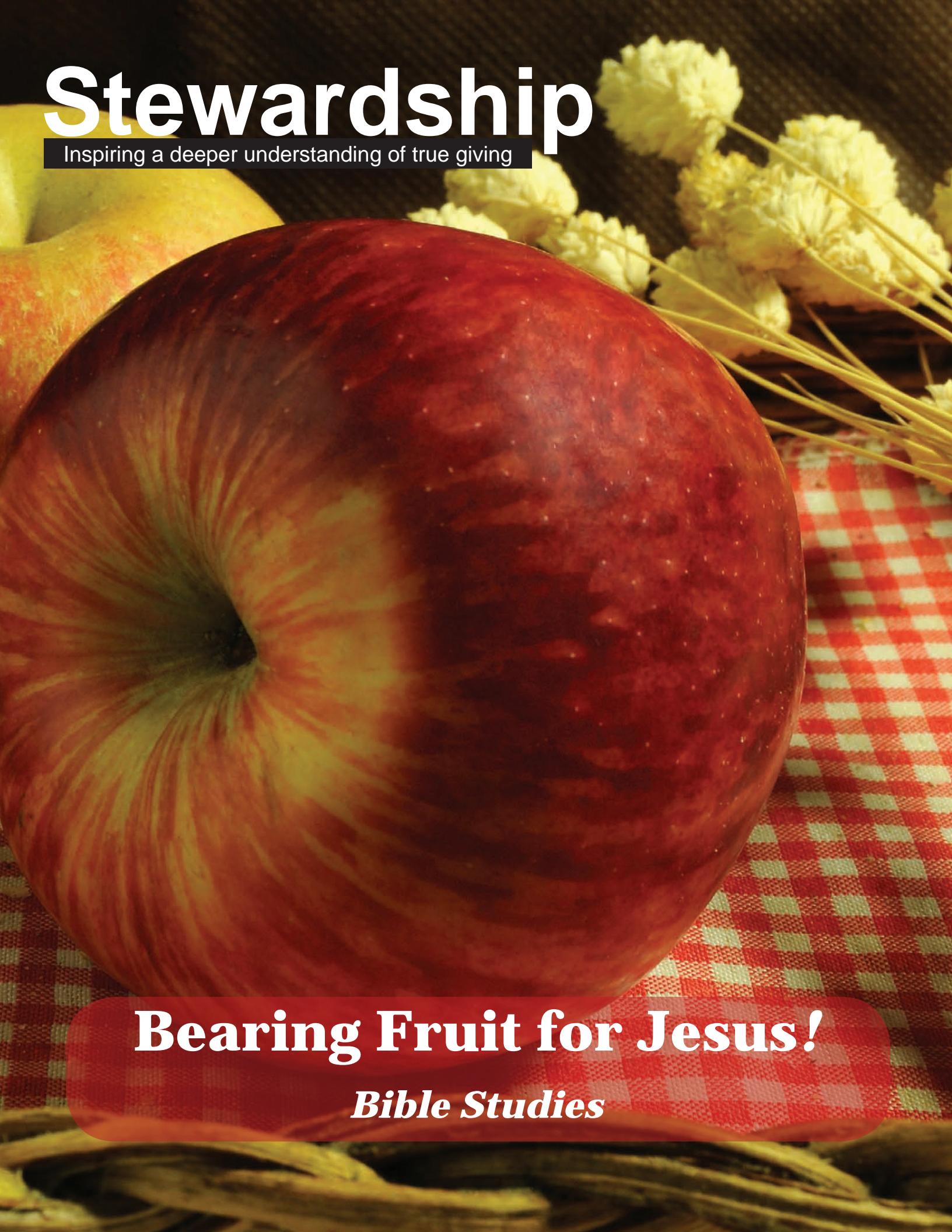


Stewardship

Inspiring a deeper understanding of true giving



Bearing Fruit for Jesus!

