

The number of Whitestone episodes is now well over two hundred...and counting! The overarching mission of all these episodes is sharing in the equipping, the exhortation, and the excellence of Christians. ...And, we must add, doing all that from a timeless perspective and with the dual goals of both individual and organizational fruitfulness that a believer is gloriously indebted to pursue.

Oh, you might say, of course you're talking about being a great leader! But that's actually not really my focus at all—in fact, focusing on leadership is secondary, at best! We talked about that some time ago in an episode titled “Leadership Exists to Serve Stewardship.” That's right—although we do indeed live in a time when many Christians are captivated with being perceived as a great leader—here's the truth: the truly enduring action for the Christian is *stewardship*. And, yes, the sad fact is, actions by people in leadership roles are often not tied to long-term stewardship at all—or even short-term stewardship!

Let's face it: in politics and the current culture, leadership is routinely self-centered, superficial, arrogant, and temporal—yeah, people essentially just living for short-term wins for themselves. Think of the political leadership of the U.S. Congress and the President...regardless of political party. Think of the cultural leadership of Hollywood. Yeah, by their fruits you shall know them, as the Bible teaches us.

In contrast, stewardship is others-centered, deep, sacrificial, humble, and enduring—yes, living and serving for the ultimate betterment of others. Think of your grandpa the farmer...steward of the land. Think of your best teacher in high school...steward of students. Think of—well, *you* name a real steward!

The truth is, every one of the Whitestone episodes is designed and intended for the best of equipping, exhortation, and excellence in *stewardship, not leadership!* You see, leadership really *is* important—but only as a tool for fantastic stewardship. Hey, you might say, where do you find that? Well, in the Bible!

Hey, the entire Bible is an integrated story about the stewardship strategy of God...and the stewardship actions by God...and the stewardship by humanity in response to God—that for better and for worse. In fact, the Bible is overwhelmingly about stewardship—yes, stewardship in all facets: its instruction, standards, successes, failures, events, covenants, outcomes, and eternal duration. All of that can be rightly understood by the reading of the Word of God and the accompanying teaching by the Holy Spirit.

When we grasp the astonishing depth and breadth of the Bible's handling of stewardship and its central importance to our very being and our lasting impact...it's only *then* that we can appreciate the fullness of opportunity of a life well-devoted to Christ. Look, how about a list of just a very few, select glimpses into God's handling of stewardship issues on our behalf.

- Acting as a steward, God perfectly, lovingly planned the great sacrifice on the Cross from the foundation of the world such that every person who believes in Christ has eternal life!
- Acting as a steward, Jesus prayed that His Father's will be done in order to fulfill His sacrifice on that Cross. And after that, His Father's will was then done!
- God appointed Adam and Eve as stewards of His creation on earth. They failed in a crucial way.
- Israel's King, God, gave Israel stewardship of the ark of the covenant...the Mosaic law...the Promised Land across the Jordan. Israel ultimately rejected God as their King (1 Samuel 8) by asking for their own kings in order to be like other nations—then Israel proceeded to substantially botch the stewardship of most everything God had given them.
- God gives every person in the whole world stewardship-knowledge of Him through His creation, doing so that each can acknowledge and honor Him properly! (Romans 1)
- God gives all believers in Christ personal stewardship of their relationships in order to have His children properly love God and love their neighbors. And God gives special stewardship of the gospel of the Kingdom to all born-again believers. Needless to say, the collective track records over 2,000 years of many Christians regarding their abounding love for others as manifested in their stewardship of the gospel...well, collectively, that's been spotty at best.

- God gives believers stewardship of all their roles...their family...their neighborhood...their workplace...their church...their “everywhere.” And examples of that in the Gospels are revealing, like the widow giving all she had while the rich fell far short. And remember the centurion with his faith-fueled stewardship of his daughter—which resulted in her healing from Jesus!
- Here’s God’s summing of it all at the end. God, being a God of justice, ultimately measures every believer at the Judgment Seat of Christ (1 Corinthians 3:9-16). That’s where many a Christian will be rewarded for their great stewardship in their multiple roles...even while many others will lose the rewards that God has earmarked for all those acting as faithful stewards.

Now here’s the thing: we would be hard pressed to find any event or parable or doctrine in the Bible that’s without a key element of a life of stewardship. OK. So, just what are the key elements that lead to great stewardship...whether that be God’s overarching stewardship—or believers’ various specific roles directed by God? How about these essential elements...

Others-centered. Jesus was the perfect steward focusing on His Father and all humanity, all the way to the Cross...and then beyond. You know: Jesus loving His Father and loving the whole world. In the Cross, He modeled that stewardship of love for us all.

Denial of self. Jesus denied Himself. And He taught it to all of us, too. “And he said to all, ‘If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.’” (Luke 9:23 ESV)

Specifically-identified benefits. Yes, how about those stunning benefits originating in the crucified Jesus? You name it: eternal life...joy...peace...reconciliation to the Father! Then Jesus included each of us in on the Great Commission—that’s the privilege of the proclamation of the gospel of the Kingdom and the discipling of others that follows. Wow. We are recruited, welcomed, and integrated into the very center of God’s plan of benefits for humanity.

Short-term sacrifice aligned directly with long-term rewards. Here’s Hebrews 12:2: “Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” When properly done, right sacrifice begets right rewards!

Joyful single-mindedness. In John 5:19, Jesus said to [His disciples], “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing.” But stewardship—for Jesus and for us—is not something to focus on for just a week, a month, a year. No, it’s a joyful single-mindedness of every moment of all of life. Our every encounter with each person is a customized, unique opportunity for God-directed stewardship. Every encounter with every neighbor...every work colleague...every family member...every church member...every enemy! And remember about “the joy that was set before Jesus”...God is perfectly mindful of your every opportunity and its bearing of fruit for the Kingdom.

Now, step back a moment in your mind and think of the focus of those couple-hundred, highly-varied Whitestone episodes. Each episode essentially operates with focus on the equipping, the exhortation, and the excellence of Christians as stewards, yes, as stewards in every role they may hold in their enterprise.

Yeah, think world-class finance: that’s enduring stewardship of money. Think world-class marketing: that’s enduring stewardship of customers. Think world-class supply chain: that’s enduring stewardship of supply chain partners’ success. Think case studies of world-class people: that’s enduring stewardship of discipling and mentoring. Think world-class knowledge and wisdom: that’s enduring stewardship of the purposes and things of God.

Look, *every enduringly, Biblically-successful* family, business, nonprofit, or local church operates on these principles. And, like Jesus, we can count it all joy for the plethora of daily opportunities to fulfill every opportunity for stewardship. Yeah, that’s the joyful single-mindedness of stewardships well-done!

A&A: Application & Action

1. Do you greet the greeter at Walmart or the clerk at the grocery store as a steward of God's love? Each and every time you're in the store? Just how pervasive should our stewardship of God's love be? Discuss.
2. Does thoughtful, pervasive, fruitful stewardship of every encounter between people permeate your workplace's group dynamic? Your local church's group dynamic? Discuss.
3. Do the theological preferences of you and your church keep you from thinking globally about the billions of people Jesus died for and are still unreached by the Gospel? In other words, does your stewardship single-mindedness have geographic limitations, spoken or unspoken? If so, who "owns" the Great Commission for those places and those faces? Discuss.