

Words

TO LIVE BY

Steward

NOVEMBER 2021

STEWARD (NOVEMBER)

Definition: *the job of supervising or taking care of something, such as an organization or property.*

When I first talked about the idea of writing another Words To Live By devotional, one of the first words Jonathan wanted me to write on was, Steward. This word has deep meaning and challenge associated with it.

I asked Jonathan why he was so passionate about this word. Here was his response.

"Stewardship is a guiding principle for seeing how to manage what God has given me. First of all that it's not mine. When something is not yours you treat it differently, with care and respect. It goes far beyond finances to time, marriage, work, raising your children, etc.

There is this concept of 'you're not spending, you're investing.' In the parable of, The Good Steward, the ones who were praised were the ones who invested wisely. They were the good stewards. In life, I want to make sure that what I'm giving my time, money and energy to is an investment for eternity. God expects a return on His investment. The purpose for what I do in life is not just to earn a paycheck every week, but to invest in light of eternity."

To fully understand what stewardship means, you first need to understand what it does not mean.

You are not entitled to anything. Everything and everyone you have in this life is a gift, including the air you breathe.

How are you stewarding it all? Your body, spouse, children, money, home, vehicles, stuff, gifts, treasures, etc.

Look at what scripture says in Psalm 24:1 NIV, "*The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.*"

According to that verse not only does everything in this world belong to God, but so do all who live in it and that means you. The purpose for which you were created was to bring God glory. Are you living in such a way that does? Isaiah 43:6b-7 NIV says, "*Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth - everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.*"

As you choose to live by the word Steward this month, recognize that everything and everyone in this life is a gift and does not ultimately belong to you. If everything you have belongs to God, how are you doing stewarding (taking care of) it for Him?

James 1:17 NIV says, "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows."

WEEK 1: STEWARD YOUR TIME

I catch myself saying often, *I wish there were more hours in the day.* Have you ever said the same thing? Then I remind myself that even if there were more hours in the day I would probably still want more. The realization is that I don't need more hours in a day, I need to steward the hours that I am given in a better way.

In writing this I feel convicted again because I know I can do better at stewarding the gift of time God has given me. How about you?

It is important to realize that someday you will give an account before God even for how you spent your time here on this earth.

Why is time so important to God?

Time is important to God because He created it. There is much that can be done in a day. Do you live with the mindset of stewarding every moment in your day in a way that would bring God the most glory?

The apostle Peter reminded the early Gentile Christians in his letter the importance of stewarding their time well.

"Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body is done with sin. As a result, they do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God.

*For you have spent enough **time** in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. They are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless, wild living, and they heap abuse on you. But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to human standards in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit.*

The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen." 1 Peter 4:1-11 NIV

Peter calls followers of Jesus to live with an attitude of commitment to their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. There will be great struggles for you on this earth but you are called to keep your eyes fixed on eternity.

Peter goes on to tell them they are not to live their lives (time) for human desires but instead for God. He reminds them of who they once were, living for themselves and this world. God called them to a new way of living, one that stewards their time for His glory.

This is an important reminder for believers. It is easy to get sucked into the things of this world, wasting your time on worthless, worldly things. An example of what this looks like for many of you (including myself) is social media. Social media is a great tool that can be used to further the gospel and encourage each other, but it also consumes much of our time these days.

There may be times when you feel like you never got to fully experience enough of this world, but can I encourage you, fight against those feelings. That is not who you are anymore. It will never satisfy.

If you have repented of your sin and placed your faith in Jesus alone to save you, you need to remember that your life is not your own. You were bought at a price, that being the price of Jesus own precious and perfect blood that was shed for you. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 NIV reads, *"Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies."*

To repent means to turn (do a 180) from the life you were living before to a new way of life, fully committed to Jesus Christ. Are you living a life of daily repentance? Do you constantly choose to turn from the things of this world towards Jesus? Are you remembering to steward your time here on this earth?

Peter says in that passage you will be made fun of and slandered by your previous friends, but remind yourself that you now live for the glory of God and not for your own pleasure.

A warning is given towards the end of the passage that every person will give an account before God for how they lived and spent their time here on earth. Don't let your life and time be a waste in light of eternity.

Live for your Savior, not for yourself.

You don't know when Jesus will return. It could be at any time. How will He find you stewarding your time?

