

MANAGING ALL OF LIFE
UNDER GOD'S RULE



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MANAGING ALL OF LIFE
UNDER GOD'S RULE



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Kingdom Stewardship: Managing All of Life under God's Rule

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INTRODUCTION

Many years ago, during the days of the Wild West, a man robbed a bank in Texas and then fled across the border to Mexico. Chased by a sheriff from Texas, he was finally cornered in an old bar where he thought he'd escape notice. The problem for the sheriff, though, was that the bank robber spoke only Spanish and the sheriff spoke only English. So they had to locate a translator.

Once a translator was found, the sheriff interrogated the bank robber about his stash. For starters, the sheriff asked him where he hid the money. The bank robber replied that he wouldn't tell. The sheriff began to push harder and demanded that the robber tell him where he hid the money. But the bank robber held his ground and told him nothing. Then the sheriff instructed the translator to tell the robber, "If you don't tell me where you stashed the money, I'm going to shoot you right here and right now."

The bank robber saw the seriousness in the sheriff's eyes. He knew he was out of the jurisdiction of American law and that the sheriff could make good on his threat. So the thief told the translator exactly where he hid the money. It was buried beneath an oak tree outside of a nearby barn about two feet under the ground.

When the sheriff pushed the translator to tell him what the bank robber just said, though, the translator changed the story. "He said he ain't tellin' you nothin'!"

Of course that wasn't the truth. But the translator now knew where the stash was hidden!

Communication can be a rough thing. You don't always know when someone is telling you the truth or whether you are getting the full story. When it comes to the area of kingdom stewardship, there is a lot spoken

and written on the subject. But a lot of that information is plain wrong or incomplete. Many people simply focus on stewarding money and assume that's all there is to living as a kingdom steward. But money is only one part of your role of managing all you have under God. Biblical stewardship involves more than money. How you choose to spend your time, where you choose to let your thoughts linger, what you choose to say, and how you leverage your position and maximize your talents all have a far greater impact on the outcomes of your life. Yes, stewardship includes money, but the true treasures of this topic also include so much more.

It is my goal in this book to communicate a practical theology of stewardship that connects it to the broader theme and worldview of the kingdom agenda. The kingdom agenda *is the visible manifestation of the comprehensive rule of God over every area of life*. Only when stewardship is seen against the backdrop of this broader kingdom worldview where all of life is lived under God's rule can we fully understand, appreciate, and benefit from the managerial responsibility God has entrusted to us as His kingdom stewards.

PART I

THE
FOUNDATION
OF
KINGDOM
STEWARDSHIP

1



MEANING

During my years in seminary, money came to us as a family fairly infrequently. My wife, Lois, stayed home with the children, and I worked what jobs I could while also going to school full-time. To describe that season as one of near financial destitution would not be an exaggeration. Anyone who has attended seminary or graduate school with a spouse and children to care for will understand. Surviving became the goal. Eating became the goal. Keeping the car running and the electricity on became the goal. We aimed to reach these goals each week through as many strategies as we could.

One of the ways we sought a source of income came through house-sitting for families who traveled on vacations or business trips. The seminary I attended had developed strong relationships with many wealthy families in Dallas, nurturing a trust that would open the door for such work. These families assumed (and rightly so) that the seminary students who house-sat for them would not steal from them. They also assumed that their children would be properly looked after, their animals cared for, and their valuables protected. And what valuables they were! Some of these families had cars that cost more than most houses!

Now, you can imagine how excited Lois and I were each time we were chosen to house-sit for a family. Not only were we assured that we would

be eating well all week long, but we also got to live it up in palaces while driving fancy cars. To top it off, we got paid to do this. Moving on up from our tiny apartment to an enormous home, finely decorated inside and with a well-manicured lawn outside, brought us great joy. One time I even got to drive a Bentley to school. Yes, I took the longest route possible.

However, despite our enthusiasm for our increase in living standards, we needed to stay realistic in our thinking. Lois would often remind me by saying, “Tony, this is not your house.” She would say this because, at times, I would get a little too comfortable with my surroundings rather than remember that the family had merely left us in charge during their absence.

I’ll admit—it is easy to get comfortable and forget what is yours and what is not yours when you are in the vicinity of something or even someone. Proximity paints unrealistic pictures of power and possession in all of our minds. Just because we had been tasked with managing a property for a weekend or a week, this did not make us the owners of that property. We were asked to manage the premises of another. Our role involved overseeing the well-being of what was not ours at all.


