

Servants & Stewards

THE GOSPEL | GOD'S WILL | TIME | WEALTH | SPIRITUAL GIFTS

Bibles Studies

For Small Group Leaders

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Servants & Stewards

Your Part in this Emphasis

During the 1980's and 90's, Sunday School teachers would attend training events where there was often a job description for adult teachers. It said one of the vital roles of a teacher was to "Interpret the work of the church." One might think that's a strange word, *interpret*. It's not like it's in a foreign language, or in code, or something. But here's the deal... people are busier than ever; they don't always read the church emails. Some aren't present every Sunday to hear things explained. Some will be in the services during the announcements, but it still fails to sink in. Some may mis-hear or misunderstand, or jump to false conclusions. Sometimes, the church *really, really* needs to explain something. So, for those who "never read that stuff" and for those who say, "I heard something about that" and for those who get the wrong impression, some *interpretation* is required. That's where you come in.

This emphasis uses a staggered delivery approach. On one Sunday the pastor introduces the theme of the coming week. Then, during the week, there are five devotionals, which develop the theme. The weekly Sunday School Class (or Life Group or whatever your church calls it) will conclude the theme of the week in Bible Study. The pastor introduces each theme in an uplifting way, the devotionals develop the theme from multiple perspectives, and the Sunday School lesson is geared toward application. This time will be focused on considering what teach aspect of stewardship will look like in practice.

There are five themes in this emphasis:

1. What it Means to be a Steward (Our main stewardship is the gospel.)
2. Steward of God's Will (How to hear God and know how he is leading you.)
3. Stewards of Our Time
4. Stewards of Our Wealth
5. Stewards of Our Spiritual Gifts

The big picture is this: God owns it all. He owns us, our possessions, our time. He has entrusted to us the gospel. He has made us stewards of spiritual gifts with which to serve him. Every resource of which we are stewards is to be used in his way. It's not optional; we're either a faithful steward or an unfaithful steward.

Many church members are tempted to think of stewardship as being only about giving money. Others are tempted think of stewardship as a forbidden subject. However, stewardship is a big subject with various integral parts. It is all tied to the Great Commission. That's what this emphasis is designed to communicate.

Here are some things, you will want to do to be prepared each week:

- Pray for this emphasis to be a time of spiritual growth and increased vision in the life of our church.

Your Part in this Emphasis

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- Read, understand, and be able to answer questions about the building program or missions program in this emphasis. There are class members who will look to you for answers concerning where the money will go to.
- Understand how the commitment form and the offering work. When money is the subject, sometimes people react emotionally and jump to wrong conclusions. Be ready to calmly explain how it all works.
- Participate in the daily devotional readings (you have seven days to read five).
- Be faithful in your attendance; try not to miss a Sunday during this emphasis. This truly is a big deal in the life of our church.
- At the end of the emphasis each member is being asked to turn in a signed commitment form. This form will be seen only by the financial secretary. Each member is asked to commit to a specific amount in this giving plan as the Lord leads them. We realize others may put down the amount they are determined to give, regardless of how the Lord may lead. However, we are asking each teacher to fully participate, to set the pace, and to commit to an amount received by God's definite leadership.

Class Time

Here is how the teaching time will go each week:

1. Class announcements
2. Prayer time
3. A review of what people got out of the devotionals during the past week
4. Bible Study time. Class members will not be expected to "study their lesson" in advance, since the devotionals will meet that need. So, you will introduce the passage in the class and teach it with a strong emphasis on application. Try to answer the question: If I am a faithful steward in this area, what will that look like?

The Week Before the Emphasis Starts

On the Sunday the emphasis begins (the day the pastor will introduce the first weekly theme and the week before the first class Bible Study), you may want to say something along these lines:

"Our devotional readings begin next week. I have looked through the entire devotional booklet. First, I want to assure you that this isn't twenty-five days of begging for money. Second, as we go through the five weekly themes, I believe this is going to be one of the most meaningful seasons our church family has ever experienced together. So, even if you don't particularly enjoy reading, I want to encourage you to participate. We have seven days each week to read five devotionals. I think it will be a blessing!"

Servants & Stewards
Stewards of the Gospel
Planting, Watering, Building

Application-Based Bible Study on 1 Corinthians 3:5-16

“I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.”
— 1 Corinthians 3:6

- **Class Announcements and Prayer Time**
- **Review of This Past Week’s Devotionals**
 - ◇ A steward is someone who manages and cares for property and resources which belong to someone else. Has anyone here done something like this for a living? What would have happened if you had started making your own policies instead of following the owner’s policies?
 - ◇ If God is the owner of everything, that means we are a steward of everything we have, and that our most important stewardship is the gospel.
 - ◇ Day 3 discusses being entrusted with our sphere of influence. What stood out to you in that day’s devotional?
 - ◇ Day 5 spoke about being stewards of our testimonies, what stood out to you? Did everyone notice the worksheet for developing one-sentence testimonies in the back?
 - ◇ Does anyone have anything else that stood out to them in their devotional readings?

