



STEWARDSHIP AND FLOURISHING

We have a stewardship responsibility to flourish in our own lives, to help our neighbors flourish as fellow stewards, and to pass on a flourishing economy to future generations.



When we consider serious questions about what makes for a good life – including questions of economics – one question soon rises to the top: *What does it mean to be human?*

The Bible answers that we were made to be stewards of the world, cultivating it for God's glory. This is not all it means to be human, but it is central to the biblical view from beginning (Genesis 1:26-28; 2:15) to end (Revelation 21:24-26; 22:5). We were made to flourish as stewards (Matthew 25), help each other flourish as fellow stewards (I Samuel 2:8), and help the whole world flourish, both today (Jeremiah 29:7; I Peter 2:12) and in the future (Psalm 102:18).

Stewardship enables growth; whatever is not growing is withering. God gave the world to Adam and Eve with the intention that through human work it should develop (Genesis 1:28; 2:5). He did not give humanity a static world that would never change. The world was made to be transformed by our work so it would glorify God more and more over time. The desire for economic flourishing and growth, though it can become an idol or go wrong in other ways, is a good one that Christians should work to promote.

Fruitful work, and the exchange of work through economic transactions, creates community. It brings us together in common purpose. We are made for stewardship at the individual, relational, societal, and intergenerational levels of life. The individual call to flourishing is essential to human dignity – this is why every individual must be treated with respect, not reduced to a mere cog in a social or economic machine. The relational call to flourishing is equally important; we are called to love and serve one another, not by reducing our neighbors to objects of service and pity, but by joining with them as partners in mutual development through exchange.

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These individual and relational calls to stewardship are primary, but out of them flows a wider set of concerns. Human beings are made to live in community and to steward the world in cultural groups. If we love our neighbors, we will not privatize our faith, but will follow the call to good stewardship in public life. Moreover, we will

not simply use up economic resources and pass on a hollow shell to our grandchildren, but will build a better world for those who follow.

People need hope. They don't just need hope for the eschaton, the final goal of creation when God's will is perfectly done everywhere. They need hope that their lives here and now have meaning and purpose. They need to know that their lives and choices matter and that some ways of living really are better than others. This is not just because some arbitrary dictator far away in the sky says so, but because we were made to live in those ways.

God does not promise that all who live rightly will flourish (Job 35:1-8; Mark 8:35), nor does he ordain that flourishing can be reduced to a policy agenda or a way of distributing resources (Deuteronomy 8:3). But he does declare that the desire for flourishing is good – he made us for it, and obedience to him is the only way to pursue it (Proverbs 1:29-33; 11:10). As we seek our flourishing in discipleship to Christ, we become fruitful workers and wise citizens of our communities, serving our neighbors and world.