The life lessons learned during this time in our young lives have stayed with me in a profoundly spiritual way. This wasn’t because of any book I read or study I did, but because I experienced firsthand what stewardship really looks like. At the end of our stay, we left the homes in as good a shape—if not better—as when we arrived. We left the food (if there was any left over). We left the cars. We left the kids we were child-sitting, furniture, pets, lawn, sound systems, and large-screen TVs. We left it all. Didn’t take one single thing with us. Why? Because it was not ours to take. It had been ours to manage only. We had been entrusted as stewards.

Recently I experienced a year shadowed by a significant amount of loss. I lost friends and family members to illnesses and even suicide. It seemed like each new month brought about the devastating news of another person’s passing. While this season was tough, it also served as a wake-up call and

healthy reminder that we take nothing with us when we head home into glory. None of the things we buy. None of the things we treasure. None of the things we save up for or invest our time and talents in. The only things that get sent on to heaven are the things we did for God and for others through His power and presence in us. These are things with eternal impact.

Many people talk about “legacy” when someone leaves this earth. Legacy simply refers to what a person has left behind. But the true legacy involves that which is sent ahead. We will never fully know our personal legacies until we stand before our Savior and hear Him say, “Well done, My good and faithful servant.”

Until then, we have been charged with the task of managing what He has given us on earth. We have been asked to fill in the context of that “well done” we hope He will one day say to us. This responsibility is called stewardship. It is a managerial role, not an ownership position.

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God’s House

In football, you will often read or hear the phrase “This is our house” or “Defend the house!” What this means is that when a visiting team comes to play, the home team makes it known that the visitors have entered into their domain. The home team makes it clear that they plan to protect, defend, and rule their house. The goal is to send the visiting team back to their own house with a defeat.

While sayings like that in sports can often be chalked up to mere hype (after all, many home teams lose games in “their house”), when

God makes a similar claim to His own creation—He speaks seriously. Psalm 24:1 states it clearly, “The earth is the LORD’s, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it.” God claims comprehensive kingdom ownership over all creation. This is His house. This is His kingdom. We live in His domain.

Psalm 89:11 puts it this way, “The heavens are Yours, the earth also is Yours; the world and all it contains, You have founded them.”



God owns it all. And since God owns it all, neither you nor I have any right to claim ownership of something that is not ours.



Revelation 4:11 states, “Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created.”

God owns it all. And since God owns it all, neither you nor I have any right to claim ownership of something that is not ours. Even if we did make that claim, it wouldn’t make any real difference just as it wouldn’t make any real difference if I claimed that any of the houses we watched during seminary were mine. When the true owners returned, I’d be kicked to the curb and undoubtedly I wouldn’t even receive the payment that was due me for house-sitting. No owner is going to stand by while someone else seeks to take what is theirs.

Neither will God stand by as His creatures seek to usurp His sovereignty and role as the rightful owner of all of creation.

There is no shared ownership in God’s kingdom.

There are no partnerships or additional signatories on any deeds or titles. God owns it all.

Once you clearly understand and apply that spiritual truth to your life, you have set yourself on a journey of understanding as well as a pathway of

unleashing your fullest potential. Most people never get this. Most people never choose to live by this principle. They think or act as if they own what they really don't own, simply because they have it. Yet what God has established in His divine order of creation is a management-based created order. Businesses have entered into a new trend over the last few years, having identified the large financial waste and inefficiency of having upper-level executive roles. We are seeing fewer companies and nonprofits seeking to fill executive director, C-suite, or top-leadership roles. Escalating budgets at that level, as well as a lack of accountability related to outward-facing work assignments for these types of positions, have encouraged the trend to what is now known as the “self-managed workplace.”


A self-managed workplace consists of high-performing management personnel who report to no one other than each other and the owner, president, or board of directors. These teams require a significant amount of self-awareness, trust, and cohesion among the directors, but when they do have these things, they have demonstrated a greater ability to perform efficiently, productively, and at a lower cost to the business or non-profit.

There are dangers to running a business in this manner, but those dangers run high only when personal responsibility runs low. As long as each person adequately and authentically manages his or her work, communicates well, and respects the goals and processes of other teams, this style of leadership propels financial growth, boosts company morale, and fosters a culture of connectivity.


Forbes recently published findings on this trend toward self-management: “To be effective in this new world, everyone, in his or her own way, will need to assume a leadership role.”¹ I'm sure they weren't intending to make a spiritual statement, but that is a very spiritual statement when looked at in the context of kingdom stewardship.