Peter also reminds you to be alert and devoted to prayer. The importance of prayer has taken on a new meaning for me this year. For about six months I met weekly with two other women for prayer. We spent the majority of our time together simply praying. We poured out our hearts before the Lord seeking His will for His Church and our lives. We prayed the scriptures

together. I also was a part of a Mom's prayer group that prayed monthly together for our children.

Everyday (except for Sunday because we're at church) an alarm goes off on Jonathan and my phones at 11:09am reminding us to stop and pray. We were challenged to set our phones everyday specifically for that time because of what Luke 11:9 says, "So I say to you: **Ask** and it will be given to you; **seek** and you will find; **knock** and the door will be opened to you."

Being devoted to prayer is critical for a follower of Jesus. When you set aside time each day to pray that is stewarding your time well.

Peter ends the passage encouraging them to love deeply. Be careful that you don't misinterpret what Peter is saying here. You are told to love, but the world is also saying the same thing. Remember that love speaks the truth to someone who is living a life of sin, calling them to repentance. This must be done with grace and kindness.

Verses 9-10 from 1 Peter 4 tell you to be hospitable and use your gifts and talents to serve those around you.

Be a faithful steward of your time and use it in a way that brings God glory. That might even mean saying no and not giving your time to something that God has not called you to.

God has given you the exact amount of hours you need for each day. You just need to steward them well.

What changes need to be made in your days that would help you better steward your time?

"Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." Psalm 90:12 NIV

WEEK 2: STEWARD YOUR TALENT

This month you have been living by the word, steward. To be a steward means to take care of something for someone else.

A TV show that is a big hit in our home is Shark Tank. People come on this show to present the product they invented in hopes that one of the sharks will choose to invest in their product. The sharks don't just automatically agree to invest in any product, they are wise and careful in their decisions by asking many questions. If they feel the product would be a good one for them to invest in, they not only give their money to advance it but also their time.

When the money and time are given to the person it is up to them to steward it in such a way that brings much growth to the company. The sharks ultimate goal is to get a return on their investment in the person and their product.

Today you will be studying a passage that talks about stewardship verses ownership. This is the parable Jesus taught of the Talents. Parables were simple stories that Jesus used to illustrate a spiritual lesson.

"Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.'

His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

The man with two bags of gold also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.'

His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.'

His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have

will be taken from them. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Matthew 25:14-30 NIV

To understand this passage correctly it is important to note that the word talents is not meaning an ability to do something, but instead a unit of money that was worth at least \$1,200 in modern terms and possibly more. A talent was not a coin, it was a specific weight. The word talent here comes from the Greek word, *talanton* which is a sum of money. It was equal to about 6,000 denarii.

When the master dispersed his talents among his servants, notice that he gave to each according to their ability. Often it is easy to let pride or envy overtake a person when they see someone else with more talents than them.

It is important to remember you are given just the right amount of talents for you. Don't get caught up focusing on others around you. You need to steward well whatever God has given to you. Maybe you were only meant to steward 1 talent. Take that 1 talent and multiply it so that you are able to give a return to God on His investment in you.

Once the master leaves for his journey each of his servants get to work. The first took his five talents and put them to work, doubling the amount he was given. The second took his two talents and doubled them as well. And finally the last servant took his one talent and buried it in the ground causing there to be no growth.

After many days the master returns from his journey and brings his servants together to see how well they had stewarded their talents. Would there be a return on the masters investment?

The first two servants seem eager and excited to share how they were able to double their masters investment. The response the master gives is so powerful, “*Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!*”

Oh how I long for these words to be said of me. Is that your desire as well? Do you want to hear Jesus say to you someday, *well done*? Do you want to share in your master’s happiness? I can imagine the joy these two servants must have experienced hearing those words.

Pastor David Guzik in the Enduring Word Commentary states, “*We can say many good things about the work of the first two servants;*

- *they did their work **promptly***
- *they did their work with **perseverance***
- *they did their work with **success***
- *they were **ready** to give an account to their master.”*

And then you come to the last servant. Notice his response is much longer than the two servants before him. It was like he had a lot of explaining that he needed to do to help his master understand why he chose a different method. He tried to make his words speak louder than his actions but we all know that actions speak louder than words. He was in major defense mode.

He starts off by flattering the master with his words and then acknowledges that he let fear control him. Because of that he panicked and did the first easy and safe thing that came to mind, bury it.

The response of the master is extremely convicting and challenging for me. He starts by calling the servant wicked and lazy. If this servant really knew who his master was then he would not have buried what was entrusted to him? He would have at least tried to invest the talent in some small way. The master tells him at least he could have put it in the bank to earn interest.

As a follower of Jesus can I ask you, how well do you know your master, Jesus Christ? Are you stewarding what He has entrusted to you so that you can give Him a return on His investment?

Maybe you've been following and reading along with all these devotionals and realize today for the first time that you don't truly know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. Romans 6:23 NIV reads, "*For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*"

Your sin deserves death, separation from God who is holy and sinless in every way. His gift to you was brought about thru His Son, Jesus' death on the cross and resurrection on the third day. When you fully surrender to Him, repent of your sin and place your faith and trust in Him alone to save you, He will.

2 Corinthians 6:2b NIV says, "*I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.*" Don't wait any longer to be saved from the punishment that your sin deserves.

Remember, that wicked and lazy servant was only given one talent. In the beginning it was all he was capable of handling, but in the end it showed that he was not even able to handle one. The master took away the one talent and gave it to the first servant.

The servant who ended up with 10 bags was rewarded with the last talent because he had proved himself to be a good and faithful steward.

The wicked and lazy servant did not truly know his master. If he did, he would have stewarded his talents in such a way to give a great return to his master.

As I read the end of the passage in Matthew it reminded me of an earlier conversation Jesus had in Matthew chapter 7 where He said, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’” Matthew 7:21-23 NIV

If you claim to know your master, you will steward well what He has entrusted to your care.

This whole parable is a picture of the coming judgement day. Every person will stand before God someday and give an account for what He has entrusted to them. You don’t come before God with a group of people. If this were true then all these servants would have done well. You come to God individually, on your own. This is a powerful parable when you think of that day.

Pastor David Guzik also said, “*In light of this parable, we must ask ourselves: What have we done with our knowledge? Our time? Our money? Our abilities? The sins of omission [what we don't do] may ultimately be more dangerous than the sins of commission [what we do].*”

God is looking for good and faithful stewards. Does that describe you?

Charles Spurgeon once said, “*It is better to be faithful in the infant-school than to be unfaithful in a noble class of young men. Better to be faithful in a hamlet over two or three score of people, than to be unfaithful in a great-city parish, with thousands perishing in consequence. Better to be faithful in a cottage meeting, speaking of Christ crucified to half-a hundred villagers, than to be unfaithful in a great building where thousands congregate.*”

Follower of Jesus, steward well the investment that God has made in you so that He will have a great return on His investment.

WEEK 3: STEWARD YOUR TREASURE

It was about the 5th year in our marriage when my husband Jonathan said, *let's take the Dave Ramsey course Financial Peace University together and learn how to better steward our finances.* I immediately panicked inside and that came out in my response. I didn't want to take the class. I was sure it would limit me and my spending. I already felt like I struggled stewarding our money well but the thought of taking a class to teach me otherwise scared me.

Even though I resisted inwardly it was a moment when I was grateful Jonathan stepped up to lead as the head of our home and made the decision that we would take the class together.

I laugh now thinking back to how I resisted at first because I learned so much from that class and am a big proponent of Financial Peace University. The class taught us both how to steward our finances and treasures on this earth in a way that would honor and bring glory to God.

You know what's even more crazy? What I thought would limit me and hold me hostage in my spending actually proved to be the opposite and gave me more freedom than I imagined.

The class began from day one recognizing that everything we have on this earth, including our money, is not ours but a gift from God. Once I understood that, it required me to live the life of a steward knowing that I will have to give an account before God someday for how I handled the treasures He gave me on earth.

That is a lot of responsibility. What an honor and privilege that God would entrust you and I with so much.

We're going to continue this concept today comparing ownership to stewardship. Knowing that God owns it all and you are just a steward, look with me at 2 Corinthians 9:6-15 NIV.

"Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. As it is written:

'They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their righteousness endures forever.'
Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with

*everyone else. And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. **Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!"***

To give a little context behind this passage, Paul is writing to the church at Corinth and is very encouraged by how generous they are in their financial support of the saints in Jerusalem. The beginning of chapter 9 Paul tells them that he has boasted of their generosity to encourage others to live in the same way.

Paul calls to their remembrance the idea of sowing and reaping. He compares generosity to that of a farmer who sows seed. When a seed is put into the ground it could seem that the farmer is losing the seed but he believes and waits patiently for a future harvest. The seed must leave the farmer's hand or his grasp on it and be planted in the ground in order for there to be a harvest.

