

Today has been earmarked as Diocesan Stewardship Sunday across all the churches in the Diocese of Delhi and visiting preachers from other churches have been asked to come and preach in different churches. How do we understand stewardship? The Oxford dictionary defines stewardship as, 'the act of taking care of or managing something, for example, property, an organization, money or valuable objects'. Historically, stewardship was the responsibility given to household servants to bring food and drinks to a castle dining hall. The term was then expanded to indicate a household employee's responsibility for managing household or domestic affairs.' The term is also used in a more general way to refer to a responsibility to take care of something one does not own. Two things stand out in this definition: The first is that it was 'an act of managing something' and that it was also used to define the responsibility that was given to household servants to manage the household or domestic affairs. Similarly, in the Bible, the word used in 1 Peter 4 is the word which means 'a manager of a household or estate'. Within the Bible stewardship seems to be the use of God-given resources for the sake of accomplishing God's purposes. What are the resources that God has given the Church? What are the purposes that he wants us to accomplish? And what motivates us to use the God-given resources for the sake of fulfilling God's purposes?

Jesus explains the idea of stewardship using a parable about a man who went on a journey and called his servants and entrusted them with his wealth. To one of them he gave five talents – a talent was equivalent to about 30kg in weight. So imagine getting a 150kg of gold. The NIV translates it as five bags of gold. To a second one he gave two talents or 60kg – two bags of gold and to the third he gave a talent about 30kg of gold. Each of the men were given the responsibility according to their ability. The man then went on his journey.

So what do they all do with the gold that has been given to them? The first servant goes and invests that gold and he manages to get a hundred percent profit that he managed to earn another five bags of gold. Similarly the man with two bags of gold also invested his gold and managed a hundred percent return and got two more bags of gold. However, the man who had received a bag of gold went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. The first servant shows a lot of eagerness as the servant went at once and invests his money. He took the risk that was involved in investing that money. He shows a model of enthusiastic discipleship. The second servant also does likewise, but the third was unwilling to take that risk. The challenge for us is to take risks for the kingdom of God. William Carey said 'Attempt great things for God Expect great things for God'. We are called to put to good use the gifts that God has given us for the sake of his kingdom whether it be our time, talents, money or any other responsibility that God has given.

After a long period of time the master of these servants returns home and calls for account. The first and the second servant are given different sums of money but they both achieve a 100% profit and so are commended by the master. They are found to be trustworthy and reliable and therefore they are given an even greater responsibility. The third servant does not do anything at all with the talent that he had been given but instead buries it.

The third servant's argument was that he knew the Master to be a hard man, harvesting where he had not sown and therefore was afraid and hid the gold in the ground. The servant's own words are turned against him. Even the minimum profit from the banker's interest was not aimed for. Banking had hardly begun in the Roman world in the first century. The 'bankers' would have been individuals who were money lenders or money changers and whose honesty and competence might be questionable. Under these circumstances it was probably the better way to keep it safe. However, the course of action demanded by the Master would have also been risky like the ventures of the other two servants. But risk is at the heart of discipleship (Matt 10:39; 16:25-26). The cautious servant tried to play it safe and achieved nothing. If we do not lose ourselves for the sake of God's kingdom then we will not save our lives. Whatever has been given to us will be taken away.

Jesus concludes by saying, 'Whoever does not have even what they have will be taken from them. The third man had nothing with him apart from the capital amount that his master had given him. But now even that capital that was given to him will be taken away from him and given to someone else who had used their capital well. May we truly be good stewards in God's kingdom that God will say at the end, 'Well done my good and faithful servant.'