Bible Study: 1 Corinthians 3:5-16

This week, the theme has concerned how we are stewards of the gospel. The gospel has been entrusted to us and we are accountable to accountable for what we do with it. Now, what will that look like?

Some of us picture personal evangelism as trying to win an argument with the town atheist — a one on one struggle for intellectual supremacy. And most of us don’t feel that we’re up for that kind of battle. The good news is Scripture doesn’t describe it that way. First Corinthians 3 gives us a portrait of how it works, which most of us will find very encouraging.

It’s a Team Effort and Each Member of the Team Contributes in Different Ways:

Verse 5 “What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each.”

Notice, first, how we are all servants, not celebrities. We don’t have to be a super-salesman or an intellectual or have a magnetic personality. As Paul said one chapter back, in chapter

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2, verse 1: “And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom.” In verse 4, he adds “and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom...” You don’t have to be super smart or have a super personality or be a super salesman. Nor do you have to go it alone. For every Paul, there is an Apollos — a team. In 3:8-9, he repeats this idea for emphasis: “He who plants and he who waters are one... we are God’s fellow workers.”

The Witness of the Group

When an individual Christian shares the gospel with someone, it is easy for the other person to dismiss him or her as an odd duck. However, when an unbeliever has the opportunity to be around a group of believers, things begin to stand out. They observe how the Christians really seem to care about one another. They notice themes in their behavior, like kindness or thoughtfulness. There is something winsome about it.

As on most teams, we don’t all play the same position. We serve “as the Lord assigned to each” (3:5). Different people are more effective in different parts of the process. In verse 6, Paul says, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.”

So, let’s start with planting.

Planting: Soil Preparation & Sowing

1 Corinthians 3:6 “I planted”

Soil Preparation in Agriculture

Soil preparation is the process of breaking up hard ground and removing weeds so the seed, water, and air can penetrate the soil. This creates better growth conditions, enabling the seed to take root.

Soil Preparation Addresses their Fears

- ◇ Guilt, with which some are now barely coping.
- ◇ Having a load being dumped on them. “You mean I’ve got to read my Bible and go to church?”
- ◇ Most lost people aren’t looking to join anything or for radical change. “This isn’t what I’m looking for at all.”
- ◇ Being thrown in over their head, and not being able to hold out.
- ◇ Being embarrassed in front of their work associates or friends.
- ◇ Becoming as weird as some of us. Sometimes, they mistake our idiosyncrasies for our Christianity.
- ◇ Losing the sources of fulfillment they have now. Before becoming a Christian, one isn’t indwelt by the Spirit or experience the love, joy, and peace believers do. They may have “substitutes,” and fear they will have to give them up if they turn to Christ.

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Planting the Seed

- ◇ Mark 4:14 “The sower sows the word.”
- ◇ Sowing means helping people understand the basic truths of the gospel with their minds.
- ◇ Knowing the facts alone won’t save you, of course. But you can’t believe what you don’t understand.

What about those people who know the facts of the gospel, but haven’t yet responded to the message? Verse 6 tells us, “Apollos watered.”

Watering: Prayer and Persuasion

“Irrigated land represents about 15 percent of all land under cultivation but often produces over twice the yield of non-irrigated fields.” - Encarta

Watering with Prayer

- ◇ Prayer waters the seed!
- ◇ When we pray, God meets people in their thoughts and reasons with them.
- ◇ When we pray, the Holy Spirit convinces them of their need of Christ (John 16:8-11).
- ◇ When we pray, the Father draws them to Christ (John 6:44; 1 Thessalonians 2:12).

We said that the gospel seed is watered by prayer and persuasion. Is persuasion in the Bible? Paul said *yes*. “Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others...” (2 Corinthians 5:11). But what is persuasion?

Persuasion

- ◇ Persuasion isn’t manipulating or pressuring a person.
- ◇ Persuasion is giving a person good reasons to make the right choice.
- ◇ Persuasion gives sound answers to sincere questions.
- ◇ Persuaders let them know we care what they decide.
- ◇ The persuader trusts the Holy Spirit to work in their hearts.
- ◇ The persuader respects the other person’s right to decide.

“Our job is to help a person *understand*. The burden of proof is not on us, but on the Scriptures. The responsibility to convince lies with the Holy Spirit, not with me. We are responsible to be faithful to that person by maintaining his exposure to the Word of God until a final decision is made, for or against.”¹

— Jim Petersen

¹ Jim Petersen, *Living Proof: Sharing the Gospel Naturally*, NavPress, ©1989, page 184

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Mini Decisions as the Soil is Watered

(The kinds of things people think as the gospel seed is being watered.)

- ◇ The Bible isn't so hard to understand after all.
- ◇ What the Bible says about life fits my experience.
- ◇ Jesus is clearly the key.
- ◇ Jesus is God; I need to do what He says.

Of course, none of us can save anyone. God gives the increase" (verse 7).

The Harvest

It has been said that successful witnessing is, "Telling the truth about Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, and leave the results to God."

Mini Decisions at Harvest

(The kinds of things people are thinking when coming to Christ)

- ◇ My big questions have all been answered.
- ◇ God is working in my heart, telling me this is what I ought to do.
- ◇ I realize I'm a sinner and need a Savior.
- ◇ I feel nervous about it, but I need Jesus.
- ◇ This is what I really want. I am ready.

A Good Question to Ask:

Is there a reason you can't commit your life to Christ right now?

Servants & Stewards

Stewards of God's Will

Following God's Leading

Application-Based Bible Study on Acts 16:6-10

“And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’” — Acts 16:10

- **Class Announcements and Prayer Time**

- **Review of This Past Week's Devotionals**

- ◇ Does this emphasis on making a giving commitment based on God's specific leading feel a little “out there”? Does it feel scary, unreasonable, weird, overly-strict, or what?
- ◇ If the first time you ever had to follow God's definite leadership was in a stewardship emphasis, would that make it easier or more difficult?
- ◇ In the Day 2 devotional, on recognizing God's will, which principle stood out most to you?
- ◇ Day 3 spoke about “wisdom decisions.” Can anyone name a time when they had to claim God's promise in James 1:5 — “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him” — and how God came through?
- ◇ What else stood out to you this week in the devotional reading?

Bible Study: Acts 16:6-10

Sometimes, arriving at a clear understanding of God's specific plan for our lives is a process more than an event. Yes, there are times when it all becomes instantaneously clear. However, many other times, there is some travail. In fact, as some of you consider what the Lord would have your family to do in this giving emphasis, you may find that you are laboring through such a process. Today's study should be helpful and also an encouragement to you.

Paul is on his second missionary journey, working his way westward through what is modern Turkey. Where do they go next? The decision couldn't be based on need; everyone everywhere needs the gospel. So, they choose to go westward to take the gospel where it's never been heard.

[Note: A map would be most helpful for your own study and for use in the class session.]

The places we see listed are regions, rather than a single city or village. Verse 6 says, “They went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to

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speak the word in Asia.” The Asia mentioned here is Asia Minor, most of present day Turkey. So they attempt to go to the further north and continue moving westward. Verse 7: “And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them.” They looked at going further north into the region of Bithynia, but they weren’t supposed to do that. So, they continued on the westward track. Verse 8: “So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas.” Considering Derbe at their starting point (16:1), they have probably walked well over 500 miles, and are now in Troas on the west coast of Turkey, overlooking the Aegean Sea.¹ Across this body of water is Europe.

The Lord himself has prevented them from taking the gospel to multiple places. As one door after another closes, they snake their way westward, skirting around one region after another. The Lord of the church had another place in mind. But so far, all they knew was where not to go. It was in Troas, the Lord clarified their destination. Vs. 9: “And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’”

Several parts of this story, as it unfolded, give us insight into what we often experience as we seek to recognize God’s leading in our own lives.

1. Sometimes, the Lord Leads us by Closing Doors

Not once, but twice, we see this in Acts 16.

- ◇ Vs. 6 “Forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia.”
- ◇ Vs. 7 “And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them.”

They didn’t go where they were forbidden to go, trying to *make* something happen and force it. When the Spirit leads, a *no* is just as helpful as a *yes*. Facts are our friends.

2. Clarifying Guidance

Sometimes, we try very hard to understand what exactly God wants to do. Perhaps, like Paul, we know what we *aren’t* supposed to do, but are fuzzy on what exactly our next step is supposed to be. At this point, God will clarify his will. In this case, he did so with a vision. Verse 9: “And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’” If we are committed to following God’s plan, we will find that God is committed to making certain we understand our next step.

¹ The Aegean Sea is an arm of the Mediterranean Sea. To its west is modern Greece and Europe, and to its east is modern Turkey and Asia.

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3. We Still Need to *Think*

Vs. 10 “And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, *concluding* that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.”

The word for “conclude” means to draw a conclusion based on the evidence, to infer. Following God’s leading does not mean that we turn off our brains!

If you missed it in the devotional reading, it would be good to reemphasize here that in our current stewardship emphasis, we are being asked to *not* give from emotional impulse. Instead, we *are* being asked to *pray it through, to think it through and to talk it through* with our families. To look at the evidence and then, based on that, to make a decision, trusting the Lord to make clear his exact will for us.