The same is true for you when it comes to your treasure on earth. You must hold it lightly with open hands knowing that it ultimately belongs to God.

If the farmer only planted a few seeds then he would only gain a small harvest. But if the farmer planted many seeds he would have a plentiful harvest. He scatters his seed generously with open hands.

It is important to note that Paul says to give what you have already decided to give. Don't ever give reluctantly, out of guilt or because you feel pressured to. Scripture says, *God loves a cheerful giver.*

Give generously knowing that God is the owner and you are the steward. When you live in such a way that you recognize God as the owner of your wealth and treasure on this earth it frees you to be generous. A cheerful giver is one who is living in the freedom that Christ gives.

God is able to bless you more abundantly than you every imagined. I want to point out here the word, able. The verse does not say God *will* bless you, it says He is *able* to bless you. That is all up to Him.

Many people today fall for the false teaching of a health and wealth gospel. Meaning, if you give generously God will automatically pour out blessings of physical health and monetary gain. Don't fall for what so many false teachers say in this way. God says He is *able*, not that He automatically *will*. It's all up to Him. He is the owner.

He always promises that you will have exactly what you need. Not what you want, but what you need.

Because of the generosity of these believers, Paul says their righteousness will endure forever. This was written hundreds of years ago and here you are reading the testimony of these

believers today. Do you want the same to be said of you after you die? Their righteousness truly is enduring forever.

Paul goes on to remind them that God is the supplier for all their seed (everything they have in life). God is the one that causes increase, growth and enlarges the harvest. When you are a faithful steward of what God has entrusted to you, He will cause growth to come.

Why did these believers choose to steward their wealth in a way that honored God? Because they chose to live a life of obedience. Obedience to handle their wealth in a way that multiplied what God had entrusted to them. Are you willing to live the life of an obedient steward?

When you try to put yourself in the place of owner your treasures can end up owning you. Anxiety often accompanies that and you feel held hostage to your treasures. Choose to live with open hands.

God is able to bless you abundantly with more than you ever imagined when you recognize that you are the steward and not the owner.

It is easy to have the mindset that you deserve the money or treasures you have on this earth. You don't deserve anything in this life. It is all a gift. The very last verse says, *Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!* What is the indescribable gift? Jesus Christ. You don't deserve saving from your sins punishment but God wanted to give that to you thru His Son, Jesus.

John 3:16 NIV says, "For God so loved the world that he **gave** his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

That is how generous God was with you. It is the best gift you could ever receive. Repent and turn from your sin today believing in Jesus death and resurrection.

When you live with the mindset of, it's all mine, you hold a tight grasp on what you are called to steward. Live your life generously and wisely with open hands, knowing that God is the owner and you are a steward.

"Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops." Proverbs 3:9 NIV

WEEK 4: STEWARD YOUR RELATIONSHIPS

During my early college years I became pretty convinced that I would never get married. I wondered if I would ever date a guy, but soon realized I had no business dating until my relationship with Christ was first place in my life. Any man God put into my life needed to be viewed as a gift. Not someone that I owned or even deserved, just simply a gift to walk thru life with who would push me closer to my Savior.

I grew much closer to God in that season of college life and marriage became an afterthought for me. Just when it seemed I finally learned that God had to be first place, He gifted me with a dating relationship that eventually led to marriage with Jonathan.

There were some important lessons on stewardship that I learned early on in my marriage and as a new Mom. I remember having the feeling that once I married Jonathan he belonged to me and me alone. Don't get me wrong, there is truth to that. But I struggled with this feeling of ownership in my marriage. Again, he is mine but what I kept forgetting was that Jonathan was a gift to me. He did not ultimately belong to me but to God. How was I going to steward my marriage in a way that had a return on God's gift to me?

Exactly one day before our first wedding anniversary God gifted us with our first child, Zoe Faith. Once again I had to be reminded that Zoe was a gift to Jonathan and I who we needed to steward well for God's glory.

I have struggled many times and still do as a Mom with a feeling of ownership over my children. When Zoe was just a baby, there was a dear friend from church who told me that it was important to learn to share Zoe and her life with others. Zoe was not only a gift to Jonathan and I but also to our family and friends. I have never forgotten her words to me as God blessed Jonathan and I with three more children.

Sometimes stewarding your spouse and children with wisdom means keeping them safe from people or places that would harm them.

Ultimately what I needed to learn and still be reminded of is that people and our relationships with them are gifts to us. We do not own them.