Forbes was saying that when each person properly stewards his or her time, talents, and resources in a way that reflects a spirit of responsibility, enthusiasm, excellence, and drive—the organization grows. A management

style that commissions a heart of leadership throughout the organization leads to motivated and productive employees. Similarly, our stewardship in God's economy and creative structure is entirely up to us as well. No human being ultimately rules over us to tell us what we need to do, when we need to do it, and in what manner it should be done. God rules, and

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*God's trust in
you can inspire
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through the sacrifice of His Son, God has given us direct access to Himself. In the final analysis, each of us reports directly to God—the President per se. We report to the Trinity—the Board per se. And when we do, we discover that He has entrusted us with the freedom, responsibility, and opportunity to manage all within our domain.

What you do with the time, talents, and treasures God has given you is up to you. The choices you make. The decisions on how you spend your days. The focus of your mind. Even the thoughts you think. That is

all up to you. And because it is up to you, you have a unique ability to directly influence the rate of your own spiritual progress.

That reality ought to invigorate you to work harder, seek creative ways to grow, and look for how you can fully maximize all that God has given to you. God's trust in you can inspire you to make the most of what He's placed within your disposal.

God's Creation

Owners of property often hire management companies to manage the property for them. God has a management company for His creation—it's called humanity. One of the primary reasons the Lord created humanity was to manage what He owns.

Before God created humanity, He had another management company: the angels. The angels had been positioned to manage God's property. However, one angel chose to go rogue, and with his own rebellion, to draw a significant number of other angels into the rebellion with him. Isaiah 14:12-15 recounts this scenario for us:

How you have fallen from heaven, O star of the morning, son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the earth, you who have weakened the nations! But you said in your heart, "I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, and I will sit on the mount of assembly in the recesses of the north. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High." Nevertheless you will be thrust down to Sheol, to the recesses of the pit.

Lucifer rebelled against God and tried to establish ownership on God's premises. He sought to enact a joint venture with other angels, and as a result, led a third of all angels into a cosmic kingdom rebellion (Revelation 12:4). This rebellion was hugely unsuccessful, as Jesus tells us in Luke 10:18, "I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning." The so-called shining one left a streak of shame across the sky as he tumbled to his eternal demise.

Satan, who got a name-change from Lucifer as a result of his rebellion, was kicked out of heaven down to the third planet from the sun. That's why when you open your Bibles to read about the beginning of known time, you will see that the earth was without form. Void and darkness was upon the face of the deep, so God had to create light when He created mankind. God had to separate the land from the water when He initiated the existence of the world. He carried out a major reconstruction when He brought humanity into existence. But prior to our creation, Satan lived in swampy, dark, and damp disarray until the time when a new group of managers were assigned.

Enter Adam.

Psalm 8:3-8 describes Adam's role, and subsequently our roles as well. We read,

When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained; what is man that You take thought of him, and the son of man that You care for him? Yet You have made him a little lower than God, and You crown him with glory and majesty! You make him to rule over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea, whatever passes through the paths of the seas.

Humanity has been placed a little lower than the angels—we are constitutionally inferior, for example, because we can't disappear, fly around, or think with angelic intellect. Yet God has still crowned humanity with majesty and has given us the task of looking after His creation. That's stewardship. That's management. We report to God Himself as we carry out the managerial roles of stewarding His resources. God's goal in creating man was to demonstrate what He could do in and through an inferior being (man) that was dependent upon Him rather than a superior being (Satan) that was in rebellion against Him.

God has still crowned humanity with majesty and has given us the task of looking after His creation. That's stewardship. That's management.

The definition of kingdom stewardship is *the divinely authorized responsibility for believers to faithfully oversee the protection and expansion*

of the assets (time, talents, and treasures) God has entrusted to them to manage on His behalf.

Thus, kingdom stewards can be defined as *believers who faithfully oversee the protection and expansion of the assets God has entrusted to them to manage on His behalf.*

Stewardship always involves both protecting and expanding the assets of another. A kingdom steward protects and expands God's creation on His behalf because He is the King. Creation is His kingdom and we are His managing crew. This is similar to how a bank's role is not only to protect a person's valuables and assets, but also to grow them through interest on deposits. A steward doesn't merely guard another's assets. A proper steward grows them.

