeping with our values and mission in life.

"Freedom, morality, and the human dignity of the individual consists precisely in this; that he does good not because he is forced to do so, but because he freely conceives it, wants it, and loves it." Mikhail Bakunin (1814-1876); Philosopher

The concept of stewardship has found a place in management developed from its initial religious formulation to psychological and sociological transformation now applied as 'stewardship theory' in management. Consideration is given to the potential of stewardship for encouraging decision-making as an economic factor in corporate and state management.

Stewardship theory is defined by Davis, Schoorman & Donaldson as

"a steward protects and maximises shareholders wealth through firm performance, because by so doing, the steward's utility functions are maximised".

In this perspective, stewards are company executives and managers working, protecting and making profits for the shareholders. In the non-profit environment they are the CEO, Coordinators, and managers. Stewardship theory stresses not on the perspective of individualism, but rather on the role of top management being as stewards, integrating their goals as part of the organisation.

Stewardship has the capacity to combine efficient, market-like behaviour with trust-based, ethical forms of decision-making. Stewardship theory suggests that stewards are satisfied and motivated when organisational success is attained.

In other words *Stewardship theory* is a theory that managers, left on their own, will indeed act as responsible stewards of the assets they control.

The stewardship theory portrays a positive view of the manager's role as opposed to the view of agency theory, in which managers are assumed to act in their own self interests at the expense of shareholders.

Underlying the concept of stewardship is integrity: straightforward dealing and completeness in presenting a balanced picture of the state of the company's affairs, through integrity of reports. It takes someone of high moral character, guided by value based-principles no matter the pressure to do otherwise.

Often, the concept of stewardship is narrowed to financial management ignoring the bigger picture of role of stewards. The church, as the custodian of the scriptures, is a culprit of the skewed emphasis on stewardship; the emphasis is aimed at pushing the membership to financial giving for the benefit of the church, rather than the understanding of stewardship in totality. What about the church as an organisation being a good steward?

Stewardship means that we weigh not only our own needs and desires but those of other people and future generations. We realise that none of us is a self-made person and that part of what we own is wealth that flows from others through us. We appreciate the natural resources, societal resources and financial resources that have been handed down to us by our ancestors and we are conscious of our own legacy.

In conclusion we borrow thoughts from a presentation: *Understanding the Psychology of Stewardship within Leaders* by Morela Hernandez.

A steward is a role model: Principled example; and Entrusted to balance the long-term best interests of the organisation and its stakeholders ahead of self-interest.

A steward is a motivator: Encourages a deep organisational commitment; and Motivates individuals to work for the greater good of the organisation.

A steward is a caretaker: Manages resources of others; Protects organisation and the community(s) in which it resides; and Accepts personal responsibility and fosters same feelings in others.

"Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful."