

# **The ABCs of Stewardship**

## **Consecration: The Requirement of a Successful Steward**

*Mark 10:13-31*

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## **Consecration: The Requirement of a Successful Steward**

### **Scripture**

For the past two Sundays we have been in a series of messages on *The ABCs of Stewardship*. The material for this series of sermons comes from Dr. John Maxwell. So far we have looked at “Attitude: The Response of a Successful Steward,” and “Blessings: The Resources of a Successful Steward.” Today, I want to continue with a third message titled, “Consecration: The Requirement of a Successful Steward.” So, let’s read Mark 10:13-31:

<sup>13</sup> People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. <sup>14</sup> When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. <sup>15</sup> I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” <sup>16</sup> And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.

<sup>17</sup> As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. “Good teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

<sup>18</sup> “Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good—except God alone. <sup>19</sup> You know the commandments: ‘Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.’”

<sup>20</sup> “Teacher,” he declared, “all these I have kept since I was a boy.”

<sup>21</sup> Jesus looked at him and loved him. “One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

<sup>22</sup> At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.

<sup>23</sup> Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!”

<sup>24</sup> The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!

<sup>25</sup> It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”

<sup>26</sup> The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, “Who then can be saved?”

<sup>27</sup> Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.”

<sup>28</sup> Peter said to him, “We have left everything to follow you!”

<sup>29</sup> “I tell you the truth,” Jesus replied, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel <sup>30</sup> will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life. <sup>31</sup> But many who are first will be last, and the last first.” (Mark 10:13-31)

## Introduction

In the children’s book, *Leo the Late Bloomer*, Leo’s Dad is concerned because Leo can’t read or write yet. He watches Leo closely to see when he will bloom. After much watching, Leo’s Mom says, “Honey, you have got to stop watching Leo so closely. You see, late bloomers don’t bloom when people are watching them very closely.” Leo’s Dad stops watching so closely and the months go by. By the end of the book, Leo is blooming beautifully. He has learned to read and write, and he shouts, “I made it! I made it!”

Some of you matured very quickly after your conversion to Christ. But some of you are late bloomers spiritually. You have not matured as quickly. It’s not that you are disobedient, or even that you want to be slow; it’s just that it takes a while.

One of the things I have noticed, as your pastor, is how some of you—whether you are a quick bloomer or late bloomer—have

really bloomed in recent years. God has blessed you and you have taken what he has given to you and blossomed. What a blessing it is to see a Christian bloom in his or her walk with Christ!

## Lesson

Today's message is really very simple. And what excites me about today's message is that some of you are going to come to a clear understanding of what stewardship is, and you are going to say, like Leo, "I made it! I made it!" You will grasp what it means to be a steward of God.

Let's look at Mark 10:13-31. We began reading in verse 13 because there is an important connection between Jesus' interaction with the little children and his answer to the rich young ruler. And we will see that connection later on in this study. But, let us begin by studying the rich young ruler and learn what we can about this young man.

### I. Background Check

Let's begin with a background check on the rich young ruler.

#### A. *Wealthy (10:22)*

First, the man was wealthy. Verse 22 says that **he had great wealth**. And because he was wealthy he had options.

Wealth allows options. The rich young ruler came to Jesus with options. He had a freedom and an independence that most people don't have. He was able to take control of his life. Each day he could decide what he was going to do and what he was not going to do. He was self-sufficient.

Now, wealth can be either a blessing to God's kingdom or it can be a detriment. You see, there is nothing wrong with wealth. There is nothing wrong with possessions. The issue we are going to deal with today is not whether you have or do not have posses-

sions. We all have possessions; some small, some great. The issue is not: Do you have possessions? The issue is: Do your possessions have you?

There is world of difference between the two. Some people have very little in life. But the little they have totally controls them. In this story in Mark 10, it's not that the ruler has possessions; it's that his possessions have him.

*B. Ruler (Luke 18:18)*

Second, the man was a ruler. Luke 18:18, the parallel account in the Gospels, tells us that this young man was a ruler. That means he had influence.

The ruler had a certain amount of respect, esteem and prestige. He had the ability to influence many people.

