

Introduction

Stewardship of the family and relationship is one of the most crucial areas in stewardship because people constitute the greatest resource on earth and in any enterprise. In fact, people cannot be compared to any riches of this world nor anything that money can buy. In the wisdom of God, no human being can live alone. We are meant for one another.

Stewardship of Family

The bible gives two forms of family: The natural family and that of the spiritual family. In both cases we are to be good stewards.

- *Stewards of the spiritual family*

In the first place, the spiritual family concerns God's family. Through faith in Jesus, we enter into God's family, and God becomes our Father. This wonderful family of God is found in two places --- "in heaven and on earth" (Ephesians 3:15). Living believers are on earth. Believers who have died are in heaven. None of God's children are "under the earth" (Philippians 2:10) or in any other place in the universe. We are all brothers and sisters in the one family, no matter what racial, national, or physical distinctions we may possess. In this type of family, we are to be stewards of each other by being each other's keepers. Besides, we are to carry each other's burdens (Gal 6:2), correct each other in times of errors (James 5:21) and to use whatever gifts God has given us with the purpose of edifying the church and other brethren.

- *Stewards of the Natural Family*

The natural family has to do with the blood relation which is the family in which one is naturally born into. To this God has commanded that parents are to be stewards of their wards by providing holistic care to them in their physical, moral, spiritual and economic lives. The believer must take care of his family. First

Timothy 5:8 says: "If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."

Physically, Mary and Joseph were to protect the life of Jesus against the murderous threat of Herod the Great. Spiritually God commands us to train our children in the fear of the Lord. Joshua could say that "choose ye this day who you will serve as for me and my house we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:14-15). David said that 'far be it from me to sin against the Lord (1 Sam 12:23) for failing to pray for his family. Jesus also displayed a splendid example of stewardship of the natural family during the hour of his departure by entrusting his mother Mary to the care of his beloved Apostle, John.

Stewardship of other Relationships

One of the things that we will be accountable before God is our relationship. The facts of creation testify that human beings are relational beings. Adam's countenance changed as he saw Eve. And human life is such that we depend on one another. God uses other people to bless us. We depend on others for all aspects of livelihood: in times of birth, sickness, joy, sadness, learning, working and leading. So the human life is all about relationship.

Here, this section of our study does not only talk about romantic relationship, but it talks about general relationships with others at workplace, school and all those who in one way or the other come our way.

General Principles of Stewardship of relationships

1. *Value relationships above all else*

The first principle of being stewards of our relationships is the recognition of its value. Relationship defines the essence of Jesus' death on the cross Jesus defines God's love for us through his death on the cross. Paul declares that by Jesus' death he has

broken the wall of hostility that divides us. Thus, the basis of our unity is in what Christ has done for us. Having died for us he also prayed for the unity of the church. So, unity is of God. Moreover, relationship among people especially among Christians is valuable in that we all have one Spirit. The only one Holy Spirit dwells in all of us irrespective of our backgrounds. By the Holy Spirit we all have one faith, one hope and one love (Ephesians 4:1-6).

Traditionally or culturally, the value of a person is his belongingness to the entire society. This explains the African adage that *I am because you are, we are because others are*. Thus the combination of our traditional heritage with the theological truth that we are made in the image of God presupposes that we are all from a common ancestor, one extended family and that we are one.

2. *Pay the Price of Reconciliation and Unity*

In order to be stewards of our relationships, one must be prepared to pay the price of reconciliation and unity. It is obvious that as a result of the Fall of humankind, human beings have the tendency to live independent of the other. And whenever people come together, the sin of selfishness, greed, hatred, jealousy, despising and unfaithfulness are present. In this case, being ready to forgive in order to love others could be the price thereof.

Not paying the price of forgiveness and thereby becoming bitter can lead to serious consequence of murder. A case in point is the story of Cain and Abel. Even after God had warned Cain about his bitterness, he went on to kill his brother Genesis 4:1-16. When God later asked him of the whereabouts of his brother Abel, the response was that *am I my brother's keeper?* When people fail to pay the price of forgiveness and love, they live in perpetual guilt before God. Jealousy, bitterness and hatred make people fail to assume their

stewardship responsibilities towards their fellow humans.

3. Value Human Life and Dignity above all else

We can be very good stewards of relationship when we value human life and dignity. There are so many things that compete against human dignity. Some value their own personal comfort and pleasure above others. Others also place more dignity on work and money above human life. Although these are legitimate needs and concerns, the dignity of human life lies in the fact that we are created in the image of God. We reflect the image of God. Thus when we sin against one another, it first hurts God.

4. Develop Mentoring relationship

One of the ways of fulfilling our stewardship mandate to others is by adding value to the people that we relate with through mentoring. Through mentoring, one can transfer skills, abilities and good values to the next generation. It has the sense of leaving those that we encounter better than we first met them. Some examples of such mentoring relationships abound in the Christian scripture: Moses mentored Joshua, Elijah mentored Elisha, Jesus mentored the early Apostles, and Paul mentored Timothy. The result at the end of it all need much to be desired.

5. Accept people just as they are

Closely related to the above is the acceptance of people just as they are. Others may be different from us because of differences in educational and family backgrounds, cultural upbringing and temperaments, ideologies and political affiliations. There is therefore the likelihood to despise and reject others because they are not like us. But being stewards of relationship implies that we accept and cope with others in spite of the differences.

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**The Church as a community of
stewards of family and
relationships**

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