

Marks Of A Steward

Memory Text: “Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.” (1 Corinthians 4:1, 2)

Setting The Stage: The word steward is not common in today’s language. The social context that gave rise to stewards of biblical times is uncommon in a world dominated today by the various types of governments and economies such as ours.

The word translated as “steward” in a few Old Testament texts doesn’t come from a single word but from a phrase: *asher al bayt*, the “one who is on or over a house.” If we consider that the family that resides in the house is part of the house itself, then what is more valuable to a person than his or her own home? So a steward is someone being entrusted with something very valuable that doesn’t in fact belong to him or her. This same idea is continued in the New Testament, as well.

“The NT takes OT ideas and joins them with first-century ideas, concepts, and words, thus enriching and enlarging the biblical teaching on stewardship. The most common Greek words used in relationship with stewardship are derived from oikos and oikia, ‘house.’ The oikonomos is one who keeps the house: the steward or manager.”
(Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology, p. 653)

Ellen White also helps us: *“A steward identifies himself with his master. He accepts the responsibilities of a steward, and he must act in his master’s stead, doing as his master would do were he presiding. His master’s interests become his. The position of a steward is one of dignity because his master trusts him.”* (Testimonies for the Church, vol. 9, p. 246)

Paul, writing to Titus, refers to ministers as being stewards of God (1:7), and Peter admonishes believers to take the gift they’ve been given and “minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” (1 Peter 4:10) In the last-days, Jesus asks a vital question of all His followers:

Matthew 24:45, 46: “Who then is a faithful and wise servant [steward], whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing.” (see also Luke 12:42)

We’re each called to be stewards (managers) of the gospel, of God’s truth, of building up the church, of administering the gifts the Holy Spirit has given us, of our families, our time, our lives. One could liken stewardship to discipleship—all that I have and am is God’s, to be used for His honor and glory.

What are the identifying characteristics of a steward? What are the distinctive qualities of God's last-day stewards? As retailers are known by their brand, so are stewards. What brand do stewards carry around?

Sunday – Faithfulness

1 Corinthians 4:2; Deuteronomy 7:9; Hebrews 11:8-12; Numbers 12:7; Hebrews 3:1, 2

“Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.” (1 Corinthians 4:2)

Faithful: “Steadfast in affection or allegiance: a faithful friend.” “Firm in adherence to promises or in observance of duty: a faithful employee or spouse.”

What are some other words that come to mind that describe faithfulness to you?
How about dependable, reliable, or unswerving?

Faithfulness is an attribute of God that He desires to share with His children:
Deuteronomy 7:9: “Therefore know that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments.”

Lamentations: 3:22, 23: “Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness.”

Can you think of any Bible characters described as being faithful that you would want to aspire after?

Hebrews 11:8-12: “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born as many as the stars of the sky in multitude—innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.”

Numbers 12:7: “Not so with My servant Moses; he is faithful in all My house.”

Hebrews 3:1, 2: “Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus, who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was faithful in all His house.”

In Hebrew, to be faithful is to trust (different from being trustworthy). God's last-day stewards trust God's love for them, they trust His promises for them, and they trust their lives with Him.

Illustration: One of the most tragic events during the Reagan Presidency was the Sunday morning terrorist bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut, in which hundreds of Americans were killed or wounded as they slept. Perhaps some of you still recall the terrible scenes as the dazed survivors worked to dig out their trapped brothers from beneath the rubble.

A few days after the tragedy, an extraordinary story emerged. Marine Corps Commandant Paul Kelly, visited some of the wounded survivors then in a Frankfurt, Germany, hospital. Among them was Corporal Jeffrey Lee Nashton, severely wounded in the incident. Nashton had so many tubes running in and out of his body that a witness said he looked more like a machine than a man; yet he survived.

As Kelly neared him, Nashton, struggling to move and racked with pain, motioned for a piece of paper and a pen. He wrote a brief note and passed it back to the Commandant. On the slip of paper were but two words, "Semper Fi," the Latin motto of the Marines meaning "forever faithful." With those two simple words Nashton spoke for the millions of Americans who have sacrificed body and limb and their lives for their country—those who have remained faithful.

God is looking for men and women who, called to be His stewards, will also be "forever faithful" no matter the cost to themselves for a cause far more worthy.