Once you learn to identify yourself as a manager over everything that God puts in your hand, it changes how you look at everything around you. God created mankind to be His stewards, and a steward is to manage things according to the intention and vision of the owner. God made each of us in His image. When we do things that oppose His will, there's going to be conflict. This is similar to what happens in any workplace. The managers work for the owner. The owner does not work for the managers. We have been created in God's image. Thankfully, He has not been made in ours.

When you woke up this morning and stood before a mirror, you saw you. If you lifted up your right hand, you saw your right hand in the mirror. All the mirror did was bounce back to you your image. The image in the mirror follows the movements of whatever it is reflecting. Thus, as God chose to make humanity in His image, His intention was




Once you learn to identify yourself as a manager over everything that God puts in your hand, it changes how you look at everything around you.




for us to mirror His movement and nature in the visible realm as part of His management team over things that humanity does not own but has been tasked to steward.

When God had created the earth and prepared it for humanity, we read over and over that God saw it and said that it is “good.” He was well pleased with what He made. Then after He made man, He was so pleased that He even rested. He knew that His creation could and would sustain

itself at a minimum, and if stewarded well by humans, it could produce a society capable of building and enjoying great success and productivity. God had made a world where we would never run out of air, foliage, or space. He packed so much into our creation that we have not yet even discovered it all—this after thousands of years of exploration.

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Every idea, invention, and imaginative blend of design has been initiated in that which God has already made.

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Our job as stewards over His creation does not depend on our ability to produce things out of nothing. Rather, we are to successfully uncover ways to utilize and advance the resources already

made. Every idea, invention, and imaginative blend of design has been initiated in that which God has already made. As 1 Corinthians 4:7 says, “For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?”

Nothing you nor I have ever thought of or made originated from us. We had to piggyback off of something God made first. We eat because God created vegetation and animals. We wear clothing because God created the materials from which clothes are sewn. We build houses because God created trees and metals that form the elements we combine into

structures. Everything we have has been borrowed from our one, true Source—God Himself.

We are never tasked with creating something out of nothing. Our role is to cultivate, keep, defend, and expand that which God has given us (Genesis 2:15). God placed Adam in the garden called Eden and instructed him to bear the responsibility of cultivating it. This was Adam's homestead. He was told that he could eat from anything in the garden, except for the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. An immense amount of freedom was placed in his hands to unlock the potential of the home he had been given. Shortly thereafter, Eve joined him in the task of unleashing the full potential of their shared domain.

The Freedom God Gives

Many people don't see the freedom given to us in the garden. For whatever reason, perhaps because of our sin nature as Paul describes in Romans 7:7-8, we focus on the limitations of the single tree in the garden—the one which Adam was told not to eat from. Yet when God placed humanity on earth, He freely bestowed upon mankind the ability to enjoy and expand the various resources at our disposal as we unpack earth's potential.

God even charged Adam to maximize the potential of the garden within the sphere of stewardship given to him. Like a parent on Christmas morning, God may have watched with eager anticipation as Adam and Eve went about His creation, seeing what was wrapped and hidden within every crevice, river, plant, and mineral He had made. God



*Humanity was
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wanted Adam and Eve, as well as those who followed after, to access the full benefits of what He made.

In fact, the first governing use of the word “free” is not in the American Constitution. The first governing use of “free” is in the Garden of Eden, given by God Himself. Humanity was created to live freely in such a way that allowed for the full maximization of their potential under God’s rule.

Now, true, there was that one tree placed in the center of the garden. This is the tree they were instructed not to eat from. But that was it. Everything else was at their free disposal. Yet despite everything else



*As His managers,
He asks us to live by
divine revelation
and not through
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around them, it was the one tree that brought them down. Why would God put a tree in the middle of the garden—a tree that would bring about death? Because every time they passed this tree, it served as a reminder that this was not their house. They were not the owners of this domain. If it had been their house, Adam and Eve would have made the rules. But only an owner has the authority to hand out rules. Thus, they were

to manage everything, but like managers in business who need to stay within an approved budget, their decisions were not theirs to make independently of the owner.

This tree served as a reminder that God was allowing Adam and Eve to live there—like a parent may allow an adult child to live at home but says, “My house, my rules.” But just because they were allowed to live there, it didn’t mean they owned the garden.

Just as Christmas trees in our homes are often placed in central locations such as the den in an effort to remind us of the season we are in, this centrally located tree served a perpetual purpose in God’s plan. It

was a daily reminder of their subordinate dependency on God. It was an invitation to intimacy with the One who knows all truth.

