

Living For Giving: Introduction

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[0 : 00] Well, again, good morning and welcome here for this Sunday, January 9th, 2022. Wow. I say that all the time, right? I say the date and I say, wow.

But do you recognize time is just flying by? Maybe you feel like sometimes it's not. Pandemic time seems pretty slow, actually, doesn't it? But we need to recognize that this is a new year, a fresh start.

There is hope in God. So as I said, it's nice to be back with you this morning. I want to thank Luwam, my friend and my brother, for sharing from his heart and God's word over the past two weeks while our family celebrated the holidays together.

And as I told you, we were down in Coaldale, which was three degrees warmer? I think it was about three degrees warmer on average than what you experienced.

So not that great. But as I said, we didn't drive around too much once we got down there. But I'll tell you, our car stayed plugged in the entire time. This morning, we're beginning a new series that I've titled Living for Giving, Perspectives on Christian Stewardship.

[1 : 16] And this is going to take us through to the end of January. Each week, we're going to look at a different aspect of the idea of stewardship, beginning with an introduction this week.

Always a good place to start introducing something. So then we're going to look at, over the course of the series, stewardship of our time, stewardship of our talents, stewardship of our treasure, or our money and our belongings.

Stewardship. Stewardship. It's an interesting word, isn't it? It's not always easy to wrap your head or your mouth around. For the average person on the street, when you say that word, stewardship, they may equate it with the environment, right?

Environmental stewardship. That's an important topic and one that comes to mind for most people. Responsible use of natural resources. Or other ideas along those lines.

Stewardship. And for Christians, I believe that the word stewardship also has the potential to make people really uncomfortable. Doesn't it?

[2 : 29] Stewardship. Especially if your first reaction to me as a pastor using the word stewardship to go, he means money. He's going to talk about money. So that's part of it, absolutely.

For many people, they'd rather talk about sex or politics than their bank account, their investment portfolio, right? And for Christians, the word stewardship may also evoke the idea of that one Sunday a year when the pastor gets up and asks you to dig a little deeper.

To drop more into the offering plate. Because lots of churches, that happens at least once a year. And so, as I indicated, stewardship does relate to money.

But it also relates to much more than that. And we'll be exploring that together over this series. The concept of stewardship is one of the predominant themes of the Bible.

And it's a foundational principle and a value that should shape every aspect of our lives. Here's some New Testament and Greek for you this morning.

[3 : 39] The New Testament word for stewardship is the Greek word oikonomia. Oikonomia. Say it for fun. Oikonomia. Oikonomia. Oikonomia.

Oikonomia. Sounds a little bit Hebrew. Oikonomia. But anyway. So this is the point where I would have you guess what English word we get from this Greek origin.

What English word does that sound like? Nobody. Economy. Economy.

Economy. So one of the ways the word economy can be defined is as the management of a household. That's one definition. It refers to the responsibility that's entrusted to a manager.

That's the context of that word. So this morning as we begin this series, I want us to first consider some of the things that stewardship is not. We're going to begin with that.

[4 : 40] First, as I indicated, stewardship is not just about money. Stewardship encompasses everything that God has given us.

And we'll see that over the course of our series. That's why we're going to be looking at how God has called us to be good stewards, good managers of our time and our talents, as well as our money and our finances.

Second, stewardship is, hear me on this one, stewardship is not about guilt. Not at all. My goal in this series is not to make you feel guilty.

Not to make you feel somehow inadequate about how you've been managing or mismanaging, maybe in your own perspective, what God has given you in your life so far.

It's not my goal at all. My goal is to help us gain a biblical perspective on stewardship. And perhaps to see some of the truths of this concept more clearly.

[5 : 43] And definitely, ultimately, to encourage you to lean into what God is asking of you. Third, stewardship is not about what you're giving up on, letting go of, or somehow losing out on.

A healthy perspective on stewardship can actually free us to be more joyful and intentionally participate in God's plan for our lives, for our world, for eternity.

When we intentionally engage as good stewards of what God has given us already, it's a partnership with rewards beyond imagination. As you can tell, I am a bad news first kind of person.

Rip off the band-aid so that we can move on, right? Eat your veggies so that you can have dessert. So that's why I started with what it is not.

So what are the things that stewardship actually is then? What's that biblical perspective? Well, first, stewardship is about having the proper perspective.