*C. Moral (10:20)*

Third, the man was moral. When Jesus asked him about obeying the commandments, he said, “**Teacher, all these I have kept since I was a boy**” (10:20). That means he was a nice guy.

Girls, he was the kind of guy your Dad would like you to bring home as a prospective future husband. He was meticulous about keeping the commandments, and so your Dad would feel safe trusting you to him. Your Dad would let him take you out because he knew that this young man had extremely high moral standards.

*D. Young (10:17)*

Fourth, the man was young. He **ran** up to Jesus, indicating youthful ability.

As you study his background, you learn that he has time on his hands. His future looks bright. He is just starting out in life. He has his whole life ahead of him. He is young and he has time.

And so we have this man. He is wealthy. He is a ruler. He is moral. And he is young.

He has everything going for him, don't you think?

## **II. Personality Assessment**

Now let's assess his personality.

### *A. Courageous (10:17)*

First, he was courageous.

You say, "Where do you find that in this text?"

Remember that the rulers at this time in our Lord's ministry were plotting against him and trying to bring his kingdom down. They were meeting secretly trying to sabotage the ministry of Jesus. When the rulers interacted with Jesus it was to try and trick him into saying something incriminating.

But not this ruler. In fact, he's not even like Nicodemus who went to Jesus under cover of darkness. No. The ruler came to Jesus in broad daylight when everybody was watching. He went right up to Jesus and said, in effect, "I've got questions, and I desperately need answers!"

### *B. Spontaneous (10:17)*

Second, he was spontaneous.

As Jesus was heading down the road, the ruler saw him and spontaneously ran after Jesus to ask his questions.

You don't see rulers running. And certainly, the rulers did not run after people. The people ran to the rulers.

### *C. Humble (10:17)*

Third, he was humble.

In his quest for spiritual fulfillment, the ruler ran up to Jesus and **fell on his knees before him** (10:17).

The ruler is kneeling before Jesus. Again, most of the time people knelt before the ruler. But here we see the ruler kneeling before Jesus. The ruler wants answers so badly, he loses sight of who he is for the moment, and in humility asks our Lord for help for his spiritual needs: **“Good teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”** (10:17).

*D. Open (10:17)*

And fourth, he was open.

He was genuine, real, and transparent. There was no dancing about with superficial small talk; he asks about eternal life. Interestingly, rulers usually had the answers. But here is a ruler who has questions.

If I were to stop here, we would say, “This ruler has an awful lot going for him.”

But, our Lord goes beyond the externals and goes right to the heart of the issue.

Now let me say that as I look at you, you look really good to me. You come in every week and you look your best and you act your best. But I know that, for some of you, behind those Sunday smiles, all is not always well. And Jesus looked behind the ruler’s best, and knew that all was not well.

### **III. Needs Assessment**

Let’s now do a needs assessment.

*A. Spiritually Frustrated (10:21)*

First, the man was spiritually frustrated.

Jesus saw frustration all over his face. Look at verse 21. Jesus said to him: **“One thing you lack.”**

The ruler did not come to Jesus out of a sense of guilt and conviction. He had his act together. He was self-sufficient. He had options. He kept the law. He had good moral character. He did not come out of conviction and guilt.

In fact, the ruler thought that he was a pretty good guy. He could not imagine how or where he had broken God's law. He said to Jesus, "**Teacher, all these I have kept since I was a boy.**" The implication is, "But, Jesus, there is still an emptiness in my life. What's the problem?" He was spiritually frustrated.

He did not feel guilty. He did not feel convicted. No. He simply felt frustrated.

Aren't you frustrated in your spiritual journey when you know that you go to church and you try your best and you do all that you know to please God, and there is still something missing? There's a darkness within. A hole. An emptiness. And no matter what you do or how hard you try, it's still empty.

That's this guy! He does all these things, but he's still spiritually frustrated.

### *B. Spiritually Lost (10:19-20)*

Second, he was spiritually lost.

The reason he was frustrated is because he was spiritually lost. Jesus said to him, "**You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.'**"

But the rich, young ruler replied, "**Teacher, all these I have kept since I was a boy.**"

Oh, really, ruler? *All? All* of the commandments? "Yes," he would say. "**All these I have kept since I was a boy.**"

You see, he was the kind of guy who could check off on his checklist. He did not murder. He did not commit adultery. He did not steal. And so on. In his mind, he was keeping the Law. And at first appearance, it really looks good.



