

Stewardship: A Way of Life

The Stewardship of Treasure

Sermon preached by Chris Lofquist

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Introduction

This last month has been a whirlwind for most young families in the US, leaving parents completely exhausted at nights. Why? You may ask. Well, it has been a whirlwind of activity, because **school has started** in all 50 states. And with school comes homework, activities, and sometimes whiny kids. Children around the country are learning to be observant by asking the questions – Why? What? When? How? And Who? These are good questions to ask, and ones we should program into our observational skills when it comes time to studying God’s Word. So, with that as a way of introduction this morning let us continue on the path of Stewardship, as we deal with the Stewardship of Treasure. And in so doing, we ask ourselves the questions: What is the Stewardship of Treasure? How am I to view and spend the Treasure God has given?

But before we get any further let’s Pray.

One question was not asked prior to prayer. And that is the question, WHY? So, let’s begin with the WHY of this Biblical command. Why are we to consider we to hold our hard earned cash loosely with open hands? Remember, stewardship is the responsibility of caring for another’s possession. And therefore, when we speak of our Treasures, the proper perspective is to understand that our Treasures are a gift from God, and therefore we should use them to His Glory and for His purposes. This flies directly in the face of the popular thinking of the world – where we are told to be greedy and thrive in discontentment. We are told that we need more, we need nicer things, because the things we have are not good enough. So, we run the danger of placing our priorities in life in the arena of collecting the nicest things. But if that is our thought process than we can never have enough – they are always coming out with a nicer car, a bigger television, a better phone – and in their marketing strategy, they are telling us that we need to pursuit those things to be successful, to be happy. Yet believing in this deception of the world comes at a high cost. Paul says that the *love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.* (**1 Tim. 6:10**). And when our understanding of where money comes from and our perspective on why we should view it as a gift from God is skewed, relationships can get severed, faith can turn to doubt, and sin has an open invitation into our lives. So, I begin by saying that the money you have (whether little or plenty), the things you own (whether nice or not as nice) are all gifts from God, He owns them, and He has entrusted you with them to accomplish His plans and purposes on this earth. You are a STEWARD OF THE TREASURE GOD HAS GIVEN YOU. So, now that we got the “why” out of the way, let’s look at a few other questions that will help us construct our thoughts around Scripture this morning. And hopefully, we will walk away from here challenged to be better stewards of our money and our material possessions.

The first official question I want to ask us is, What?

1. What?

When we think of being stewards of treasure, as Christians, our minds often go straight toward tithing. So let's begin there...

What is Tithing? The word 'tithe' literally means 'a tenth', and this word is mainly used in the Old Testament, and only a few times in the NT when referring to Israel under Old Testament economy, never in such a way it could imply this is the rule of life for the Church. So it would be safe to say that 'tithing' is an Old Testament concept.

Leviticus 27:30-32 says, *"Thus all the tithe of the land, of the seed of the land or the fruit of the tree, is the LORD's; it is holy to the LORD. If, therefore, a man wishes to redeem part of his tithe, he shall add to it one-fifth of it. For every tenth part of herd or flock, whatever passes under the rod, the tenth one shall be holy to the LORD."* So what the Law says, is that if you are a farmer, a tithe (or tenth) of your first fruits should go to the LORD, and if you are a shepherd, a tithe (or tenth) of your herd or flock should go to the LORD. This concept of tithing is also mentioned in **Deuteronomy 12:17-18** pertaining to tithing grain, wine and oil. And in **14:22** concerning a tithe of all the produce that comes from the field each year. So this is where we get the concept of tithing. And when we think of this concept, we automatically begin at the 10% mark. I'm sure you've heard us use this term before with financial counseling. It was very important to God to have the Jewish nation tithe 10% of their possessions in order to remind them that it was God who has blessed them with these possessions. But this tithe was mandatory, and therefore sort of like an income tax. This is why 'tithes and offerings' were two different words and two different concepts. If one wanted to express his worship through an offering it would be over and above the tithes commanded of him. Tithing was something that only the nation of Israel was commanded to do in the Old Testament. Therefore, I want to be clear in saying that the tithe, according to Scripture, is not for believers today.

