

# Stewardship and Cooperation

By Vern Charette

## Pre-Session Assignments

One week before the session, participants will take the following assignments.

### Assignment One

Read Malachi 3:8–12. Then read the comments related to Matthew 25:14–30 in the section **It's in the Book**. Prepare to share your answers to the following questions: What were the people in Malachi's day guilty of? What was God's requirement for His people and their possessions under the Old Testament law? What were the promises God made to those that were obedient to Him in that area?

### Assignment Two

Read Nehemiah 4. Then read the comments related to 1 Corinthians 1:10–13 in the section **It's in the Book**. Prepare to share your answers to the following questions: What great task was needed in Nehemiah's day? Who were the "bad guys" that were trying to stop the work? How did Nehemiah and the people respond? What was the key to accomplishing their task?

### Assignment Three

Read Exodus 25. Then read comments related to **An Excellent Example** in the section **It's in the Book**. Prepare to share your answers to the following questions: What were the people commanded to do in order for the tabernacle to be built? Think about the sacrifice they were called to make for the building of God's house. Can you draw any parallels to the New Testament, especially those that have to do with stewardship and cooperation?

## Scripture to Memorize

*As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace.* 1 Peter 4:10

## Session Goal

Consistent with God's Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit—by the end of this session, disciples will understand the importance of stewardship and cooperation for living the Christian life.

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## It's in the Book

30 minutes

### Real-Life Scenario

Autumn worked all summer at the fast-food restaurant in order to save money toward a car. Her dad had made a deal with her. He would help her buy a car, but not until she could contribute \$2,000 of her own money. She knew she should be giving a portion of her income to her church as an offering to God. At the same time, she also knew that if she were obedient to do so, it would take even longer to save enough money for her car. What would you say to her?

Read Matthew 25:14–30 out loud.

### Studying the Passage

**Verse 14. going on a journey.** Jesus began this parable by telling about a man who went on a long journey.

**Verse 15. talents.** Before the man left, however, he gave talents (money) to three of his servants. A *talent* in those days was worth about twenty years' wages. Thus, it was a considerable amount of money that he expected each of his servants to invest for increase.

**Verse 18. hid his master's money.** The third servant, however, did not use his master's money wisely. In fact, he just hid it. The Lord has entrusted each of us with many blessings, and He expects us to use those blessings wisely.

**Verse 19. settled accounts.** The master finally returned and settled accounts with his servants.

**Verses 21, 23. Well done.** Two of the three had been obedient with their blessings, and they were rewarded. The third servant, however, had his laziness exposed. We live between verses 18 and 19—our Master has departed but has not yet returned. One day Christ is going to return, and we are going to give account for the way we handled out time, talents and treasure.

**Verses 26–28. wicked and slothful.** The master judged the servant. Not to use the blessings God has given us wisely is more than just unwise; it is actually sinful.

**Verse 30. Cast the worthless servant.** The disobedient servant was stripped of his investment and severely punished. This is the shocking end to the parable. The point? God will judge those who are disobedient as stewards, but He will reward those who are faithful.

### Assignment One Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment One** during the week can now share answers to the questions found there.

### Discussion Questions

What is a steward? We often think only in terms of being faithful with our possessions, but what else should we be willing to surrender to God?

### On Your Own

In the space below, write some of the blessings God has graciously bestowed upon you. Thank Him for these things. Also, ask yourself how these things might be used for His kingdom and

glory. Be ready to share these with the other “servants” in the group and see if you might come up with some unique ideas for using your “talents” wisely.

**Read** 1 Corinthians 1:10–13 out loud.

### **Studying the Passage**

**Verse 10. agree . . . no divisions . . . united.** Paul commanded the believers in Corinth to *agree* together. The Greek could be translated, “speak the same thing.” They were also encouraged to avoid *divisions*. We derive our English word *schism* from this Greek word. *United* carries the word picture of a torn net that has been mended together. Paul challenged the church to come together in unity.

**Verse 11. quarreling among you.** The Corinthians were challenged to come together because they were having problems getting along. What was this particular church split over? Favorite preachers! Some liked the way Paul preached, some liked Apollos, some liked Peter, and a “very spiritual” group within the church claimed to only like Jesus (see v. 12).

Christian unity is not an option; it is a command. A church is a body of twice-born people who have voluntarily come together to reveal the nature of the Godhead to the world. God has shown us that we will accomplish more as we walk in unity. On the other hand, Satan is ultimately behind all dissension and confusion. He knows that if he can disrupt the unity of the church, he can hinder the work of God.

### **Assignment Two Feedback**

The person who completed **Assignment Two** during the week can now share answers to the questions found there.

