

Stewards by God's Design: The Three R's of the Christian Steward
Relationships – Responsibilities – Resources
Stewarding the Resource of Truth

Goal: That participants would understand and live out the fact that God has given His stewards the precious gift of the Gospel and that they are to steward it faithfully and wisely.

Introduction: Read the following quote from Fyodor Dostoevsky, "Above all, don't lie to yourself. The man who lies to himself and listens to his own lie comes to a point that he cannot distinguish the truth within him, or around him, and so loses all respect for himself and for others. And having no respect he ceases to love." Ask participants if they agree with Dostoevsky. Ask them to respond to the following questions:

- Why do people lie to themselves?
- What happens when people lie to themselves?

The truth is important even if it is uncomfortable or inconvenient.

We live in a time when truth seems to be illusive. We don't know who to trust to tell us the truth. Some say that there is no absolute truth—that everything is relative. Truth is a precious commodity. Henry David Thoreau said, "Rather than love, than money, than fame, give me truth."

Of course, this is nothing new. Scripture tells us that Pilate asked Jesus "So you are a king?" Jesus answered him, "I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." Pilate's response to Jesus was "What is truth?" (John 18:37-38)

Stewards have been entrusted with the truth of the Gospel—salvation in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

What do we learn about truth from the following Scripture passages?

1. John 8:44

You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

We Learn: Satan has been a liar from the very beginning. When he tempted Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden he lied. When he tempted Jesus in the wilderness he lied. When he tempts us he lies.

The story is told of an old Scottish clergyman who said that the devil has two lies that he uses at two different stages. Before we commit a sin, he tells us that one little sin doesn't matter — 'no one will know.' The second lie is that after we've sinned, he tells us we're hopeless. The truth is that little sins do matter and there is hope, even for all of us who sin, because Jesus took our sins to the cross where there is forgiveness—full and free.

2. 1 John 1:8

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

We Learn: We do tend to lie, even to ourselves. The Bible tells us that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23) The lie that we don't sin or that sin isn't important is especially dangerous because it convinces us that we do not need a savior—when the truth is: we all sin, we cannot pay for our sin, and we need Jesus.

3. John 17:17

Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.

We Learn: God's Word is true. Holy Scripture is the inspired, inerrant Word of God. Scripture is self-authenticating. It says about itself, "All **Scripture** is **inspired** by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;" (2 Tim. 3:16.)

4. John 14:6

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

We Learn: Jesus is *the* truth—period!

5. Psalm 25:5

Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long.

We Learn: If we want to know the truth we must know the Word of God. It tells us the truth about God and about ourselves. When we know the truth we have hope for this life and for the life to come..

Read Luke 19:11-26. Stewards have three obligations regarding their stewardship of the Gospel.

1. Guarding the Gospel

- What responsibility did the nobleman give to his servants?

Answer: He entrusted them each with a portion of his wealth. He told them “Engage in business until I come.” They were given the responsibility of stewarding his money while he was gone so that when he returned he would receive a profit.

- What does it mean to guard the Gospel? Jude 3

Answer: Jude 3 uses the phrase “contend for the faith.” Mark A. Jeske writes in *James, Peter, John, and Jude: The People’s Bible*, “Jude does not mean fighting to get the power to have faith, for that is the Spirit’s business and the Spirit’s gift alone. He means fighting for the message people need to believe, fighting to keep the message straight. The words of the gospel are our lifeline to God, and any tampering—adding, subtracting, or changing—damages people’s relationship with God. God’s Word does not need constant updating and revision every generation—Jude says that the faith was entrusted to the saints ‘once for all.’” Page 236

- Why is it important to guard the Gospel? Jude 4

Answer: It is important because there are many people around who will distract us from the faith or lead us astray from both inside and outside of the church. Jeske continues, “The church of all ages will be assaulted by Satan on two fronts. One assault will come from outside, from unbelievers who will use physical means to hurt the church: ridicule, legal harassment, confiscation of property, persecution, imprisonment, torture, even death. The second form of assault is worse, though: infiltration from within. Satan gets his agents inside congregations, in positions of leadership if possible, who work gradually to replace God’s saving truth with lies from hell.” Page 326

2. Sharing the Gospel

- What did the nobleman want his servants to do with the talents?

Answer: He told them to engage in business until he returned. They were to use his money to get more money for the master.