After all, this was a Google tree. God called it the tree of knowledge of good and evil. It was an information center. It held good information and bad information. Within this tree were the mysteries of creation. It held insights and understandings beyond what Adam and Eve had access to on their own. Why wouldn't someone want to take advantage of a tree like that?


Yet God wanted to make it clear from the start that our basis of knowledge is that which He reveals to us. As His managers, He asks us to live by divine revelation and not through human reason. More information is not always a good thing. Decisions based on logic aren't always the correct decisions in a spiritual environment, which is the nature of the environment we live in.

God didn't want our thoughts to compete with His own. When I was a teenager, I would often tell my dad that I disagreed with him. Yet as soon as I got the words "I think" out of my mouth, he would cut me off right there. "You think?" he'd say, quickly. "I don't remember paying you to think." As the man of the house, it was my father's role to guide and direct. And he did a great job at it.


Our world is in chaos today because people are living their lives based on the Google tree. The Bible calls this "human wisdom" (1 Corinthians 2:13; James 3:15). People are making their choices of right and wrong based on their own ability to reason. They are worshiping education, information, relationships, and reason rather than God. The same tree that plagued Adam and Eve, eventually ushering in their destructive demise, is the same tree that plagues us today. People swear by "their truth," not "THE truth." And, just like Adam and Eve, they are suffering at their own hand. Adam handed the management over to Satan when he chose to disobey God (Luke 4:6). As a result, he lost everything.

God had given Adam so much freedom that He even allowed him

to hand over his freedom to the devil, should he choose to do so. And that's just what he did. Adam messed up the mission with which he had been tasked. Just like Adam, each of us has the freedom—as a steward of

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Many people have good motives all the while making wrong decisions because they are not functioning in the fashion of a stewarding relationship with God.

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God's kingdom resources—to mess up our own gardens, our own families, our own influence, and even our own lives. We are free to manage poorly, just as we are free to manage well. The choice is up to each of us. God will never force anyone to obey Him, believe Him, align under Him, or bow to Him. All of that will come naturally in eternity but for now we each have a choice. We can either choose life or we can choose death (Deuteronomy 30:15-20). We choose our actions. God enacts the consequences of our choices as He chooses. Just as a bank that owns a home does not force the residents to keep it neat and tidy, God gives people freedom to


choose how they will manage what He has entrusted to them. But, like a bank, He has the right of foreclosure.

Many people have good motives all the while making wrong decisions because they are not functioning in the fashion of a stewarding relationship with God. They are functioning in a mindset of ownership rather than management. Yet in so doing, they discover they have limited resources or limited wisdom on how to best utilize what has been placed before them.


My grandkids love Legos, as many kids do. One grandson in particular absolutely loves them. He loves to dump out a brand-new box of what seems like a million pieces of Legos and then get to work. Legos

don't come already constructed. Sure, there are pictures on the buckets and boxes of what a person can do. But none of it comes premade. You don't buy a house or car or building or spaceship already put together. What you do get are the necessary pieces to make it come together. The whole point is to arrange, or steward, the pieces within your control in such a way that you make something greater than what you originally got.

God has filled creation with Legos. We live in a world containing all kinds of things that can be mixed, matched, combined, grown, cultivated, and maneuvered to bring about something greater than what we first got. God desires for us to craft things out of His creation. We are to build with the things given to us. Our role as stewards is to make this world a better place for each person in it, all the while advancing His kingdom agenda on earth.

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is to make this world
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His kingdom
agenda on earth.*

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Time, Talents, and Treasures

Kingdom stewardship is our earthly response to God's ownership as declared in Psalm 115:16: "The heavens are the heavens of the LORD, but the earth He has given to the sons of men." In other words, God is up there and we are down here. He is expecting us to manage down here according to the direction He gives from up there. Whether or not we do that is up to each of us. There are three distinct areas down here He's given us to steward. We all have these three things, in varying proportions, which God has placed within our realm to manage. They are time, talents, and treasures.

First, you are to steward your time. Sure, we don't all have the same amount of time. While everyone has the same twenty-four hours in a day, we don't all have access to the same number of days. No one knows the length of time God has ordained for them to live. In fact, our family was reminded of this firsthand through the experience of the loss of my niece, who was only in her late thirties when she experienced sudden heart failure. None of us expected this. She appeared to be in perfect health. Yet God ushered her into glory at that young age.