Bible Studies

parish

Bearing Fruit for Jesus! Bible Study

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for loving us so lavishly. Thank you for your grace and mercy. Help us to show our gratitude to you through our thoughts, words, and actions. Use this Bible study to help us see how we can bear fruit that helps others, extends your kingdom, and gives you glory and honor. Thank you for the opportunity to be in your service. In Jesus' precious name we pray. **Amen.**

Objectives of Study:

To help God's people

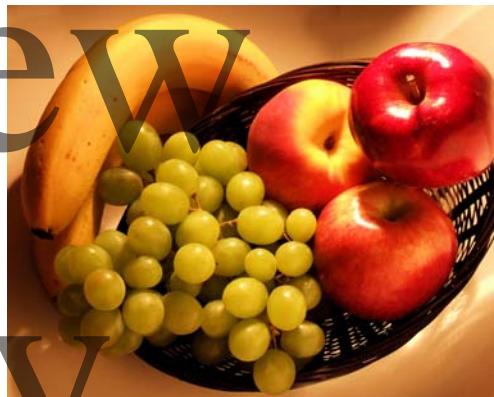
- † To understand what spiritual fruit is.
- † To understand how we can bear fruit.
- † To respond to God's love by bearing fruit.
- † To know that God has called us and given us his Spirit to sanctify us.

What Is Fruit?

An apple seed is planted. Soon a seedling is seen coming up through the surface of the soil. The rain and sun nourish it, and, as it grows, branches start spreading out from a sturdy trunk. The tiny apple seed grows and develops into a mature tree with willowy branches waving in the breeze. It is a beautiful thing to behold; yet, something more is expected. Apples! An apple tree isn't what it was meant to be until it produces fruit.

We, as Christians, are like that apple tree. As God chose apple trees to bear apples, so he has chosen us to bear spiritual fruit. Fruit is what is expected of all Christians. *"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit ... fruit that will last"* (John 15:16). Paul explained to the Galatians what that fruit is: *"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control"* (Galatians 5:22-23). This fruit will be evident in the lives of Christians as a natural outcome of Christ living in us. *"Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit"* (Galatians 5:24-25).

In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5, 6, 7), Jesus called his followers salt and light. Our "saltiness" and our "light" are manifested by the fruit we bear through our thoughts, attitudes, and actions. Salt, by its nature, must be salty. Light must shine. We don't light a lamp and put it under



Our society pulls at us with all kinds of diversions which crowd our lives with things of no eternal value. Our calendars, day planners, or smart phones will tell us what we value as priorities.

When we acknowledge God as the giver of time, how can we behave in a way that says we have no time for him?

In order to use our time productively, we must control it. Keys to controlling time include setting goals, deciding on priorities, and making plans. Without goals and priorities, our schedules can be lost in the “rat race” of the day, and our lives lose balance. It is easy to fall into the trap of allowing one activity, usually our work, to consume our time at the expense of other necessary activities. We need to spend time with our families, building relationships with others, and nurturing our faith.

In Luke 10:38-42, we find the account of Jesus visiting the home of his friends, Mary and Martha, in Bethany. Luke tells us that, while Mary sat at the feet of Jesus *“listening to what he said,”* Martha was distracted by all the preparation that had to be done and complained to Jesus about Mary not helping her. *“‘Martha, Martha,’ the Lord answered, ‘you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.’”* As stewards, we learn from these verses that time spent with Jesus is time spent productively. Perhaps we, like Martha, have allowed too many activities to keep us too busy to study God’s Word and spend meaningful time in prayer. Perhaps we have even gotten into the habit of looking at the Sabbath as just another day to sleep late, play golf, go fishing, or work some overtime. John 15 discusses at length the importance of abiding in Christ. As branches on the Vine, we will be nourished by Christ himself who will help us “keep the main thing the main thing.” The Holy Spirit will guide us into making proper choices so that our work will not just be “busyness” but produce real fruit.



Questions for Discussion

1. Excluding the time you spend at work, how do you spend the majority of your time?
2. What are some of the things you are doing that distract you from prayer and reading God’s Word?
3. In what ways does God’s principle of sowing and reaping (2 Corinthians 9:6; Galatians 6:8) relate to time and opportunity?
4. What counsel does Paul share in Ephesians 5:15-17?
5. List your biggest time wasters:

6. How can you be more fruitful with your time?

Fruitful Use of Our Talents

As stewards, we are to recognize our God-given human abilities and use them to carry out God's purposes. The stewardship of our abilities includes three essential areas: self-evaluation, self-development, and self-involvement.