Monday – Loyalty

Matthew 6:24; 2 Chronicles 16:9; 29:9; 2 Kings 20:3; Daniel 3:16-18; Job 13:15

"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." (Matthew 6:24)

Loyal: "Unswerving in allegiance: such as to one's government, or to a spouse, or a cause, ideal, custom, institution, or product : loyal churchgoer."

What are some other words that come to mind that describe loyalty to you? How about true, devoted, constant, steadfast, undivided?

Do you think our loyalty to God is important?

2 Chronicles 16:9: "For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him. In this you have done foolishly; therefore from now on you shall have wars."

"It [loyalty] is not a contract that tries to foresee every contingency; nor is it just a list of rules. It is, rather, the visible expression of our personal beliefs, faith, and commitment."

Can you think of anyone in the Bible who exhibited loyalty?

1 Chronicles 29:9: “Then the people rejoiced, for they had offered willingly, because with a loyal heart they had offered willingly to the Lord; and King David also rejoiced greatly.”

2 Kings 20:3: “ ‘Remember now, O Lord, I pray, how I have walked before You in truth and with a loyal heart, and have done what was good in Your sight.’ And Hezekiah wept bitterly.” (see also 2 Kings 18:1-8)

Daniel 3:16-18: “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king, ‘O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.’ ”

Job 13:15: “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him. Even so, I will defend my own ways before Him.”

Illustration: Eisaburo Ueno, a professor at Tokyo University, was the proud owner of a white Akita dog, named Hachiko. Every morning they walked to the Shibuya station where the professor got on the train. In the evenings, when he returned from work, Hachiko was at the station waiting for him, and they would walk home together. For years Hachiko followed this tradition with his master.

But one sad day in 1925 something terrible happened. The day started out as usual with Hachiko accompanying Mr. Euno to the train station, but while at work the professor had a sudden heart attack and died. That evening Hachiko sat waiting for his master at the train station, but he never arrived.

The next day when the evening train pulled in, Hachiko was at the station. Again he waited eagerly for his owner who never showed up. For the next 10 years Hachiko faithfully met the evening trains until he died at the Shibuya station. His faithfulness didn’t go unnoticed, and today, if a person visits the Shibuya station, they’ll see a statue of Hachiko – a permanent reminder of steadfast loyalty.

Are you one of God’s last-day loyalists?

Tuesday – A Clear Conscience

Hebrews 10:19-22; 9:19, 20; 12:22-24

I heard that ever since 1811, when someone who had defrauded the government anonymously sent \$5 to Washington D.C., the U.S. Treasury has operated a Conscience Fund. Since that time millions of dollars has been received from guilt-ridden citizens.

Donations given to the Conscience Fund vary in size and reason. A 9-cent donation was made by a person from Massachusetts who had reused a 3-cent postage stamp, while a person from Jersey City sent US\$40,000 in several installments for US\$8,000 he had

previously taken. Another donor sent handmade quilts in an effort to settle her tax bill. Most gifts to the Conscience Fund are from anonymous donors. Others are forwarded by clergy who have received deathbed confessions.

The sincerity of some donors' repentance can be uncertain, as demonstrated by a received letter reading, "Dear Internal Revenue Service, I have not been able to sleep at night because I cheated on last year's income tax. Enclosed, find a cashier's check for \$1,000. If I still can't sleep, I'll send you the balance."

The conscience is a pretty powerful thing. Residing in the mind, it's kept many from doing the unthinkable, and has also troubled many after having done the unthinkable. Many listen to it and prosper, but, sadly, many don't and suffer. The conscience can be heard loud and clear if continually listened to, but it can become dull and seared (insensitive) if ignored.

Hebrews 10:19-22: "Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water."

It appears that the Bible teaches sprinkling. What needs to be sprinkled? Our hearts. With what? Blood. When the mind is sprinkled with the blood of Jesus the result is freedom from an evil conscience.

What is the conscience? The conscience is the avenue through which God seeks to speak to you. And what your conscience says depends on who's using it. What you hear from a piano depends on who's sitting at the keyboard. If Satan is playing on the keyboard of your conscience, he may give you an easy time when you should be having a hard time or he may hound you and worry you when you should feel happy and free. Only a heart sprinkled with the blood of Jesus is truly free from guilt.

Blood of Sprinkling: Earthly sanctuary was a replica of the one in heaven to teach the plan of salvation and reveal Christ's three phases of ministry – sacrifice, priest, and priest/judge.