- What does God want us to do with the treasure of the Gospel? Mark 5:19-20

Answer: God wants us to tell others the Good News that Jesus loves us and paid for our sins on the cross. John 3:16 is called the Gospel in a nutshell: *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.* This is the message we are to steward by telling others about Him.

- Why is it so important to tell this Good News to others? 1 Timothy 2:4

Answer: It is God's desire that all people be saved. He has promised that the Holy Spirit will work through the message of the Gospel to bring people to faith. Romans 10:17 says, *So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.*

- How are we to share the Gospel? Read the following passages from Acts.
 - We are to be personal missionaries to others. Acts 4:20
 - We are to fulfill our obligations through the congregation of which we are a member. Acts 5:42
 - We have the responsibility to share the Gospel through the mission work of our larger church body. Acts 13:47

3. Reflect the Truth of the Gospel in our Lives

- Matthew 5:13-16

Answer: In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells His followers that they are salt and light. Salt is a preservative. Christians serve as a preservative in the world in which we live. A world that is often corrupt and ungodly.

Jesus is the light of the world. In Him there is no darkness at all. As children of God we are to let the light of Christ that shines in us reflect through us to others. As followers of Christ, we point to the true light of the world—Jesus.

- Galatians 5:22,23

Answer: Here Paul lists the fruit of the Spirit or those things the Spirit works in the Christian that mark his or her life. Armin J. Panning writes in *Galatians, Ephesians: The People's Bible*, "If one wants to see a pattern, it would seem that three groups of three virtues yield a workable scheme. The first three, 'love, joy, peace,' are inner qualities that reflect our Christian relationship to God. The next three, 'patience, kindness, goodness,' show themselves in the Christian's attitude and actions toward his neighbor. The last three, 'faithfulness, gentleness and self-control' reflect how the new man conducts himself in view of the duties, opportunities, and obligations that come to him in his Christian calling." Page 100

- 1 Peter 2:9, 11, 12

Answer: We were chosen by God for a special purpose—to proclaim His excellencies. Clinton J. Armstrong writes in *The Reformation Heritage Bible Commentary: General Epistles*, "God's people, individually and collectively, are set apart to do His will, because God's people are valued by Him more than any other thing...Being thus chosen and consecrated, God's Gospel people respond in proclamation of His excellencies. Better than 'virtue,' or even 'praises,' the object of Christian proclamation is the superlative action that won our salvation, the perfect life, death, and resurrection of the Son of God (cf. Php 4:8)." Page 137

How we, as stewards by God's design, manage the resources He entrusts to our care is important. What do Romans 14:12 and 2 Timothy 2:15 tell us?

Romans 14:12 *So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.*

2 Timothy 2:15 *Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.*

Answer: In the Parable of the Talents, the nobleman returns to take account of the servants' stewardship. We will also give an account to God of our stewardship of "the word of truth." Mark W. Love writes in the *Reformation Heritage Bible Commentary: Pastoral Epistles*, "This (*handling the word of truth*) describes the skillful application of God's Word, in which no provision is made to spare anyone or anything from it. How many people approach and handle the Word of God in such a way that they selectively apply it, so as to spare this person or that, even themselves and their own pet sins. It has to be handled for the salvific sake of the hearer. Can it be said mercifully? Yes, but it cannot be held back from the faithful and full application of it, lest the hearers obtain a false security in their sins." Page 124

Additional Passages About Truth: (Discuss some of these passages if time permits.)

1 John 1:8 *If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.*

Ephesians 6:14 *Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place,*

John 16:13 *But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.*

John 17:17 *Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.*

Proverbs 12:22 *The LORD detests lying lips, but he delights in people who are trustworthy.*

Psalms 25:5 *Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long.*

Psalms 119:160 *All your words are true; all your righteous laws are eternal.*

Ephesians 1:13-14 *And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.*

1 Corinthians 13:6 *Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.*

John 14:6 *Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*

John 8:32 *And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.*

Closing prayer: Dear Father, the best way to start each day is to start in truth. The truth is that I am a sinner. I sin everyday by thought, word, and deed. But I will not despair, for by Your love for me and the world, I know the Truth: You sent Your Son, Jesus, to die and rise so I may have forgiveness of every sin. Guide me to put the Truth of Your love into action, especially with everyone I meet. In Jesus name. Amen. Adapted from the Saturday morning prayer in the April-June, 2023 issue of *Portals of Prayer*