Self-evaluation is the important process of determining our areas of strength and skill. Understanding our God-given potential will help make us more fruitful in our stewardship, and the knowledge of our capabilities will help us better develop and utilize our gifts.

Self-development is a thoughtful and deliberate effort to enhance our aptitudes, skills, and interests to the highest degree possible. We need personal motivation and discipline to bring about the development. We demonstrate discipline when we take extra educational classes, read manuals or pertinent material, and make out daily agendas. In the quest for more satisfying rewards, we, as stewards, may need to forego some momentary pleasures. Becoming what God intends us to be may require self-denial and self-discipline.

Self-involvement implies that we desire to use our identified and developed talents for God's purposes. As his stewards, we will be willing to share ourselves in ways that fit our individual strengths to the service of God. Our personal involvement may include such areas of commitment as singing in the choir, serving on church committees, landscaping church grounds, evangelism, personal witness, driving people to church, and praying with the discouraged. As we become more and more interested in others, we will see the opportunities God gives us to be fruitful with our talents.

As we look at our God-given talents we may empathize with Moses, who told God many times that he was not qualified to do what God was asking (Exodus 4). In spite of Moses' excuses, God had plans for him. God turned Moses' "no" into a "yes." When we are asked to serve or help within the church, we may even borrow some of Moses' excuses, such as, "I'm too busy," "I'm not experienced," "I'm too old," "I'm too young," "I'm not good enough," "I could never do that," or "Someone else is more capable than I."

Have we taken time to reflect on the possible ways God can use us? We are unique creations of God, designed to live out the plan and purpose he has prepared in advance for us (Jeremiah 29:11). In order to ensure that we are indeed seeking to use our talents to build up God's kingdom, we may want to adopt one of Benjamin Franklin's habits. Each day he would ask himself two questions. In the morning his question was: "What good shall I do today?" At the end of the day he asked himself, "What good have I done today?" If each of us would develop such a deliberate effort to share our talents, certainly there would be no limit as to how God could use us. We often underestimate what God can accomplish through us. God's mighty power can make even our most feeble efforts to serve him bear fruit.

Scripture is full of instances where God has used ordinary people like us to accomplish extraordinary things. He chose a stammering Moses to lead his people out of bondage, self-serving



to serve him. Are we open to the possibilities before us? Are we willing to explore and grow? As redeemed people, we can depend on the Holy Spirit daily to empower us so we can faithfully use our God-given gifts for God's kingdom. God didn't make us and give us so much without giving us the ability to make a difference in our churches, communities, and the world. God will always equip us for the tasks he gives us to do. Review again the account of the tongue-tied Moses whom God equipped to be the leader of a vast nation. Study the life of David, an obscure shepherd boy, whom God prepared to be king. Marvel at God's patience with Gideon who asked for test after test before he was confident enough to undertake the task God entrusted to him. We might find new situations and challenges to be a bit risky or uncomfortable, but just as God was with Moses, David, and Gideon, he will be with us all the way. With his help we will find ways our time and talents can make a difference and we will each hear God's words, "*Well done, good and faithful servant!*" (Matthew 25:21).

Every Christian is called to be the person God intended him to be. "*You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden*" (Matthew 5:13-14). Salt and light penetrate. A little sprinkling of salt on the outside of our food flavors it throughout, and even the light from a flickering match dispels darkness. If, however, salt loses its saltiness and light is covered up, both become useless. We lose our effectiveness in God's kingdom if we lose our saltiness and hide our light.