But then you pull back and say, “*All? All* of the commandments? No, rich young ruler. You have not kept all the commandments. How about the first commandment? ‘You shall have no other gods before me’? (Exodus 20:3). Or, how about Deuteronomy 6:5: ‘Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength’? No, no, ruler. You have not kept the commandments. God is not first in your life.”

And when God is not first, beloved, a person is spiritually lost. A person may have all of the outward actions. He may go to church. He may tithe. He may even serve on church committees. But if God is not first in his life, he is lost.

You may be doing much in the church, but if God is not first in your life, not only are you frustrated, you are spiritually lost.

### C. *Spiritually Independent (10:17)*

Third, the man is spiritually independent.

I can tell that he’s independent because he comes to Jesus and asks in verse 17: “**Good Teacher, what must I *do* to inherit eternal life?**”

That’s the wrong question. That’s the question we like to ask.

If you are a reasonably competent person, the first thing you ask when you encounter a problem is, “What do I have to do? Tell me what to do so I can fix the problem and get on with life.”

The ruler saw a problem in his life, and knew that it needed to be fixed. So he ran up to Jesus and asked, “Jesus, what do I need to do to fix my problem?”

But the question is not, “What must I *do*?” but, “What must I *be*?”

Too many are doing this and doing that but are never finding spiritual fulfillment. “Stop doing!” Jesus says, “Be mine. Be totally mine. Stop doing things and be mine, and I will change you!”

You see, for Jesus spiritual fulfillment is *dependence*. That’s why in the paragraph before (Mark 10:13-16) Jesus says, “You have got to be like these little children to get into heaven. They

cannot make it through life on their own. Children are totally dependent. And like dependent children, you must depend on me, and on me alone, to get you to heaven. You cannot earn your way there or work your way there. You must trust me alone to get you into heaven.”

That’s what frustrated the ruler. He didn’t need God. After all, he had his possessions, his land, his houses, his children, and his family. He had everything he materially needed. He did not need God.

Is that how you are? You have your possessions, your land, your job, your family, and honestly, you don’t need God! You’ve got everything under control. The biggest prayer you ever pray is for your cereal!

Listen! When you try to be independent, you are frustrated and you are lost. Jesus will not and will never accept anyone who wants to be independent.

When Jesus saw the ruler, he saw someone who was independent. He was doing his own thing his own way without reference to God.

#### **IV. Radical Therapy (10:21)**

Now look at the radical therapy of our Lord. It’s a two-part treatment.

Read verse 21: **“Jesus looked at him and loved him. ‘One thing you lack,’ he said. ‘Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.’”** First, *go and sell*. And second, *come and follow me*.

That’s the radical therapy. You must go and sell, and then you must come and follow. Now, I’m not sure that the ruler heard the *come and follow me*. I think when our Lord said, “*Go and sell*,” he lost it. He never heard anything past that statement. He couldn’t believe that Jesus was telling him to get rid of his wealth.

You ask, “Freddy, why did Jesus tell him to *go and sell*?” Because Jesus knew that this man’s possessions ruled him. Jesus

knew that a man cannot serve two masters. Jesus knew that the ruler would either have to get his possessions under *his* control or else he was going to have to get rid of them. There is nothing wrong with possessions. That's not the issue. The issue is not: Do you have possessions? The issue is: Do possessions have you?

It is helpful to think of three levels of control with respect to possessions. There is the *top level*. That is the best level. At the top level *God controls both my possessions and me*. God has ownership of both. If God owns me and all that I have, we're in good shape. Because that means that anything he wants, he gets. There is no struggle; just a joyful surrender to God's sovereign control over my life. I see myself as a steward of all of God's possessions.

The *middle level* is where *I control my possessions*. God has nothing to do with it. This is the disciplined man, the businessman, the man who acquires vast sums of money for himself, and builds an empire for himself. We admire his discipline. We admire his ability to control what he has, but God has absolutely nothing to do with his possessions.

