

# Stewardship of Self for Christian Workers: Biblical Bases

God has called you into ministry, and you may assume that he will take care of you better than a corporation takes care of its workers. In your concern about helping others, you do not have to be concerned about such mundane things as getting enough sleep and taking time out for yourself, do you? If those you serve see you spending time on yourself, will that not harm your ministry? In fact, it seems almost selfish (sinful) to be concerned about yourself, and you would not want to do anything wrong, would you?

## Commanded to love—Ourselves

When asked such questions as what was the greatest commandment or what one must do to obtain eternal life, Jesus replied that we should love God with everything we have and love our neighbors as we love ourselves. He noted that this was more important than offerings and sacrifices (Matthew 19:19; 22:39, Mark 12:31, 33; Luke 10:27). Of course, this was not a new command that Jesus came up with, but he was quoting what God had said hundreds of years earlier through Moses. He had commanded us not to look for revenge or keep a grudge but to love our neighbors as ourselves because he is the Lord (Leviticus 19:18).

In addition to what Jesus said in the gospels, other New Testament writers echoed the same thing. James pointed out that if you really want to keep the law found in Scripture, you will love your neighbor as you love yourself (James 2:8). Paul also noted that the

entire law was summed up in the one command to love your neighbor as yourselves—and that was how you would serve one another in love (Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:13-14). Thus, you are to love yourself—and love your neighbor in the same way. If you do not love yourself, you may have difficulty loving those you are called to serve. People who do not care for themselves often have difficulty caring for others in healthy ways. If God had wanted us only to care for others, he would have left love of self out. The two are linked in important places.

## Commanded to rest—A Sabbath

Included in the law given through Moses was a Sabbath, a command to set aside a day not to work but to come apart to rest, to heal, to recharge. Anyone who desecrated the Sabbath was to be cut off from the people, to be put to death. Even during the busiest times (perhaps especially then) of plowing and harvest, they were commanded to rest (Exodus 20: 8-11, 31:14-15, 34:21). This law was not an arbitrary command, but one based on us being made in God's image, God's resting on the seventh day after creation, and his blessing that seventh day and making it holy.

Jesus pointed out that God had made the Sabbath for us as human beings—not us for the Sabbath. Everyone, including Christian workers, needs a day each week to recuperate from the pressures put on us during the other six. During the busiest times of ministry when they were so busy they did not have time to eat, Jesus told his early Christian workers to go by themselves to a quiet place to get some rest (Mark 2:23-3:6).

Since Christian workers often work the most on Sunday, many take another day a

week off but may work hard on that day doing things that have to be done—such as mowing lawn, repairing the house, etc. Christian workers usually do not need to be encouraged to care for others, but they do often need to be reminded to care for themselves. People in ministry also need a day to go to a quiet place and rest, recognizing that just gifts and means of service are diverse, so are means of rest. For example, one may read a book, another take a run, another watch a video, and another visit friends. Those who do not take a Sabbath may find that they become taskmasters rather than servants to those they are called to serve. Rather than being drawn to someone in whom they see love incarnate, people may be repelled by someone they see driven to work more than motivated by love.

## Commanded to care for the temple—Ourselves

No place was more important for the Hebrews than the place where God was. Moses was on Mt. Sinai for 40 days getting instructions on how to build the tabernacle in which God would dwell (Exodus 25-31). When they finally followed the instructions and built the tabernacle, God's glory filled it (Exodus 35-40). Many years later when Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem, the glory of the Lord filled it as well (2 Chronicles 1-7). Desecrating or destroying the temple or letting it go to ruin was one of the greatest insults any enemy could inflict, and the whole book of Ezra is about rebuilding the temple.

When Jesus came, he gave the promise of the Holy Spirit who would not live in the temple in Jerusalem but in his people (John 14-17). Paul later wrote about our being God's temple, the temple of the Holy

Spirit and God living in us, and about our making known among the Gentiles that great mystery, Christ in us, the hope of glory (1 Corinthians 3:16, 6:19; 2 Corinthians 6:16, Ephesians 2:20-22 Colossians 1:21). Peter pointed out that we are like living stones being built into a spiritual house (1 Peter 2:5). John wrote about God living in us as well (1 John 3:24; Revelation 3:20).

As God's temple and his messengers to make known his gospel to those who do not know him, we have a responsibility to care for his dwelling place—us. Athletes take care of themselves so they can do their best, and we must maintain ourselves so that we can be the best temple of God himself and so that we can be the most effective in bearing his message. We are not selfish to care for ourselves if our reason for doing so is not only for our own benefit but is also out of respect for our own value in God's eyes and so that we stay fit enough to be good servants of others. What good does it do the cause of Christ if we are out of commission because we have failed to maintain ourselves? We would likely be critical of missionaries who did not add oil to their car's crankcase or coolant to their car's radiator and burned up the engine. How is that any different from not taking care of ourselves?