Tithing vs. Offering. Jesus has fulfilled the Law, the Church is not under the Law, and so we are not commanded to tithe like Israel was in the days of Moses, David, and so on. So then, why have we spoken of tithes before? Why do we equate tithes with our offering? Well, if there is anything we can learn from the concept of the tithe, it is that perhaps 10% is a good place to start when calculating how much we are to give weekly in our offering of worship to God. But we are not obligated to tithe a tenth of our possessions – we have been freed from the obligations of the Law, and we now live in an Age of Grace. So, if we are not obligated to tithe, then why do we take an offering each week? Because, the NT teaches us, as believers, that we are to be Good Stewards of our what God has gifted us with in the area of Treasures. We are to give, as an offering of worship and thanksgiving to God. He has provided for you your job; He has given you the strength and knowledge to do it; He has promised to care for your needs and provide for you above and beyond how He does for the birds of the air and the lilies of the field. And you have experienced that. He has provided for you every step of the way. And with this changed perspective on His hand in providing for our needs, we are to respond with thanksgiving and worship – and this is done by giving with grateful hearts to the ministry of the Gospel. **This is not an obligatory tithe, this is a heart swelling with gratitude and worship, overflowing with generosity – He has blessed me, may a portion of His blessings be used to bless others toward the glory of God and the preaching of the Gospel.** This is what motivates our Stewardship.

Let's move to the next question, we answered the 'what', now let's ask the 'how'.

2. **How?**

To answer this question of 'How are we to give according to Scripture' – we are going to approach it by gathering some **Guidelines to our Proportionate Giving**, with the **FIRST** being that we are to give...period. Turn with me to **2 Corinthians 8:1-3**. Here God is highlighting this Church in Macedonia for their testimony of generosity and giving not based on whether or not they are thriving economically, but based on their good stewardship of giving even when things are tight or times are difficult. *They gave according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord.* These faithful believers gave back to God even when they had little to give – they still gave. What an example of Good Stewardship – Giving back to God was atop their financial strategy. **Side Note:** I've heard some say that my gift in place of my offering is my service. That is not a Biblically accurate thing to say. The Bible calls us to both serve and give, one does not replace the other, but both are encouraged. The only time you are not expected to give back to God a portion of what He has given you, is if you have no treasure whatsoever.

Now flip back to **1 Corinthians 16:1-2** for our second guideline– *“Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come.”* Paul here, is encouraging the Church in Corinth to each week put aside a portion of what God has prospered them to use for the ministry of the Gospel – how they saw fit – Paul was not planning on Lording over their finances, he was telling them of the importance of taking a collection, but reminding them of their freedom to use it toward the ministry as they saw fit. Leading us to the **SECOND** guideline – **Give to God first**. In this passage, they are taking a collection *the first day of the week*, which means that they are not giving what is left over, but considering their offering of worship to God first and foremost. **Leviticus 2:12** tells us that a proper offering of worship to God included offering of the first fruits of one's harvest, of one's animals, of one's finances. They held their treasures with an open hand, understanding that what they had was God's – remember Stewardship is 'caring for or looking after another's possession(s).' And they did this regularly. If you want to keep being a Good Steward in front of you, as a constant reminder of your response to God's goodness in your life, than give regularly – *each time the week resets*.

For the **THIRD** guideline, turn back to **2 Corinthians 8:12**. We are to give *according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have*. The guideline here is not to give a certain percentage across the board. We are not all commanded to give 10%. Paul, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is telling us that we are to give according to what God has blessed us with. **You are giving based on what God has given you**. If you have little, you may not be able to give as much as your neighbor, but you are still to give. If you have much, you are to give more – and that percentage goes up. Do you understand the Biblical concept of proportionate giving? Give, Give God the first fruits (not the leftovers), and Give based on what God has given you. So with these verses in mind, we take an offering each week, encouraging you to give the very best of your treasures to the ministry of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That's why Tod prays, *'Use our*

offerings to save souls and make disciples.’ This is the right perspective of Good Stewardship – understanding that our treasures, money and possessions, are God’s (He has simply entrusted them to us), therefore we hold our hands open regularly in worship.

Side Note: Luke 16:10-11 tells us that *He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much...Therefore, if you have not been faithful in the use of unrighteous wealth, who will entrust the true riches to you?* God does not entrust more wealth to us to manage until we prove faithful with what we have now. **2 Corinthians 9:6-7** tells us that *whoever sows sparingly will reap sparingly and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.* God loves and blesses a cheerful giver - He rewards those who give more, so that they can continue to be even more generous in their offering of worship to God.

God loves a cheerful giver.

Conclusion

My conclusion this morning is two-fold: **First**, as Americans, God has blessed us beyond every other country in the world. We are so very wealthy in terms of global economics, and therefore as American believers we are to understand God’s material blessings, and respond with grateful generosity – giving back to God an appropriate portion of what He has entrusted us with. **Second**, our treasures include much more than our money – they include our house, our vehicles, our possessions. Are we using them to the Glory of God and the intent of pointing others toward Christ? Is the salvation of souls motivating our stewardship of treasures? It should. May we this day change our closed fist approach to our treasures to an open-handed act of worship. And may we be committed to becoming good stewards of our treasures.

Let’s pray.