4. Immediate Obedience

Vs. 10 “When Paul had seen the vision, *immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia...*”

It’s been said that God won’t steer a parked car. He leads those who follow.

Or if we are full of self-will, insisting on our own plan, God won’t bother to tell us that which we don’t want to hear. Once God’s will is clear, move in obedience!

Vs. 11 “So, setting sail from Troas, we made a *direct voyage* to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days.”

5. The Impact of this One Decision

They had bypassed some places which really needed the gospel. However, God led this past those places to take them to entirely new places. The gospel would catch up to the very places the Spirit led them to bypass, as witnessed by 1 Peter 1:1:

“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, *Asia*, and *Bithynia*”

And look at the results of obedience to God’s plan!

- ◇ Their next place of ministry is Philippi (verses 11-40). And as a derivative of this ministry we benefit from the Book of Philippians.
- ◇ In the next chapter, chapter 17, they travel to Thessalonica. Consequently, he would later write to this church, and we would have the books of First and Second Thessalonians in our New Testament.
- ◇ In chapter 18, the team traveled to Berea and to Athens and then to Corinth . And, as a result, we get to read First and Second Corinthians.
- ◇ Five books of the Bible were written, from one missionary journey, because Paul and his

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team understood God's specific direction.

- ◇ And one more *really big thing* — if you have believed the gospel, having heard it from those of European descent, you are saved through their witness. Because Paul obeyed the definite leading of God. Because he and his team didn't wait until everyone in Asia heard the gospel first.

Some Conclusions:

Coming to understand God's exact leading for the early Christians was not, as we may imagine, quick and easy and snappy. It was a *process* through which they sometimes travailed. And, like them, we must be willing to go through that travail. We must be willing to remain alert to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

This is true, not just true during a stewardship emphasis. This is a life skill needed by every believer for every part of life.

Stewards of Our Time

A Season for Everything & Priorities for Every Day

Application-Based Bible Study on Ecclesiastes 2:24-3:17

“He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man’s heart”
— Ecclesiastes 3:11

- **Class Announcements and Prayer Time**

- **Review of This Past Week’s Devotionals**

- ◇ Did anyone else pick up on the example of opportunities being like a stick floating down the river on Day 1. How we they come and go, and we should seize them?
- ◇ Day 2 discussed our use of time like a business exchange. Does anyone have any observations from that day’s reading?
- ◇ One sentence in the Day 3 reading says, “The Lord has an eternal plan for good works prepared in advance for you to do (Ephesians 2:10).” Do you think it would be a new thought to most people that God has pre-planned good works which would pop up on his calendar app on his phone (so to speak)?
- ◇ Day 5 discussed the importance of spending time with the Lord. With your personal situation, what is your biggest challenge in scheduling time alone with the Lord?
- ◇ What else stood out to you in your devotional reading this week?

Bible Study: Ecclesiastes 2:24-3:17

Ecclesiastes can be a challenging book. One minute it seems the writer is speaking in a straight-forward fashion. The next minute, he is speaking tongue-in-check, even on the verge of speaking sarcastically. At times, the book can seem a bit negative. It can be helpful to understand that there’s an element of satire in the book. He holds the secular lifestyle up to the light and examines it. We see in chapter one how the writer tells us how he has tried it all — intellectualism, hedonism (living for pleasure), drinking and self-indulgence, amusement, materialism with its accumulation of possessions, and achievement. For two chapters, he describes how hard he worked at having fun, and how in the end, it all felt so empty.

As he gets toward the end of the book, the writer says this:

“Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes. But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.” — 11:9

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He sardonically says, “Yeah, go ahead, follow your heart... if you think something will make you happy, try it... but don’t forget that you will give an account to God on judgment day.”

In chapter 12, he uses a multitude poetic word pictures to say, “Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth” (verse 1).

In the final two verses of Ecclesiastes, he brings it all to a conclusion:

“The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.” (12:13-14)

With the big picture of Ecclesiastes in mind, we look now at our passage for today, 2:24-3:17.

Life Is Unfulfilling Without God

2:24-25 “There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God, for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment?”

The original design was for man to live all of his life before God, enjoying his divine presence in every part of life. Since the “big trainwreck” in the Garden of Eden, work became toil and life became complicated. Life was marred, but not destroyed. There is hardship, but there are also meaningful times and enjoyable moments. God created life in all its aspects and parts. And we cannot fully enjoy the goodness of life without God.

The Futility of a Secular Life

2:26 “For to the one who pleases him God has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, but to the sinner he has given the business of gathering and collecting, only to give to one who pleases God. This also is vanity and a striving after wind.”