God makes a lot of promises in His Word, but time is not one of them. None of us are even promised tomorrow (James 4:14). That's why stewarding our time is so critical. We are all living on death row. We do not know when the hour will come that God calls us home. Whether we are young or old by humanity's standards is irrelevant to God. God is not bound by time. We are. And because we are, it's important that we learn how to manage our time well.

Ephesians 5:15-17 puts it this way, "Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is." In this passage, God tells us plainly to watch out for time. We are to steward our time. We are not to waste it.

As David models for us in Psalm 39:4-6, our theology of time ought to be rooted in the truth of the transient nature of life itself. He says,

LORD, make me to know my end and what is the extent of my days; let me know how transient I am. Behold, You have made my days as handbreadths, and my lifetime as nothing in Your sight; surely every man at his best is a mere breath. Surely every man walks about as a phantom; surely they make an uproar for nothing; he amasses riches and does not know who will gather them.

David's prayer ought to be our prayer as well. We are to ask God to help us understand the fleeting nature of life. As he writes, we are but a "mere breath." This ought to inspire us to live with a biblical definition of time.

When the Bible speaks of time, it speaks of a boundary of opportunity. We are to make the most of our time by maximizing the potential contained within it. Every time an opportunity is wasted, time is lost. As kingdom stewards, we have been called to use time, not lose it. One of the primary ways to use time wisely shows up in the passage we just looked at in Ephesians 5. In understanding "what the will of the Lord is," we are able to make decisions regarding the management of our time, which will result in productive gain toward advancing God's kingdom agenda. Time is maximized when it is used to accomplish God's will.

As Paul wrote in Acts 20:24, we are to use our time to finish the divine destiny and ministry God has given to us. He said, "But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so

that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God." You can investigate Paul's point further in 2 Timothy 4:6-8.

Paul's words are what each of us ought to aim to say when we reach the end of our time on earth. To say that you have "finished the course" of God's will for your life is to have stewarded your time well. The dreams God has placed in your heart will not become realities unless you take advantage of the opportunities He gives you in this space of time.

Second, in addition to stewarding our time, each of us has been tasked



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with managing the talents God has given to us. These are the skills He has bestowed upon you for His purposes. Another term people often use for these is “spiritual gifts.” God never gives you a spiritual gift just so you can have it. Whatever He has given to you, whether skills, abilities, talents, or personality traits, He’s placed it all within your disposal in order to usher in greater good for others and expanded glory for Him.

The Bible declares that your greatest Christian stewardship is not seen in what you get from God but in what God, through you, can give to others as you serve Him in alignment with your gifts. This can sometimes be tough for people to do because we live in a “me” generation. We live in a culture of selfies and narcissistic promotional ways. Yet God has asked each of us to use that which we’ve been given not to balloon our own platform or build our own brand, but to advance His kingdom agenda on earth. One of the primary components of that agenda is helping those who are less fortunate than yourself according to the gifts and skills He has given you. Loving God and loving others are the first and second commandments we have been given to carry out as kingdom stewards (see Matthew 22:36-39). This love ought to show up in our feet through what we do to strengthen others through the gifts, abilities, and talents God has given to us.

First Peter 4:8-11 urges us to use our gifts in serving God and others while also reminding us of the boomerang effect that extending love and service can positively have in our lives. We read,

Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaint. As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things

God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

In all things, God is to be glorified through Jesus Christ by the right management of your talents. After all, it is God who has allowed you to receive an education, develop skills, acquire talents, and benefit from them yourself as well. Functioning from a mindset of gratitude for His abundant grace will keep you in alignment with His calling of service with regard to your talents.

Third, in addition to your time and your talents, God has given you treasures. This includes not only money but also the tangible items over which you have been assigned as a steward. Whether it is your home, vehicles, ma-

terial possessions, or money—God has a purpose for all He has allowed you to obtain in this life. That purpose is to serve Him, bring good to others, and expand the manifestation of His kingdom rule on earth.

One way you are to steward stuff, as we often refer to our things, is by bringing it underneath God's sovereignty. The use of what you own must yield to His will. Even owning what you own must yield to His will. As Jesus said in Luke 14:33, "So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions." That's not a verse you hear preached on frequently or find as the title of a best-selling book. Can you imagine what would happen if someone published a book called *Follow Jesus by Giving Up All You Own*? It's doubtful that book would get much exposure around the digital world or any buyers at all. Truth be told, we like our stuff. We work for our stuff. We over-extend ourselves



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at times to get more stuff. What's more, once our stuff loses its newness, we get rid of it or put it into rented storage in order to make room for more stuff. But a kingdom steward must maintain a biblical perspective when it comes to stuff. And that perspective means returning the ownership of all your possessions to God.

