

Group 2: Read Matthew 25:14-30. Evaluate the actions of the second steward. What business decisions did he make? For whom did he work? What can you assume about his character based on the way he performed his job? What characteristics of the master can be determined?

Group 3: Read Matthew 25:14-30. Evaluate the actions of the third steward. What business decisions did he make? For whom did he work? What can you assume about his character based on the way he performed his job? What characteristics of the master can be determined?

As groups begin to work, remind class members that talents refers to a specific amount of money. Encourage each group to review "Managing the Family Business" in the student material as they discuss their assignment. Create four columns on the whiteboard. Across the top of the columns, write: The Master, The First Steward, The Second Steward, and The Third Steward. Enlist four class members to serve as recorders. Call for responses from each team. Instruct recorders to briefly list the teams' responses.

After all three groups respond, emphasize:

1. We are entrusted with varied amounts of wealth.
2. We are "possessors" but never "property owners."
3. Our relationship with God may be rightly seen as owner/manager.
4. God has placed confidence and trust in us, and chosen us as partners.
5. We have been granted broad freedom in the utilization of our entrusted resources.
6. We will be rewarded for faithful management and held accountable for failure.

Comment: Our partnership with God is rooted in two distinct and inter-related positions, the owner and the manager. This relationship at work is what we call "stewardship."

The Purpose of Stewardship: Write the following questions on the whiteboard: Why should we give? What is the proper attitude toward giving? Can stewardship become theft? Assign each question to one of the three groups and instruct each group to search the student material for the answer to their assigned question.

Ask: If God owns everything, why are we asked to give? Review the story of the building of the Tabernacle as related in Exodus 35. Point out that God called on these newly-freed slaves to give to the construction of the Tabernacle.

Ask: What did the Hebrews learn from their participation that they would not have learned if God had miraculously provided the Tabernacle? Why was this an important lesson for them to learn?

After calling for responses to each question, write the following statements on the whiteboard:

1. The Master is interested in each steward's active participation.
2. The most common error in stewardship is that managers behave as though they are owners.

The Pattern of Stewardship: Write the following on a large sheet of paper:

A Good Manager:

1. Realizes that he acts on behalf of the owner.
2. Knows the owner and the owner's plans.
3. Works to accomplish the owner's wishes.
4. Evaluates if his relationship with the owner is healthy and strong.
5. Understands the owner's expectations of him.
6. Evaluates if management actions are consistent with the owner's plan.

Explain that all of these actions are indicative of a good owner/manager relationship.

Lead class members in prioritizing the list by determining which actions most productively lead to good management. Encourage class members to debate their opinions. After the list has been prioritized, ask: Which of these are important in our stewardship relationship with God? Why?

Distribute a copy of the following Meditation Moments to each class member or read it aloud and encourage class members to silently respond to each question.

Meditation Moments

- Have I considered "God's Ownership of All" as a philosophy instead of a practical approach to life?
- How would I grade my performance as a manager in the Father's Business?
- How well have I related to God in terms of manager and owner?
- Do I have possessions that I try to exclude from God's ownership?
- Do I feel freedom in my role as God's steward?
- Have I abused the financial freedom God has given me?
- What qualities do I possess that enable me to be an effective manager?
- Do I feel an urgency about "my Father's Business," as boyhood Jesus did?
- Have I practiced the Prodigal Son's approach to stewardship?
- Am I aware of occasions when I, as manager, have behaved as an Owner?

Read the following prayer:

Heavenly Father, I acknowledge Your Ownership of my life and all my possessions. There is nothing I claim as my own that does not belong to You. I ascribe to You all the rights and privileges of ownership. I thank You for all the good gifts you have brought into my life. Thank you for the freedom you have given me in the utilization of these manifold gifts. Give me wisdom and discernment to use Your gifts well. I confess I have not always performed well as Your manager. I have, on occasion, been more concerned about my business than Yours. I have been guilty of disabling Your distribution system with my failure to participate. Too often, I have received Your good gifts, consumed them myself, and forgotten You. Forgive me, and receive me into full fellowship in the Family Business. I want to participate as Your faithful and productive steward. Help me to become, and every day be, Your faithful manager. By Your Holy Spirit inspire and stir me to maximum performance. Instill in me a spirit of joy and generosity.

Amen.