It is quite possible to live a basically secular life and, yet, go to church on Sunday. When we live a secular life — that is, living our lives without reference to God — we may be under the impression our accomplishments are permanent — “This also is vanity and a striving after wind.” Or, we may believe we are building our wealth. But God has a way of seeing that those resources get to the right people in the end — “to the sinner he has given the business of gathering and collecting, only to give to one who pleases God.” When we choose against the secular life, and live our lives with God, he involves himself with us. He makes life fulfilling. “To the one who pleases him God has given wisdom and knowledge and joy.”

Do You know What Time it Is?

Let’s read chapter 3, verses 1 through 8. [Read verses 1-8] We see here fourteen couplets, twenty-eight activities, which serve as examples of a principle.

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Here is the thesis sentence: “For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven” (3:1).

We’ve all seen the bumper sticker, “Life is a Beach.” The beach can be fun, but life is much more than a beach. Maturity is allotting to each part of life its appropriate amount of time at the appropriate times. It is arranging our priorities so that for each part of life we expend the proper amount of effort and resources. We cannot live our lives laughing all the time and never weep. How shallow would our lives be then?!

Of course, this means we need to know which aspects of life are the everyday responsibilities and which ones are the special treats. There are the moment when it’s appropriate to splurge on something nice we have been wanting — while, generally, we are responsible to “save for a rainy day.” It’s one thing to take a needed vacation, but that is different from being gone so many Sundays per year, you could never accept a place of service in the Lord’s church. If we spend all of our time playing — or all of our time working — there is no way we are going to have a significant Kingdom impact in our communities. As verse 11 says, “He has made everything beautiful in its time.”

So, it comes down to priorities. Our priorities are what they truly are in practice; nothing is a priority simply because we *say* it is. Here is five-question test to establish what our priorities really are:

1. What do we talk about?
2. What do we think about?
3. On what do we spend our money? (Look at your bank account.)
4. What do we spend our time doing? (Look at your calendar.)
5. What do we choose when it comes down to a choice?

There is a widely known comparison many have found helpful. If you have a jar and then some rocks, some gravel, some sand, and some water, then to get it all in, you have to put the big rocks in first. You can fit the small stuff in somewhere around the big stuff. However, if the small stuff uses up all the available space, then

[This would make a great visual illustration. For those who are already familiar with it, it will serve as a good reminder.

See: <https://jonathanbecher.com/2024/05/05/prioritize-the-big-rocks/>]

Verse 2 reminds us, there is “a time to be born, *and a time to die*.” If we are going to fulfill our priorities, then we will have fulfill them in a timely manner. Time is running out. Our priorities are what we choose when it comes down to a choice.

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You Are Hard-Wired for Eternity

3:11 "...Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end."

What does he mean when he says God "has put eternity into man's heart"? It means that we are hard-wired to know there is more to it all than this short life. (It is this sense which gives our missionaries a starting place.) We intuitively know there is a bigger picture than what we can see, even though we cannot see that picture and "find out what God has done from the beginning to the end."

We want our lives to matter and for our contributions to endure. God has put eternity in our hearts.

Jesus would come along later and explain more about this concept. In Matthew 6, he told two things. First, he said:

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal." (verses 19-20)

Jesus tells us to invest in eternity... to lay up treasure in heaven. We are unwise to make our lives about stuff. We could choose to live materialistic lives or we can choose lives that will matter into eternity.

There was a saying one used to hear: "He's so heavenly minded he's no earthly good." The temptation for most of us, however, is really the opposite, to be so worldly-minded, we're no heavenly good.

And when we get worried about how we will make ends meet, Jesus tells us in Matthew 6:33 to instead "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." God has put eternity in our hearts. And if we will live all of our lives before the Lord, seeking his kingdom above all else, he will take care of the rest. Because it's not just our money he wants to invest in eternity, it's us.

Servants & Stewards

Stewards of Our Wealth

Grace and Giving

Application-Based Bible Study on 2 Corinthians 8:1-15

“They gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.”
— 2 Corinthians 8:5

- **Class Announcements and Prayer Time**

- **Review of This Past Week’s Devotionals**

- ◇ In your devotional reading this week, what was your biggest surprise?
- ◇ How many of you grew up in a Christian home and were taught to be givers? What can you tell us about how your parents did that?
- ◇ Does anyone here today have a story about how they got started tithing today?
- ◇ Day 4 mentions God’s people whose hearts were moved to give freewill offerings. In this stewardship emphasis, what for you has been most moving or challenging?
- ◇ Also this week, we read about “grown-up giving.” Did anyone else pick up on that term? Why would you consider that an important concept?
- ◇ Day 5 discussed legacy giving, which is our biggest opportunity to give. What observations did you make in that day’s reading?