No amount of contemporary-based spiritualization can change this truth. Jesus said to give up your stuff. I can hear you now, "But Tony, are you saying that means I shouldn't have a house, or clothes, or money, or a television set?" No, I'm not saying that. The passage isn't saying that. What it does say is that your possessions ought not to possess you.


The problem is not in having stuff. The problem is in possessing it. When what you have carries more weight than what God says, that's a problem. Or when what you have gets more attention than what you give to God, that's a problem. When your decisions are dictated by the

accumulation or use of stuff over what God desires for you to do, you are possessed by your possessions. If losing stuff causes more sorrow than losing time with God, you have a problem.

See, everyone reading this book will die with their hands open. You will die empty-handed. Neither you nor I can possess anything in eternity that we had on

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earth. I'm sure you have never seen a hearse pulling a U-Haul. A biblical perspective on treasures means holding stuff loosely. We cannot hold on to things so tightly that we are bound by the very things themselves. It's not that we can't have things. We just can't be ruled by them. For example, if getting the new car you have your heart set on means sacrificing the responsibilities you have for your family, then that new car is

out of alignment with God's ownership of your treasures. God will never lead you to violate His commands in order for you to acquire more things. Treasures must remain under His rule, authority, and righteous prioritization for them to be stewarded rightly. You and I are to possess nothing. Yes, we can use it. But it must never be held on to in such a way that the priority of God in our lives wanes.

As Matthew 6:19-21 urges us,

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Most people actually misunderstand this verse. This verse is not saying to forgo treasures on earth. Rather, it is saying not to lay up treasures on earth. There's a difference. You can have a bank account, house, and more without laying it up in a position of primacy in your heart.

In other words, view and use your treasures with a heart and motivation for eternal rewards in heaven. Invest your treasures on earth for eternal purposes. Glorify God with and through that which He has given to you. Honor Him with your home. Honor Him with your things as well as with your finances. You spiritualize the material by inserting God as the primary focus point and purpose of it.

Managing All of Life under God

As you will see throughout this book, stewardship concerns a lot more than just money, although money is a factor in kingdom stewardship. But stewardship also involves the right management of all your time, all your talents, and all your treasures.


The benefits for managing these three distinct areas include receiving God's manifold blessings. Blessing is the experiencing of God's favor, which He entrusts to us for our benefit as well as for the benefit of others. When you steward well what God has given to you, you set yourself up to be blessed by God. Now, that blessing doesn't always mean getting your wish list or financial abundance. Some of that blessing will be saved for eternity as well. But the blessing will always enable you to manage more, rule more, and expand God's kingdom resources more. As God said in Genesis 1:28,

“God blessed them; and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’” Their blessings were directly tied to and given for the express purpose of ruling God's creation as His kingdom stewards.


When Adam and Eve blew it, their whole world fell apart and many of their blessings evaporated. Their emotions turned to shambles. Their marriage entered into trouble. Conflict, and even murder, fell upon their home.

A battle came into their lives that sought to destroy them. They were removed from the garden in which they had been placed. Not only that, but the whole earth suffered the consequences from their disobedience as thorns, thistles, weeds, pain, and more difficulties became an everyday occurrence in life on earth.

But there are also positive consequences (or rewards) for managing well. God offers both. If you want to know the full expression of God

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*If you want to know
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working in and through your life, you can do so through learning how to manage well what He has given to you.

For starters, give up the notion that you own anything at all. This is God's world. He makes the rules. If you want to make the rules, then go create your own world. But until then, you'll need to operate according to His rules. You and I are managers. We are stewards. We have been tasked with maximizing and cultivating all that God has entrusted to us. God does not sell stock in His world. He has not offered up His universe for public ownership. He is not requesting joint ventures. Rather, He is asking each of us to manage things according to His wisdom, by His rules, and with His power. When you do that, you will come to know Him in a more intimate way than ever before because you will get to see Him working in and through your life like never before.

The choice is up to you. Every spiritual blessing has your name on it (Ephesians 1:3). You just need to access each of them through the stewardship choices you make for the praise of His glory and the advancement of His kingdom agenda on earth.