[6 : 59] And here it is in three words. It's not ours. Or yours. Feel free to insert yours if you want to make it personal.

The proper perspective on everything that we've been given is it's not ours. Human nature, human pride, leads us to the conclusion that everything we are, everything we have, everything we own, and society reinforces all of this, is completely a result of our achievements.

What we have done. Can you recognize that? That's the message. But as Christians, we need to recognize that God is the creator and ultimate owner of all things.

Not just the trees and the grass and natural resources and water and air and all those things, but everything he has given us as well. The teaching of God's creation and ownership of all things is absolutely crystal clear in Scripture.

Now here's some verses I'm going to run through. So we'll see those on the screen. There you go. So don't panic. I'll go slow. So the Bible says in Psalm 24, verse 1, The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world and all who live in it.

- [8 : 34] Psalm 24, verse 1. So it's pretty clear there, I think, that everything belongs to God. He owns all of it, right?
- That's what Scripture is telling us there. The Bible says in Psalm 50, verse 10, and God is speaking here, For every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills.
- God is claiming, declaring ownership over all things, over everything he has created. And as one commentator I read said, In this statement, God defies the notion of what people give him is theirs, right?
- We have that sense of it being ours that we're giving back. And that they're somehow being magnanimous in parting with their property for God's sake.
- Well, I'm going to give God some of what I made because I'm a good person. The commentator goes on to say, Many people today harbor the false perception that they own stuff and give some of it back to God.
- [9 : 48] See that perspective? I think it's helpful. Second point of what stewardship is, Stewardship is about recognizing God as the source and foundation of all wealth and power.
- We don't have power or influence or authority or wealth or blessing or anything without God. The Bible says in 1 Chronicles 29, verse 12, and that's up on the screen as well, Wealth and honor come from you.
- You are the ruler of all things. In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all.
- The Bible says in Haggai 2, verse 8, The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, declares the Lord Almighty.
- Acts 17, verse 25 reminds us, And he is not served by human hands as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else.
- [11 : 05] But not only does God own everything and not need anything from us, He then freely provides for our needs.
- And we read that in James 1, verse 17. And you know this verse, Everything comes from God.
- So third, what is stewardship? Well, it's a correct view that recognizes not only does God create, own, and provide everything, God is also the ruler and sovereign over all authority.
- He is all-powerful. When Jesus gave his disciples the great commission to preach the gospel, he very clearly declared that all power was his.
- Chronicles 29, verse 11 and 12 extol God's greatness. They remind us that heaven and earth are his, that he reigns and has power over all creation.
- [12 : 32] And if you go to the very end of Scripture, Revelation reminds us that ultimately, Jesus is the King of kings and the Lord of lords.
- He rules over all creation and holds authority over all earthly rulership, over earthly authority. Finally, a correct view of biblical stewardship recognizes that God delegates authority.
- He delegates management, that management function. And much of it he delegates to us as stewards.
- Throughout Scripture, we can clearly see places where God has delegated that authority. He delegates to Adam and Eve in Genesis 1, 28-30, where he literally hands over the keys to creation for them to manage.
- He hands over or delegates authority to Noah in Genesis 9, verses 1-7, where we again see God declare and delegate authority to humanity to manage or steward creation.

[13 : 49] And Jesus, through his parables in Matthew and Luke, he reinforces our responsibility to steward or manage God's resources for his glory, not ours.

In his book, *The Treasure Principle*, Randy Alcorn makes such a great statement about the concept of stewardship. It's a great book, I recommend.

A steward manages assets for the owner's benefit. The steward carries no sense of entitlement to the asset he manages.

It's his job to find out what the owner wants done with his assets and then carry out the owner's will. Steward's job is to find out the owner's desire to manage his assets and then carry that out on his behalf.

Alcorn says, whenever we think like owners, it's a red flag. We should be thinking like stewards, like investment managers, always looking for the best way to invest what the owner has given us.

[15 : 02] Is that a good perspective for you to have this morning? Over the next few weeks, as we explore this concept of stewardship in the various areas of our lives, my hope is that you'll develop a new perspective that what's yours, it's not actually yours at all, but God's.

Ask God to reveal his will to you personally as the steward of what he has given you. Amen. Amen.