The sinner was to bring innocent victim (lamb, goat or bull), lays hands on victim representing confession of sin (Lev. 4:33; 5:5), thus the sin is symbolically transferred to the lamb. Because the lamb carries the guilt of sin it must die. The sinner kills the victim, and here he finds true repentance. This represents Christ's death on Calvary, His sacrificial ministry. Is this the end of the work? No!

The priest then takes the blood into the sanctuary (HP) and *sprinkles* it before the veil and places it on the horns of the altar of incense (Lev. 4:16-18). Here the sin is not only forgiven but also covered with the victims blood (Rom. 4:7). In reality,

Christ's precious life stands in place of my sin, and I am covered with His life, whiter than snow. The priest represents Christ priestly ministry.

Lastly, once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the sanctuary needed to be cleansed from the record of sin. How? With blood. The high priest would take the blood of the slain victim and *sprinkle* it over the mercy seat where the law could be found in the MHP. He then touched the horns of the altar of incense and the altar of burnt sacrifices on his way out signifying cleansing of sin (Lev. 16). The difference between sprinkled blood in the HP and the sprinkled blood in the MHP is the first is a covering for sin, the second is the blotting out of sin.

But all of this sprinkling on the altars and mercy seat could not avail them if the blood wasn't applied, and it will never help us unless we are sprinkled with the precious blood of Christ.

Hebrews 9:19, 20: " For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water, scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, 'This is the blood of the covenant which God has commanded you.' "

Hebrews 12:22-24: "But you have come...to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel."

Can blood speak? Yes. You remember that God said to Cain, "The voice of thy brother's blood cries unto Me from the ground." (Gen. 4:10) Abel's blood cried for vengeance. But according to Hebrews, Jesus blood speaks better things. What does it speak or cry out for? Mercy!

The sprinkled blood has a double message. First, it reveals to us sins terribleness. As we approach the cross and see Jesus bleeding in our stead we ask, "Lord, what has happened? Why this?" And He answers, "This is the fruit of sin."

But the sprinkled blood holds a second message. It reveals not only the terrible character of sin, but also the wonderful character of God. "For God so love the world..." (John 3:16)

Our consciences need to be daily sprinkled with Christ's blood. Daily His blood needs to be applied. As we spend time with the Lord each day, that quiet, thoughtful, prayerful moment with God as we begin each day, we allow God to make that application of Christ's sacrifice for our sins a reality. Our conscience will be then be properly educated, well informed, and what we hear will be exactly what God wants us to hear.

Wednesday - Obedience

1 Samuel 15:22; Deuteronomy 5:29; John 14:15; 1 John 5:3; Hebrews 11:4, 7

“So Samuel said: ‘Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams.’ ” (1 Samuel 15:22)

Obedience: “Submissive to the restraint or command of authority; willing to obey: like an obedient child or an obedient dog.”

What type of obedience does God desire from His stewards?

Deuteronomy 5:29: “Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!”

Deuteronomy 11:13: “ ‘And it shall be that if you earnestly obey My commandments which I command you today, to love the Lord your God and serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul.’ ”

John 14:15: “If you love Me, keep My commandments.”

1 John 5:3: “ For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.”

Can you think of any Bible characters described as being obedient to God that you would want to aspire after?

Hebrews 11:4: “By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.”

Hebrews 11:7: “By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.”

Thursday - Trustworthy

1 Kings 8:56

“He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much. Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in what is another man’s, who will give you what is your own?” (Luke 16:10-12)

Trustworthy: “Worthy of confidence.”

What are some other words that come to mind that describe trustworthiness to you? How about reliable, dependable, honest, unimpeachable, above suspicion; responsible, sensible?

Trustworthiness is an attribute of God that He wishes to pass on to His people:

1 Kings 8:56: “Blessed be the Lord, who has given rest to His people Israel, according to all that He promised. There has not failed one word of all His good promise, which He promised through His servant Moses.”

2 Kings 12:14, 15: “But they gave that to the workmen, and they repaired the house of the Lord with it. Moreover they did not require an account from the men into whose hand they delivered the money to be paid to workmen, for they dealt faithfully.”

Daniel 6:10: “Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days.”

Genesis 41:39-41: “Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘Inasmuch as God has shown you all this, there is no one as discerning and wise as you. You shall be over my house, and all my people shall be ruled according to your word; only in regard to the throne will I be greater than you.’ And Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.’”

Trustworthiness “is the highest level of character and competence that a person can achieve in the eyes of observers. Reflecting God’s character means you will do what you say you will do, regardless of circumstances or people who press you to do otherwise.”