There is a passage of scripture that I want to take you to that points out the order of stewardship when it comes to relationships.

In this passage Jesus is teaching in the temple and has just silenced the Sadducees with His response to questions they were asking. The Pharisees decide they are going to give a try at testing Jesus and ask Him the following question.

"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.'"
Matthew 22:36-40 NIV

Jesus answer was that stewarding your relationship with God is your number one priority in life. That was the same lesson God had to teach me in my college dorm room. He deserves first place. How are you investing and growing your relationship with Him? If you can learn to steward your relationship with Him first, then the second commandment will be easy for you to live out.

God has invested so much into you thru the gift of His Son Jesus dying to pay for your sin.

The first step for some of you is coming with all your mess and brokenness before a holy God and recognizing that you need Him. You need His healing, forgiveness, mercy, grace, love and saving from your sin. If that is you, I urge you to come and find it all in Jesus.

When you confess and repent (turn) from your sin, He promises to remember it no more. Hebrews 8:12 NIV says, "*For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.*"

Have an honest conversation with Jesus today that brings you to a place of peace and gives you hope for the future.

Follower of Jesus take some time today to answer this question. How much are you willing to invest in your relationship with God?

Often I am guilty of spending my time investing in a lot of earthly things that I can't even take with me when I die. How about you? Jesus said in Matthew 6:19-21 NIV,

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Where is your treasure? What you invest in reveals where your heart is. Invest your treasure first in your relationship with God and in things that will last for eternity.

Stewarding your relationships with others should take second place in your life. When you recognize that your spouse, children, parents, siblings, grandchildren, friends, etc. are all gifts to you then you will be able to steward those relationships in a God honoring way.

Read the following verses below and ask yourself how you are doing at stewarding and investing in your relationships.

"Be devoted to one another in love." Romans 12:10 NIV
"Honor one another above yourselves." Romans 12:10 NIV
"Live in harmony with one another." Romans 12:16 NIV
"Serve one another humbly in love." Galatians 5:13 NIV
"Be patient, bearing with one another in love." Ephesians 4:2 NIV
"Be kind and compassionate to one another" Ephesians 4:32 NIV
"Forgive each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." Ephesians 4:32 NIV
"Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." Ephesians 5:21 NIV
"Do not lie to each other." Colossians 3:9 NIV
"Teach and admonish one another with all wisdom." Colossians 3:16 NIV
"Encourage one another and build each other up." 1 Thessalonians 5:11 NIV
"Spur one another on toward love and good deeds" Hebrews 10:24 NIV
"Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other." James 5:16 NIV
"Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another." 1 Peter 5:5 NIV
"Don't grumble against one another." James 5:9 NIV

Each of those verses are relational using the words *one another* or *each other* in every verse. I only shared 15 of them with you but there are even more hidden within the scriptures. Make it your aim to live out each of these truths in your relationships this week. When you do you will be stewarding and investing in them in a God honoring way.

As I read each of those verses I realized I wouldn't have the conflict, pressure or frustration that I sometimes experience in relationships if I just apply these truths to each of them. Your response in relationships is your responsibility, not the other person's.

We talked last week that obedience is the first step in stewardship and this applies to the greatest commandment Jesus gave in the passage for today. If you as His follower are obedient to love God with all that you are first and foremost and then love the people God has placed in your life, you will be stewarding the relationships God has gifted to you in a way that will bring Him the most glory.

It is often said *Love God, Love Others*. Why do we so easily get this backwards? Too often I am guilty of loving others before I love God.

You won't ever know how to steward a relationship with someone else if you are not first stewarding your relationship with God.

I call the following word picture, *The Circle of Investment*.

God is first (top of the circle) and He has given you His Son Jesus who stewarded your problem of sin by taking care of it for you. God invested in you first. Once you receive His gift of salvation and start a relationship with Him (bottom of the circle) He gives you the opportunity to steward and invest the gifts that He has given to you. As the circle comes to a close (top of the circle again) it reminds you that someday you will stand before God and give an account for all the gifts that He gave you, including the people in your life (spouse, children, friends, etc.).

How are you stewarding and investing your relationships so that you can give God a return on His investment in you?

Romans 11:36 NIV reminds you, *"For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen."*

WEEK 5: STEWARD THE GOSPEL

As you close out this last week of living by the word steward, I want to look with you at one last topic that I believe is most important. Stewarding the gospel. You learned earlier this year that gospel means the good news of Jesus Christ and the salvation that He offers to mankind.