## Commanded to carry others' burdens—And our own load

The Apostle Paul wrote about doing good. He urges us to restore a brother or sister who has fallen, to carry each other's burdens, not to become weary in helping others, and to take every opportunity to do good to all people, especially to believers (Galatians 6:1-10).

However, we must also note that in the middle of that passage, he urges each of us to test our own actions, to carry our own load. We each have a responsibility to do what we can to take care of ourselves rather than abandoning that task to others. At times taking care of ourselves may seem burdensome, and it can require time, effort, sacrifice, and inconvenience. But Christian workers who do not take care of themselves often require others to abandon part of the work God has called them to so that they can take time and effort to take care of the ones who did not maintain themselves. Such people become “high-maintenance” persons who drain the resources of the church, school, mission agency, etc. They drain resources given to reach others for their own restoration, resources that could have been used to reach more people for Christ. People who are too busy to take care of themselves often seem to think that God’s work would come to a standstill if they took time to keep a Sabbath or to care for God’s temple.

## Evaluation of your stewardship

Take some time to evaluate yourself on how well you are keeping each of these basic commands. Use the following scale to rate some of the things we have talked about:

- 4 = Excellent (Always)
- 3 = Good (Frequently)
- 2 = Fair (Sometimes)
- 1 = Poor (Seldom)
- 0 = Absent (Never)

1. Do I keep an effective Sabbath for myself each week (a day I devote to doing something that refreshes me)?

4      3      2      1      0

2. Do I get enough sleep so that I am not sleepy the next day?

4      3      2      1      0

3. Do I exercise to the point of perspiration 20-30 minutes 3-5 times a week?

4      3      2      1      0

4. Do I eat moderate portions of healthy foods 3-5 times a day?

4      3      2      1      0

5. Do I monitor my health and seek appropriate medical help promptly?

4      3      2      1      0

6. Do I have enough consistent nurturing relationships with other people?

4      3      2      1      0

## Improving your stewardship

If you rated yourself at two or lower on any of the above, you would do well to seriously consider improving your stewardship. Even ones rated at three can be improved. The best way to begin is to find out exactly how you are doing is by recording in a journal each day specifically how you did on items on which you rated yourself low. In addition to asking God to search us, know our thoughts and our ways (Psalm 139: 23-24), we may uncover things that need changing about ourselves by monitoring our own behaviors.

If you find that you are actually deficient in an area or areas, a good approach is to set small, specific, measurable, attainable goals for improvement. Trying to completely remedy all your shortcomings at once is a sure recipe for failure. When Jesus sent out his disciples, he began by sending them to the towns ahead of him; then he sent them further

into the surrounding countryside, then into a neighboring country, then into the world (Luke 10, Acts 1:8).

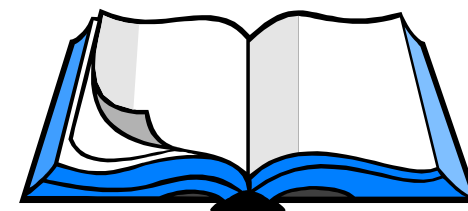
Finally, find out all you can about your shortcomings in Scripture, books, and even on the Internet. All truth is God’s truth, and learning what people have discovered in God’s natural revelation in his created world complements what he gave us in his revealed Word. The discerning person seeks knowledge (Proverbs 15:14).

## Conclusion

We have heard a story about a lumberjack back in the days when they cut trees by hand and were paid by the trees cut. Monday and Tuesday he had cut eight trees each day, and it occurred to him that he could increase his pay by getting up an hour earlier and cutting a tree before breakfast. Sure enough, he cut nine trees on Wednesday. On Thursday he also skipped breakfast thinking he could cut down an additional tree, but he only cut down eight trees. Trying to increase his output more on Friday, he decided to also cut a tree after dark rather than relaxing with his buddies in the bunkhouse, but he was only able to cut down seven trees. On Saturday he did not add any new hours, but he cut his foot while cutting by lantern light. He cut down only six trees on Saturday. Of course, he could not take time to see the camp doctor, but he decided he could increase his output for the week if he worked on Sunday. However, he was tired, hungry, missing his friends, and his foot was hurting, so he cut down only five trees. Monday morning, he went to see the foreman, told him he was not cut out to be a lumberjack. He quit his job and went home. Do you know anyone on that same path? (Perhaps you?)

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