### **Discussion Questions**

What kinds of things cause arguments today in the church? Who do you think is ultimately behind the disagreements? What can the enemy gain by causing conflict?

### **An Excellent Example**

Stewardship begins with understanding that God owns everything. Every single thing we have or will ever have is a gift from Him to us. Consequently, God has every right to command us to give a portion back to Him in worship. Obedient Christians receive several benefits from giving, not the least of which is the opportunity to cooperate with God in the building of His kingdom.

By combining their offerings, believers are able to support ministries together that they could

not afford to support alone. Cooperation among those who give multiplies their kingdom impact.

The same principle can apply to churches. Churches can combine some of their funds to support ministries no single church could support alone. Here is just one example. In 1925, the Southern Baptist Convention launched something called the Cooperative Program. Funds are voluntarily given by individuals, churches, and state conventions with the same desire to see Christ's kingdom spread throughout the whole earth. As a result, more than five thousand international missionaries and more than five thousand North American missionaries are on the field. The Cooperative Program supports many other ministries as well. The broader principle is this: great things are being done because people give with a cooperative and unified purpose.

### **Assignment Three Feedback**

The person who completed **Assignment Three** during the week can now share answers to the questions found there.

### **Discussion Questions**

If you give a portion of all the income you receive, which of the following statements best reflects your motivation for giving?

- A. God has commanded us to tithe, and as a believer I am under obligation to obey His commands.
- B. I so adore Jesus and am so grateful for His sacrifice that placing my tithe at His feet is a delight.
- C. I feel badly if I do not help cover the expenses of our church, and I like to think my offerings help spread Christ's kingdom.

### **On Your Own**

If you give a part of all the income you receive, humbly thank God's Holy Spirit for leading you to this step of spiritual maturity. In the space below, write a brief prayer of thanks to Him.

If you do not give regularly, read and meditate on the three statements above. In the space below, invite God's Holy Spirit to prepare your heart for a lifetime of giving back to God.

## **Heart and Hands**

8 minutes

Read again the **Real-Life Scenario** near the beginning of the lesson. Consider whether your answers have changed during the session.

Be silent for two or three minutes. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice and for the gospel. Adore Him for His glorious reign on the throne of heaven. Then ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you:

1. A way the Scriptures you studied today will change your heart for the glory of Christ.
2. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to stop doing something for the glory of Christ.
3. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to do something for the glory of Christ.

Write what the Spirit reveals to you below, and then be ready to share what you have written with the group.

## **Since Last Week**

5 minutes

## **Grace-Filled Accountability**

5 minutes

## **Planning for Evangelism, Missions, and Service**

5 minutes

## **Prayer**

7 minutes

## **At Home: Nail It Down**

Biblical stewardship and cooperation are central issues to the Christian faith. Faithful giving often reveals a heart of love, gratitude, and adoration toward God. Faithful giving also is directly related to kingdom impact locally, nationally and globally.

- In Matthew 25:14–30, Jesus presented the parable of the “talents.” The main point of the parable is that God will judge those who are disobedient as stewards, but He will reward those who are faithful. A reckoning day is coming, and we will literally give account of our lives to God. Receiving blessings here on earth is wonderful, but we also will be rewarded in heaven for our obedience. Knowing this, we are to be wise with how we handle the time, talent and treasure God has given us.
- In 1 Corinthians 1:10–13, God, through the apostle Paul, commanded the Corinthians to walk together in unity. The problem with the church at Corinth stemmed from their selfish allegiance to their favorite preachers. A schism was the result. Many things can cause disunity among God’s people. Consider what is at stake and ultimately who is behind the dissension. We must obey the command of God to walk together for the sake of the glory of God.
- The local church is the primary example of a group of people that have come together to give cooperatively in order to see the kingdom of God advanced, but similar cooperative giving can also happen on a larger scale. A cooperative giving plan can bring together funds from individuals and churches in order to see Christ’s kingdom saturate the nation and spread throughout the world.

Throughout both the Old and New Testaments, God continuously calls His people to cooperate together as they give their time, talent and treasure. Ultimately, all biblical giving is motivated by a desire to see Christ’s kingdom and His name spread over the whole earth. The fact that we have an opportunity to participate with God in this endeavor is a mighty expression of grace. We will be rewarded now and throughout all of eternity for the sacrifices we make here on earth. May His name be praised.

### **Follow up Question**

*What do stewardship and cooperation have to do with living the Christian life?*

The Making Disciples curriculum is a gift from Southwestern Seminary to those who, for the glory of the Father and in the power of the Spirit, will spend a lifetime embracing the full supremacy of the Son, responding to His kingly reign in all of life, inviting Christ to live His life through them, and joining Him in making disciples among all peoples.