



"Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power."

—Abraham Lincoln

22-Mar-19

The Peter Principle (Part Two)

In Part One, we differentiated between the two Peter Principles: The Physical Peter Principle posits a person rises to his or her level of incompetence. On the other hand, the Spiritual Peter Principle declares that [God](#) has blessed us with gifts, talents, and other endowments, which we do not deserve, and He expects us to manage those gifts in a godly way.

We can learn more about the Spiritual Peter Principle in [Luke 12:35-41](#), Christ's Parable of the Faithful Servant and the Evil Servant:

"Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning; and you yourselves be like men who wait for their master, when he will return from the wedding, that when he comes and knocks they may open to him immediately. Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them. And if he should come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants. But know this, that if the master of the house had known [what hour the thief would come](#), he would have watched and not

allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect." Then Peter said to Him, "Lord, do You speak this parable only to us, or to all people?"

Peter likely speaks for the group when he asks if [Jesus](#) is directing this teaching at the disciples. As Christ did so often, He answers his question with a question, and then His explanation continues to the end of the chapter. We often think of this parable as applying to the ministry, and it does. God, though, has given gifts to each person He has called, not just ministers, and each is to manage his gifts. This parable is useful for "all people."

As Jesus says in [Mark 13:37](#), "And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!" He puts this in a way to emphasize the word "watch." He wants us to be alert! In the parable in Luke 12, the master comes home from the wedding and knocks, and the door is opened for him right away. The servants, indeed, are alert, attentive, at their posts, and doing their jobs. They are not coasting, marking time, or watching the clock. Christ emphasizes that the master, typifying Himself, could return at any time; his servants, our counterparts in the story, do not know when that return will be. Our job, then, is to continue to do our jobs as managers of our gifts, whatever they may be.

Jesus continues in [Luke 12:42](#), "And the Lord said, 'Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season?'" The word "steward," as we saw in Part One, is again the Greek word *oikonomos*. Perhaps the *Good News Translation* puts it more clearly: "The Lord answered, 'Who, then, is the faithful and wise servant? He is the one that his master will put in charge, to run the household and give the other servants their share of the food at the proper time.'" (*Good News Translation® (Today's English Version, Second Edition)* Copyright © 1992 American Bible Society. All rights reserved.).

There is an obvious reward for the good manager: He is given more responsibilities or a promotion. In [this world](#), the person moving up the ladder may not be ready for the new job. Under the Spiritual Peter Principle, though, God does not make such mistakes. Christ does not say, "Well done,

good and faithful servant," and then give His servant a job for which he or she is unsuited. He already knows the person thoroughly and places him or her perfectly.

We do not use the word "steward" much anymore. The *Online Etymology Dictionary* says that the word derives from the Old English *steward*, meaning "house guardian, housekeeper," which itself is composed of two words, *stig* ("hall, pen for cattle, or part of a house") and *weard* ("guard"). It is the equivalent of the Old French *seneschal*, meaning "overseer of workmen." Later, "steward" was the name of a class of early English and Scottish high officers of the state, coming down to us as "one who manages affairs of an estate on behalf of his employer." A "steward," then, is a manager of a household or an estate. In some cases, a kingdom's steward managed an entire economy. Our word is quite similar to the Greek *oikonomos*.

The Bible also shows just how high a steward could go in society: "Gaius, my host and the host of the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the treasurer of the city, greets you, and Quartus, a brother" ([Romans 16:23](#)). The word translated as "treasurer" is *oikonomos*. Other translations render it as "steward," "chamberlain," and "director of public works." These are high positions.

Jesus is talking about a position of great responsibility. We are stewards, yes, servants, but we have management duties. We have been given gifts on loan, as one might say, from God Himself, and we are to manage them.

We may be low on the totem pole at our jobs. We may not be a manager at all. If we are happy at our work, doing whatever our hands find to do with all our might, that is fantastic ([Ecclesiastes 9:10](#)). Perhaps we do have responsibilities over others, directing their work, scheduling their hours, and maybe even evaluating, reprimanding, or terminating. These are heavy loads to bear and stressful. We can [hope](#) that the Physical Peter Principle does not come into play for us.

But the Spiritual Peter Principle gives us a much higher calling than this. Notice again I Peter 4:10 from the *Good News Translation*: "Each one, as a good manager of God's different gifts, must use for the good of others the special gift he has received from God."

We have our physical job, putting in the hours and doing the work, and then we have the added weight of our spiritual job. They go hand in hand. We are a witness to those we work with and to all those we meet. We have tremendous knowledge from God inside us, and we are to use it in the way we speak to and act toward others. We are to use it especially in our interactions with our family and brethren.

In Part Three, we will see the tremendous reward our Savior promises to the faithful steward.

- Mike Ford (1955-2021)

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Stewardship](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

A steward is a person responsible for the resourceful conducting, supervision, or managing of something entrusted into his care by a superior. Notable examples in scripture of this office were Eliezer, Joseph, David's stewards, as well as Jesus' parables illustrating faithful and unfaithful stewards. We, as stewards of God, have been entrusted with many things: His Spirit, His Word, His Spiritual gifts for the purpose of helping the congregation as well as the talents and abilities He has given us. We have been entrusted with our calling, hope, and inheritance. His disciples or ministers are to provide meat in due season, being ready to provide suitable answers, be watchful and protective of his master's goods and his master's flocks. We must be watchful and protective of our families and our relationships with others, and especially our relationship with God.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[The 'Open Door' of Philadelphia](#)

by David C. Grabbe

The modern church of God, particularly a few of its splinter organizations, have made a big deal out of Revelation's letters to the seven churches. Often highlighted is the "open door" promised in the letter to Philadelphia. David Grabbe provides proof from Isaiah 22 that our understanding of this image should be revised to reflect the insight given in this neglected Old Testament prophecy.

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