Bible Study: 2 Corinthians 8:1-15

Many church members react to the subject of giving as if it were, somehow un-Christ-like. “Just preach the gospel, will ya?! “In fact, 15 percent of everything Christ said relates to this topic—more than His teachings on heaven and hell combined.”¹ You’ve heard of “leading economic indicators,” of course. Jesus saw money as a “leading spiritual indicator” of the heart.

In today’s passage, we will looking at some helpful guidance on the matter of giving from Paul. You will recall that the Apostle was promoting an offering for the believers in the Jerusalem/Judea area which had been terribly impacted by a famine. The Jerusalem Relief Fund was being collected in predominantly Gentile churches from as far away as Macedonia. Besides the relief, the offering would serve to unify believers from both Jewish and Gentile backgrounds. This offering is also mentioned in: Romans 15:22-29, 1Corinthians 16:1-4, and 2 Corinthians 9:1-15.

¹ Patrick Ward, “Jesus and Possessions: What Luke Teaches (Lesson Reference: Luke 16:13–15, 19–31),” in *Biblical Illustrator Treasury*: Luke, *Biblical Illustrator Treasury* (Nashville, TN: LifeWay Christian Resources, 2017), 31.

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Here are some insights on giving we glean from 1 Corinthians 8:

Giving is a Christian Grace

Vs. 1 “We want you to know, brothers, about the *grace of God* that has been given among the churches of Macedonia.”

The passage is about giving, but notice how it ties the generous giving of the churches in Macedonia to the grace of God. There is saving grace and there are Christian graces. We can grow in these graces (2 Peter 3:18). The entire Christian life, not just our initial salvation experience, come by grace.

This isn't the only verse in the passage to tie giving to the grace of God. As they were finalizing the collection and the arrangements for it to be carried to Jerusalem, Paul writes, “Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you *this act of grace*” (vs. 6). Verse 7 speaks again of “*this act of grace*.” And verse 9 explains how generous giving is rooted in “the *grace* of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Giving Isn't Just for Rich Folks

Vs. 2-3 “For in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part...”

It would be easy to get the impression that wealthy patrons are the givers in the church. And it is true that God sometimes gifts people with the ability to make money, to give money, and to set the pace in a way which inspires others to give. However, the best way to have a good offering is for everyone to give something. Some can give a little. Some can give a lot. But everyone should give something, and be a part. Are you a student, still in high school? Is this your church, also? Then, you too should participate in your church's offerings. Because once someone gives, they become a part of the cause. One more insight here: Our consistent, weekly (or monthly) offerings add up over time. We couldn't give that amount in a big one-time offering. But we can give a larger amount than we dreamed we could *over time*.

Christian Giving is Voluntary; Not Coerced

Vs. 3-4 “They gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints”

The believers in the churches within the region of Macedonia gave very generously — “according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means.” It was a case of, “Are you sure you can afford to give this much?”

These believers also gave enthusiastically — “of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part.” Christians want to give to the causes of the Lord in his church.

Chapter 9 continues this discussion, and verse 7 says, “Each one must give as he has decided

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in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion..." Again, *thought through... talked through... prayed through*. As the Lord leads you... but "not reluctantly or under compulsion." He concludes 9:7 with this, "For God loves a cheerful giver."

Christian Giving is an Expression of Christian Commitment

Vs. 5 "...they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us."

Our primary commitment is to the Lord. All other gifts and sacrifices are but an expression of that foundational commitment. One old hymn, *Take My Life and Let it Be*, is about a whole-hearted Christian commitment. Some of its lyrics include: "Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord to Thee" and "Take myself, and I shall be, ever, only, all for Thee." And also this line: "Take my silver and my gold; not a mite would I withhold." If the Lord doesn't have my money, he doesn't have me. That doesn't mean we give our last penny to the church. It does mean we stand ready to give.

Giving is a Christian Grace We Can Grow In

Vs 7 "But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also."

Corinth was a congregation full of gifted people which excelled in many ways. Paul challenges them to excel in giving as much as in the other spiritual gifts and graces. There was once a stewardship emphasis called, "Planned Growth in Giving." It was designed to help people who weren't yet doing so to get started tithing and supporting missions. The plan recognized some people were in debt or had other commitments. It would take time get where they wanted to be in their giving. So, there was a worksheet for calculating what a family would give this year and the next over four years. It helped a person develop a *plan to grow* in giving. The reason many never give as much as they had hoped they would is that they never had a plan to grow in their giving.

Self-Sacrificial Giving is Modeled in Christ

Vs. 9 "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich."