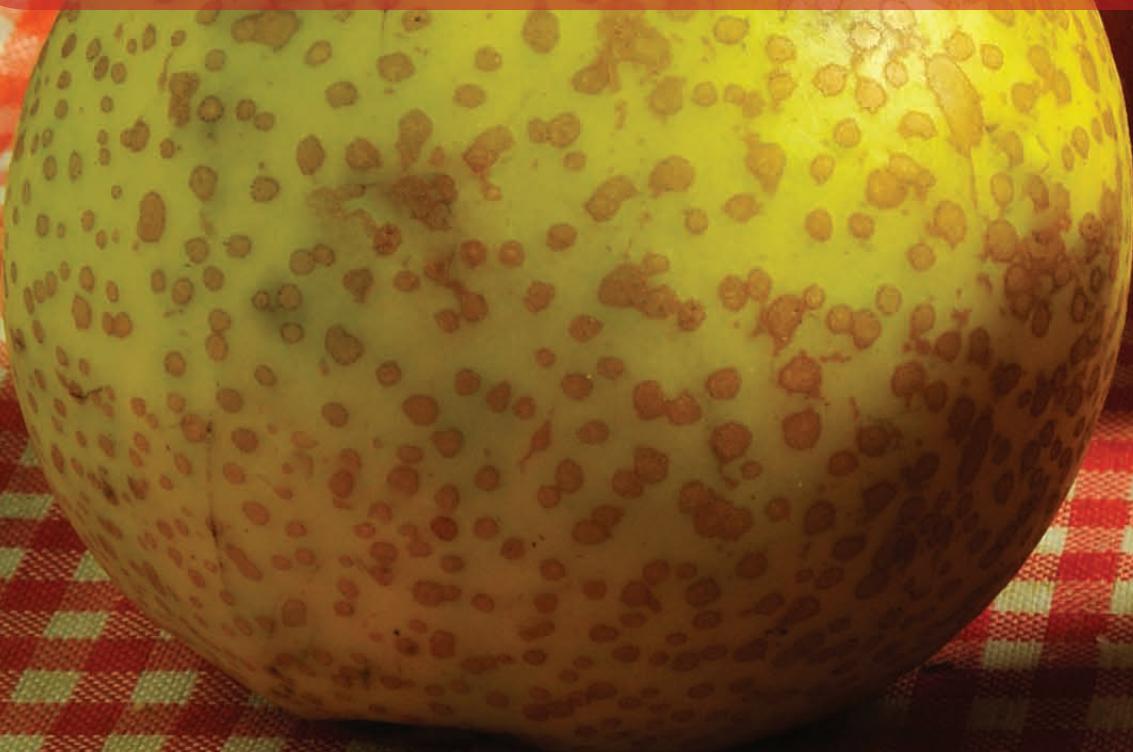
Filled with the Holy Spirit we are enabled to be salt and light, fruitful stewards using God's gifts to further his Kingdom. "*If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing*" (John 15:5). Without the Holy Spirit's presence, we are incapable of producing good fruit, but, abiding in him, we can fulfill his command to use our time and talents faithfully. "*Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful*" (1 Corinthians 4:2).

The following characteristics are necessary as we use God-given time and talents to bear fruit:

- Availability:** All the ability in the world will do no good unless we take time to use it (Isaiah 6:8; Romans 12:1-2).
- Responsibility:** God's kingdom needs people who will take responsibility. The church needs administrators, organizers, and managers (1 Corinthians 12:28).
- Stability:** God is pleased when we are well-grounded people of faith who live with conviction and are mature in doctrine and practice (Ephesians 4:11-14).
- Dependability:** God wants us to be faithful at all times (1 Corinthians 4:2).
- Mobility:** God may want to use us in other locations. We need to be willing to go where God wants to send us (Genesis 12:1-3).
- Adaptability:** Our talents will need to be employed at different times and in various situations. We need to be flexible so we can find ways to help (Ephesians 4:11-12).
- Teachability:** God wants us to be open to learning, growing, and developing. We should be receptive to new opportunities for improvement (Acts 17:10-12; Colossians 2:10).

Fruit characterizes the life of Christians. The Apostle Paul tells us what that fruit is: “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23). This fruit will be evident in the lives of Christians as a natural outcome of Christ’s living in us.

Jesus said, “If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5b). It is interesting to note that Jesus did not say, “You should bear fruit.” He stated that when we abide in him, it follows naturally that we will bear fruit. We are the branches, and we must stay firmly connected to the Vine in order to be mature and fruitful. Jesus calls each of us to abide in him.



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