How are you stewarding that good news in a way that will give God a return on His investment in you? The following two verses come to mind often when I write.

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

"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil." 2 Corinthians 5:10 ESV

Those words hit me hard because for years I struggled to know what my true gifting from God was.

Becoming an author and bible teacher is something I never imagined I would be doing in my life. If it wasn't for my husband pushing me and I mean really pushing me to write devotionals, I Choose and Words To Live By would never have been put on paper.

If you knew me in my younger years of life you would have seen me pursuing a lot of the same things my older siblings did. I was the 4th child in my family that chose to attend Moody Bible Institute for college.

My story in getting there looked a little different though. I thought it would be easy to get accepted to Moody because surely they would want someone like me who was sold out to the Lord and willing to serve Him anywhere I could in ministry. I wanted to learn further how to steward the gospel well.

However, that was not exactly the case. Everything would be done in God's timing and in His way, not mine. I was not accepted to Moody my first year and put on a waiting list for the following year. That was a blow to my pride and started to feed my insecurities in a major way.

Out of desperation and still wanting to serve the Lord I immediately applied and was accepted to the Children's Ministries Institute (CMI) of Child Evangelism Fellowship. I had worked with this ministry for years in high school and thought, *if Moody doesn't want to train and use me at least CMI will.*

I also had this false idea for years that children's ministry was really one of the only ministries within the church that women were allowed to serve in.

Within a matter of two weeks I went from packing my belongings and moving 3 hours away to moving 8 hours away from home to further my schooling.

God used that time in a powerful way in my life. He needed to remove me from any distractions and following the path of my older siblings by pushing me to step out and stretch my faith.

After I graduated from CMI then I was accepted to Moody and started school the following year. My major started out as Children's Ministry, then changed to Bible Theology with a minor in music to eventually dropping the music and just studying the Bible. I LOVED my Bible classes.

I have always struggled in school with taking tests. So to make up for it, I would do the extra credit of writing papers to bring my grades up. I've always loved writing. My favorite was when my professor would have us do creative writing.

I still struggled with insecurity when it came to my writing because I was never good at grammar. My research writing professor in college, Miss Hecht, would have grammar parties after class in her office for students to raise their grade. I remember always meeting outside her door for grammar parties with one other guy in the class. We both had embarrassed looks on our faces but eventually learned to laugh off the fact that grammar wasn't our strong point.

Knowing that I struggled with grammar I concluded that while I found writing to be enjoyable and fun it never would amount to anything for me.

The fall of 2018 I struggled with where God had me at in life so I ran to His word. I studied deeply and shared my thoughts from my devotional time constantly with Jonathan. He told me I needed to start writing these down as devotionals. I thought he was crazy. I started to let my insecurities take control again.

If there is one thing that Jonathan has told me frustrates him in our marriage it is when I am insecure. He was not about to let me bury a gifting he saw within me. And so he kept pushing me. I started writing and finished a short 30 day devotional before Christmas. I gifted it to a few family and friends.

Fast forward to the spring of 2019 a few months into the pandemic. Jonathan told me that I needed to share this devotional with more people who were struggling during COVID 19. Still thinking he was crazy, I fought against insecurity and pushed myself to start a Facebook group to encourage women around the world. That group of women grew larger and faster than I ever imagined.

I sat back in amazement and watched God use all those times alone with Him that I had written about to encourage, strengthen and comfort other followers of Jesus in their relationship with Him.

God had given me a gift that quite honestly I was embarrassed to ever fully tap into because I still had so much to learn when it came to writing. I then realized this gift of writing was something that I had to steward well because I would give an account someday before God for what He had entrusted to me.

Stewarding something does not mean that you have arrived and know everything there is to know. The life of a steward is constantly learning and growing.

I take my writing very seriously because I know I will stand before God someday and give an answer for every word I have shared with you. But, I don't let it stop me from using my gift.

If God has given you a gift, He will give you everything you need to use it for His glory. Remember, HIS glory not yours.

Do I still struggle with insecurity? Yes. But, I don't feed it or let it stop me because that would be burying a gift from God that He has entrusted to me, to steward His gospel well.

Do I need encouragement to keep fighting against those thoughts? Yes. We all need encouragement from time to time and I am thankful that my greatest cheerleader who pushes me beyond what I feel capable of is my husband.