Sometimes, people get to the place where they have so much, they don't think they can afford to give. Well, Jesus had it all. In all eternity past, he lived in a perfect place, recognized and adored by all, free from all suffering and pain. But he left it all to come to come to our rescue and to provide us a home in Heaven.

Jesus did not give his leftovers. Sometimes, we want to spend everything we have been spending on everything we wanted to have, and then give the Lord some of what's left over. That's not what this passage is talking about. If we don't give up something in order to give,

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it isn't yet sacrificial giving. How much do we give up... how much do we sacrifice? That depends on the exact cause and has to be considered as we form our plan for giving.

No One is Asking You to Give What You Don't Have

Vs. 12 "For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have."

God looks at the heart of the giver. The person with a "readiness" to give is not in competition with the person who has more to give. A person is accountable to give "according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have."

But remember, if you give as the Lord leads you, proportionate to your income, and are willing to make a few sacrifices, God will enable you to fulfill your faith commitment. As chapter 9, verse 8 says, "God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work."

Conclusion

Next week in our Bible Study, we will speak of yet another aspect of stewardship. We will be talking about Spiritual Gifts. I encourage you to spend time in the devotional booklet this week, as that is the subject covered in the devotionals also.

In the worship service next Sunday morning is Commitment Sunday for our stewardship emphasis. We will turn in our commitment forms and give our kick-off offerings. I hope you have been giving this your prayerful consideration in your home, and will be prepared to participate. This is a worthy cause.

Servants & Stewards

Stewards of Our Spiritual Gifts

Let the Gifted Serve!

Application-Based Bible Study on Romans 12:3-13

“Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them”
— Romans 12:6

- **Class Announcements and Prayer Time**

- **Review of This Past Week’s Devotionals**

- ◇ Many believers understand the spiritual gifts (or at least the more so-called charismatic gifts) to cease to be given since the completion of the New Testament. However, do you believe that some are more gifted as teachers? Do some believers seem to be better equipped at encouraging fellow believers? So, we don’t understand all church members to be photocopied vanilla duplicates?
- ◇ Day 3 talks about two broad categories of gifts: speaking gifts and serving gifts. Does that seem to pretty much represent what you are seeing in the church today?
- ◇ In your devotional reading this week, did anyone recognize his or her spiritual gift?
- ◇ Does anyone else have another observation from this week’s devotional reading?

Bible Study: Romans 12:3-13

Spiritual gifts are supernaturally empowered specialties in Christian service, given to build up the church and to glorify God.

Vs. 3 For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.”

We have differing gifts and contribute in differing ways. Of those who do serve in similar ways, we are not equally gifted. The danger here is for someone regarded as more gifted become proud. It is one thing to know what we are capable of doing in the Lord’s power and quite another to think we are doing it in our own power. Or to take the Spirit’s power for granted. It is important to think about this in a way that deeply recognizes our dependence on the Lord.

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One Body, Many Parts

Vs. 4 “For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function”

The Lord’s church is compared to a human body. Our bodies are not globs of protoplasm; they are made of parts. We have eyes to see, ears to hear, mouths with which to speak, etc. The various systems of our bodies work together in interdependence. That is how the body of Christ is to operate.

The Vital Connection of the Members

Vs. 5 “We, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.”

We have a vital connection to Christ and we have a vital connection to each other. The church isn’t a civic organization or the quarterback club. By virtue of our personal relationship with Christ (the New Testament speaks of “being in Christ”) and the Holy Spirit indwells members of the church as individuals and reveals his presence in a special way as the church gathers. As Weymouth put it, “We are linked to one another as its members.”

Differently Gifted

Vs. 6 “Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us...”

Notice first that we are gifted *by grace*. It is not that we are special or that there is something especially good in us.

Notice how verse 6 says we are gifted *differently*. Again, Weymouth: “Since we have special gifts which differ in accordance with the diversified work graciously entrusted to us.” God’s work is indeed diversified. We minister within the body of Christ. We minister outside the church body. We help people in difficult situations and people whose choices have damaged their lives. We encourage each other to grow in the Lord. We share the gospel with those haven’t heard.

Use Your Gift!

Vs. 6 “Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us *let us use them*.”

Our spiritual gifts are not merely factoids of personal trivia we talk about. These gifts are another expression of God’s grace at work in our lives. You know God gives us joy, but we still have to *make the choice to rejoice*? God, in his grace, empowers us in service, but we still have to put the gifts to work in ways appropriate to the gift. Paul begins to provide examples:

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Exercising the Gift of Prophecy:

Vs. 6 “If prophecy, in proportion to our faith”

New Testament prophecy was somewhat different from the ministry of the Old Testament. The Old Testament prophets were succeeded by the New Testament Apostles. In the New Testament period, members would sometimes be given a word of revelation or information they would share with the group. Not like a new doctrine or something, but more in a motivational way. Those with this gift would take this inspiration from God, put it into human words as best as they could, and church leaders would evaluate what had been said to verify its truth. So your gift, “if it is prophecy, let the prophet speak in exact proportion to his faith” (Weymouth). Why is faith mentioned? Because the prophet is trusting God to clearly what he wants said.

