

“Steward” What’s in a word? - Relationship By: Harry Verhiley

The English word “steward” comes from the Anglo-Saxon words “stig” or “stye”, meaning an enclosure or a hall, and the word “wéord,” which means keeper. A steward is a stye-keeper. A steward is a person in charge of property or affairs of another person, who is the true owner. A steward also often acts as a supervisor, an administrator of finances and property on behalf of the owner of the property.

The Greek and Hebrew equivalence express similar ideas. Oikonomos named the person in charge of the household. In the Greco-Roman world, this include more than 100 slaves and engaged in family services and the family’s business ventures. The oikonomos was most often a slave to whom the master of the household had entrusted the management of his possessions. The Hebrew word, אָבִיבִיחַ, “ben bieth”, literally translates as “son of the house”. The term could mean son or steward, which would be a trusted slave, set by the master over the household.

The English, Greek and Hebrew definition for steward helps us to understand that the word indicates more about relationship than it does about who manages the property. The relationship is one of trust. Psalms 24 describes, God, as head of the household, God’s household is the world, and “the world and all that is in it belongs to the Lord; the earth and all who live on it are His.”

The fundamental character traits of a steward are integrity and trustworthiness. Since a steward manages the owner’s property, the steward needs to be faithful to the owner, and he or she must act according to the owner’s intention. Since God is the owner of the entire world and we are his faithful stewards, then we must act according to his intention.

A steward can be faithful only if he or she knows the mind of the owner since the steward’s authority is a delegated; he or she is accountable to the owner for its exercise. The steward is aware that he or she possesses delegated authority and is accountable to the owner for how it is used and the fulfillment of the responsibilities delegated.

Matthew 25:14, Jesus tells a story of a man entrusting an amount of money to three servants. In each case, the amount transferred corresponds to the individual’s ability. Two of the servants realize that the master is showing them trust by asking them to take care of the sum of money. They accept the responsibility of stewardship and the risk that goes with it. They use initiative, their talents and abilities and manage to double what was entrusted to them. When they gave an account of their stewardship, they are praised and rewarded. The third man misjudged the master, he did not know the intent of the master, nor did he seek to know his will. For him, the handing over of the money was not a sign of trust, but a trap to get him into trouble. He refused to use his gifts and abilities; he simply ensured that he could return the money in the end. Instead of praise, he stands condemned at the time of reckoning. Jesus’ parable adds a valuable

insight that stewardship involves hard work and effort and taking appropriate risks courageously. Fear is the great enemy of being a good steward. Fear is the opposite of faith. Throughout Scriptures, we are commanded to “be not afraid... fear not.” Fear draws our attention away from acting upon the intentions of the True Owner; faith steadies our focus on the Master.

Not one of us owns anything. Upon the day of our death, we will know this statement to be true. We are all servants; some have more responsibility than others. Regardless of our position in life, Jesus shows us how to be a good steward. At the last supper, Jesus used the situation to teach his followers how to be good servants to the Master. If we want to be great and important, we must dedicate ourselves to the service of others, as Jesus’ example in washing the Apostle’s feet. If we are to be great, we must take on Jesus’ mind and attitude and follow his actions of service. Jesus said he did not come to be served, but to serve.

We should not be afraid to seek the intentions of the True Owner and to give all of our effort in living His will. We should not be afraid to try our very best to be Christ-like by investing ourselves, and all that has been entrusted to us, to the Master’s will and the service of others. In the end we will be overjoyed to hear, “Well done my good and faithful servant.”