

Stewardship of God's Gifts: A Self-Study

Topic #1: What Is Stewardship?

When you think of stewardship, more than likely you think about it as something that your pastor talks about once a year or more around budget time. For many, their understanding of stewardship is centered on an appeal for money for the church. But, while money is certainly one aspect of stewardship, it is hardly the only thing. Stewardship is the attitude we take towards, and the manner in which we care for, all that God has entrusted to us. And what is that? In short, it is the entire world. In the Garden of Eden, God gave newly formed Adam and Eve dominion over everything – they were to take care of the garden and everything in it. It was a huge responsibility to be sure, but it was part of what God created them for and gave them to do. Thus, stewardship of God's creation was not just one thing to think about every so often, but rather, it was an integral part of their daily existence. That is a reality which has not changed for us, even though we might think so.

That is why we are going to spend some time over the next several weeks taking a look at the Biblical meaning of stewardship. It is so you have an understanding of what the Bible says about it, which it has much to say. And, it is so you can consider your own life in light of that Biblical foundation in terms of your own faithfulness. Stewardship is a life-long growing process. We really never can get to a point where we can safely say that we have done all that we need to do and just put that part of our life on cruise control. Just as life continues to change over time, so will our abilities to support the church monetarily, physically, and emotionally. However, there are certain things that our Lord has called us to as his children, and faithfulness in being stewards of what he has blessed us with is part of that.

Over the past couple of decades, our Synod has used the following definition to shed light on the topic of stewardship: Christian stewardship is the free and joyous activity of the child of God and God's family the church, in managing all of life and life's resources for God's purposes. There are two things to note here by way of introduction to this topic of stewardship. The first is that this a free activity. Stewardship of God's gifts is not done out of obligation, but in response to the great blessings we have received in forgiveness and grace. The cross has set us free, not to do whatever we want, but to live in response to that freedom. The second thing to note is that this is a joyous activity. Now, I know how much you love your money and your time and your stuff, and to give it away doesn't seem joyous. However, when our faith leads us into a relationship of trust with our heavenly Father, to know that he has provided all that we need, then being able to share in his generosity is a joyous thing, for we can see the Lord at work in it.

But where does all of this come from? Consider the following passages from Scripture, and answer the questions as you consider God's Word in light of your our faith life.

1. Read *Genesis 1:1-3* and *Psalms 24:1*. Who has made all that we see around us and all that we have? What does that mean when we consider our possessions in this world?

2. You have probably heard someone say something to the effect that they have worked hard and built for themselves a great life. You may have been told as a child that if you want something in life, you have to work hard to earn it. Read *Deuteronomy 8:17-18*. How do even the things we own, and have worked for ourselves, still come from God?
3. Read *Matthew 6:19-21*. What does it mean that your heart is where your treasure is? Are there things that you have “stored up” on earth that may have gotten in the way of the things of heaven? If so, what are they? If not, are there things that could potentially get in the way of the things of heaven?
4. Read *Matthew 25:14-30*. What will happen on the last day when the master comes back to settle accounts? What is the basis for his judgment? What happens to the ones who put the master’s generosity to work? What happens to the ones who hoard it? What can this teach us about stewardship now in terms of our use of God’s gifts?
5. Consider our Synod’s definition of stewardship. What is comforting about it? What is difficult about it? Does it rightly define your own understand and/or practice of stewardship? If not, what is lacking? If so, are there still areas in which you could improve?

Ultimately, stewardship is not simply a topic of the Christian life that can be thought about once, and then set on the shelf. It is part of the way our Christian life is daily lived out through dependence upon God for all things, knowing that he supplies all we need for this body and life. In understanding that by faith, stewardship then becomes something that we need not dread, nor get defensive about, but can simply be the joyful response that is given to the blessings that God has granted to us in this life, and the eternal joys he promises us in his kingdom!