When we have a “speaking part” of some kind, it is very important to trust the Lord in getting the truth out accurately, to enable us to speak from our hearts to hearts, and to set the right tone as we speak.

Service

Vs. 7 “If service, in our serving”

The gift of service is the supernatural ability to help others in practical ways. This is the biblical word for deacon. Persons with the gift of serving enjoy doing the non-glamorous, behind the scenes work. If you think the work they do is unimportant in a church, just let it go undone! The divine empowerment comes in at the point of identifying the needs and the selfless attitude with which these acts are offered to the Lord.

Teaching

Vs. 7 “...The one who teaches, in his teaching”

The gift of teaching is the spiritual power to explain biblical truth and to provide practical training in Christian living for the learners’ spiritual growth. Teaching is not the gift of gab. This is the gift of study, arranging, and preparing — in addition to delivering the Word.

The New Testament never lists a gift of “preaching.” But sometimes church members will tell their pastors “You are a teaching preacher,” as if it were a lesser gift. Some folks simply want a better show. Now, teaching isn’t the gift of being uninspiring. There’s not a gift of being boring in the Bible. But if you are a Sunday School Teacher, a Bible Study leader, or a pastor — and your gift is teaching, pray! Prepare! Be accurate in teaching the Word! Explain biblical truth in ways that can be understood and which inspire spiritual growth.

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Exhortation

Vs. 8 “The one who exhorts, in his exhortation...”

The gift of exhortation is the divine empowerment to come alongside a struggling brother, and bearing the Lord’s presence, to provide encouragement, comfort, motivation, or biblical counsel. It needs to be clarified that this person doesn’t encourage people in the sense of affirming others engaged in unbiblical behavior or attitudes. They help people in their walk with the Lord.

Giving

Vs. 8 “The one who contributes, in generosity...”

The gift of giving is the spiritual specialty of giving to the Lord’s work generously and from a selfless heart. God enables this person to acquire the resources and leads them in strategically giving for the sake of the Kingdom. The giving by people with this gift has a way of motivating others to give more generously.

Leading

Vs. 8 “The one who leads, with zeal...”

This word for leadership means *to stand before*. Some lead from the middle, but this person leads from the front. This is one who supervises. The word has a nurturing aspect. In 1 Timothy 3:4-5, it refers to one whose role it is to “take care of the church of God.” This is not the kind of leader who sits at his desk all day, drinking coffee and signing reports. Wuest says “the one who is placed in a position of authority, [should do so] with intense eagerness and effort.”

Mercy

Vs. 8 “The one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.”

The gift of mercy is the supernatural ability to show genuine compassion to those in distress, bringing to them a kind presence, and doing for them helpful gestures which relieve their anxiety, sorrow, or suffering.

The challenge is such ministries are that helping such people with the burdens they face and the drama which sometimes comes with it, can wear one down. One could even become somewhat cynical. But the Apostle tells us this gift should be exercised “with cheerfulness” or as Wuest puts it, “With joyous abandon.”

Stay in Your Lane

Vs. 7-8, Wuest [If one’s gift is] “serving, exercise that gift within the sphere of service; or teaching, within the sphere of teaching; or he who exhorts, within the sphere of exhorta-

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tion”

Sometimes, people get excited about the Lord, but the river of their zeal overflows its banks. Instead of concentrating on being effective in their own area of ministry, they try to tell everyone else how to be effective in their areas of ministry. Stay within your own “sphere” of service and responsibility.

This study concludes our look at the biblical teaching of stewardship. We have seen that we have been entrusted us with the gospel , with his will for our individual lives, with the days of our lifetimes, with our wealth, and with our spiritual gifts. This is the overall context of our stewardship. It isn’t all about money, though our stewardship of our financial resources is involved in our participation in the gospel cause. Today is Commitment Sunday. I hope each one of us will be participating as the Lord leads us.

Now, there is one final verse of encouragement we should cover.

Vs. 11 “Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.”

He tells us, first, not to be slothful, but rather to be diligent. Too many believers want to round the corners in the work of the church. Do it right. We want to be a *great* church.

We are told to be fervent in spirit. Zeal is not considered a good word in our time. We tend to associate zeal with the tactless and the pushy... the graceless zealot. But the word *zeal* is in the Bible. It is even used of Jesus (John 2:17).

In the final phrase, we are told to “serve the Lord.” He is the object of our service, and we are perfectly happy to serve him as slaves would their master.