Then there is the *bottom level*. At this level *my possessions control me*. This is where the rich ruler was. Jesus knew that. And that's why Jesus recommended such radical therapy. That's why Jesus recommended that the rich young ruler go and sell all his possessions first, and then come and follow him.

As you think of these three levels of control, where do you see yourself? Are you at the top level, the middle level, or the bottom level? Just ask yourself these questions to help you determine where you stand before God with respect to your possessions—regardless of how few or how many possessions you have:

- Does God control both my possessions and me?
- Do I alone control my possessions? Or,
- Do my possessions control me?

## V. Reactions of the People

Notice the reactions of the various people to Jesus' message.

A. *The Ruler*

First, notice the reaction of the ruler. In verse 22 we read: **“At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.”** The rich young ruler went away sad.

B. *The Lord*

Second, Jesus **loved him** (10:21).

Jesus knew exactly what this man’s problem was, and still **loved him**.

C. *The Disciples*

Third, the disciples were surprised.

In fact, they were shocked. You see, the disciples lived in a society where wealth was considered to be a sign of the approval of God. A rich man had God’s favor whereas a poor man did not. And Jesus, in this incident, completely overthrows their perspective. Jesus completely turns the tables on them. In effect he said, “It’s not the blessings you collect from God that makes you blessed by him; it’s the blessings you commit to others. It’s not your collection; it’s your consecration. It’s not what you receive; it’s what you give.”

D. *Your Reaction*

And finally, what’s your reaction?

If you have turned everything over to God, you’re rooting for the ruler. You’re saying to the ruler, “Oh, go ahead! Give it all to God. I remember when I gave everything to Christ. My life has never been the same and I have never regretted committing everything to him.”

But if you haven't given everything to God, you feel sorry for the ruler. You feel that the Lord is too radical. You feel that the ruler is being asked to give up an awful lot. You feel that unreasonable demands have been placed upon him.

You can tell where a person is in their spiritual journey in how they react to this account of the rich young ruler's interaction with Jesus.

## Conclusion

There are three steps to spiritual fulfillment.

*First, possessions do not give spiritual fulfillment.* The clearest part of the account tells us that the ruler walked away sad. More possessions *never* mean more happiness, more spiritual fulfillment. You cannot find spiritual fulfillment in possessions. It is not true that the happiest guy is the guy who dies with the most toys.

*Second, Jesus Christ alone gives spiritual fulfillment.* It's just that simple. When you come face to face with Jesus Christ you either surrender everything to him and walk away glad. Or, you hold back and do not surrender everything to him and walk away sad. That's it. It is just that simple. And it is your choice. All spiritual fulfillment is centered in Jesus Christ. All other things—wife, husband, children, career, calling, house, clothes, car, money, and achievements—never give satisfaction alone.

*And third, if you want spiritual fulfillment, give everything to God.* You say, "Everything?" Yes, everything. You must give everything to God if you want to find spiritual fulfillment in your life. You must become like a child, no longer independent. You must be totally dependent upon your heavenly Father. And when you are totally dependent upon your heavenly Father, you will discover true spiritual fulfillment.

When I was a student at the University of Cape Town a friend went to church with me and was profoundly struck by the gospel. He made a profession of faith, and I was delighted.

## The ABCs of Stewardship

After several months, however, I noticed that he was attending church and Bible study less and less frequently. Also, he seemed more and more miserable.

Finally, one day I asked him what was going on. He told me that church and Bible study interfered with his cricket—the sport, not the insect! (He was an outstanding cricket player). I told him that there was nothing wrong with cricket as such. However, true spiritual fulfillment came only when everything was given and surrendered to God. He could not have God for fire insurance against hell, and say, “God, I give everything to you except this one area of my life. This one area of my life is mine and I am going to control it.” It doesn’t work that way.

Unfortunately, my friend never gave everything to God, and I never saw him truly happy. Like the rich young ruler, he went away sad.

Today, give everything—and I mean *everything*—to God if you want to find spiritual fulfillment in your life.

Don’t say to God, “I give you everything in my life—except this one thing or this one area!” Say rather, “God, I give you everything—period. I surrender everything to you today.”

And as you do so, you will discover true spiritual fulfillment. Amen.

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