After I wrote and published my first devotional I Choose, I gifted it to my parents for Christmas. They played the greatest role in discipling me as a child. A few days after we returned home from visiting them I got a phone call from my Dad telling me how proud he was of me and that he had no clue I knew how to write and study the scriptures the way I did. If there is one person in life that most people want to hear encouragement from besides their heavenly Father, it is usually their earthly father and God gave me that gift from that phone call that I will treasure forever.

I have looked back and read that devotional many times and there are things I have thought about changing or editing and then decided against it. I want to look back at the raw, imperfect, simple devotional it is from that season of my life and leave it exactly how it was written so that I can compare it to how much God continues to teach me and grow me from His word.

Just the other week when I was starting to feel insecure again, one of our students from when Jonathan and I were in youth ministry told me that I have the gift of teaching.

Those words of encouragement are what push me to keep going in my study of scripture, writing and teaching. I use them to fight off insecurity and boldly step forward with courage in what God has entrusted to me.

The goal of my writing is not to make a name for myself but for God's words to go forth and the message of the gospel to be proclaimed and received. I believe that my words will never have transforming power but God's alone. That is why I always want to point you to the power of scripture and the great truths that are tucked inside.

Stewardship of the gospel was of high value to Jesus and He taught His disciples what that looked like while here on this earth. Luke 9 tells of when Jesus first sends out the disciples to share His gospel with the world.

"When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. He told them: 'Take nothing for the journey—no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra shirt. Whatever house you enter, stay there until you leave that town. If people do not welcome you, leave their town and shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them.' So they set out and went from village to village, proclaiming the good news and healing people everywhere.

Now Herod the tetrarch heard about all that was going on. And he was perplexed because some were saying that John had been raised from the dead, others that Elijah had appeared, and still others that one of the prophets of long ago had come back to life. But Herod said, 'I beheaded John. Who, then, is this I hear such things about?' And he tried to see him.

When the apostles returned, they reported to Jesus what they had done." Luke 9:1-10 NIV

Jesus gave His disciples everything they needed (power and authority) to steward His gospel well. Then He sent them out. Jesus told them not to take anything because they would stay with people who welcomed them and provided for their needs.

The disciples response was obedience to this stewardship. They went and did as Jesus told them. Their testimony was so great that Herod heard all that was happening and people thought prophets had come back to life. The disciples took their job of stewarding the gospel seriously.

Notice the first thing the disciples did when they returned. They reported to Jesus all they had done. They gave an account for how they stewarded the message of the gospel.

A few verses later in the chapter Jesus said these thought provoking words to His disciples.

Then he said to them all: 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever

loses their life for me will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self? Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels." Luke 9:23-26 NIV

If you want to be a fully, committed disciple of Jesus the first step is to deny yourself. Deny your wants, your desires, your dreams, and even the American dream. None of those will ever satisfy in the end. If you are willing to give it all up now, Jesus guarantees that you will have it all in the end.

Are you willing to give up all your hopes and dreams to gain an eternal future with Jesus that is far beyond what you could ever imagine?

For me that meant giving up on my dreams of being a great musician or children's ministry director to pursue what Jesus specifically had set aside for me, the writing and teaching of His word. I cannot begin to tell you how satisfying it is to live within your God given purpose. Every time I study, write or teach the scriptures I come alive in a whole new way as I steward the gift of the gospel that God has given me.

For some of you it will look different. Maybe you are called to steward the gospel in your workplace, at the grocery store, as a parent, to your neighbor, on your worship team, as a janitor, as a waitress, in your business, etc. Live out and steward the gospel in whatever area God has gifted you. And yes, more than likely it will look different than those around you.

Don't try to live out your own desires, live out Jesus desires for you. Make it your goal to give Him a great return on His investment in you.

There is one other area of denying yourself that is important to note and that is denying the thought that you're good enough to get to heaven on your own. The world is trying to tell you that you can and are good enough but scripture says that you fall short. Romans 3:23 NIV, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

I could stop right there but that would leave you with no hope and there is always hope found in Jesus. 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 NIV tells about what Jesus did for you, "*Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.*"

The only thing that is required of you is to repent and believe in Jesus sacrifice for you. Mark 1:15 NIV reads, "*The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news.*" Will you make that decision today? Once you do it is then your gift to steward the gospel of Jesus Christ.

How are you doing at stewarding the gospel in your life? Are you using the gift God has given to you and investing it for Him? Don't bury your gift. God wants to see His investment in you multiply.