

Abide – Giving is Living

2/14/21

Matthew 6:19-24

Sunday AM

Have you ever been to a **Strength Team** show where these massive men perform feats of strength lifting, bending, and ripping things apart? This week, I read of a circus strongman who performed similar feats nearly every night, but then, at the end of his performance, he'd squeeze the juice from a lemon b/w his hands, then he'd offer a random audience member \$200 if they could squeeze a single drop from the lemon. One evening, an elderly lady accepted the challenge and hobbled on stage. She clamped the lemon b/w her frail hands and squeezed a full teaspoon of juice from the lemon. The performer stunned. After paying the woman \$200, he asked her how she did it. She replied, "Practice. I've been church treasurer for 42 yrs... I can squeeze blood from a turnip!"

I also like the story of the lonely, rich widow who decided to visit a tiny country church. Unfamiliar w/ how the offering worked, she noticed people putting money in the plate – so when the plate came to her, she put in \$100. Since it was a small church, and she was a visitor, everyone was watching when she made her gift. The pastor said, "We have a guest w/ us today who's made a wonderful offering of \$100. B/c of your generosity, I'd like for you to stand and select the first (3) hymns you like." Well, the lonely widow stood up, looked around the room, and said, "I choose him, him, and him."

Several weeks ago, we started a series on how to live an abiding life in Christ. In particular, what are the essential disciplines God has given us to walk in intimacy w/ Him. Today we're going to look at the next element to drawing close w/ God – **stewardship**.

Biblical stewardship is easily the most essential yet misunderstood principle in the Christian life. Too often, people mistakenly couple stewardship w/ money management only and have missed God's intention – **stewardship encompasses every aspect of life**. It involves how a person wisely manages their money, time, talents, words, body, and reputation.

Webster's defines stewardship as the responsibility of managing the assets, affairs, or property of someone else. **It's managing something that isn't your own.**

In the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6, Jesus spoke about what some call the Sermon of the Amount:

Don't store up riches for yourselves here on earth, where moths/rust destroy, and robbers break in and steal. Instead, store up riches for yourselves in heaven, where moths/rust can't destroy, and robbers can't break in and steal. For your heart will always be where your riches are... You cannot be a slave of two masters; you will hate one and love the other; you will be loyal to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money. Matthew 6:21-24

We learn in Jesus' words that stewardship involves more than your money; it is an issue of the heart.

Lest we forget, God is profoundly in love w/ us and wants to be in an intimate relationship w/ us. But He knows our nature is to love what we can possess, and that often, we make idols out of things created instead of loving the Creator. So, to help us keep Him on the throne of our lives, He asks us to steward His blessings in our lives.

As Christians we're stewards. We're stewards of the life/ministry of Jesus, of His grace, and His church – called to accomplish the Master's mission. Thus, how we manage our lives and His blessings will determine the success of God's plan in/thru us.

To understand/appreciate God's intention for calling us to a life of stewardship, it's imperative we learn the (3) primary principles of good stewardship.

I The OWNERSHIP Principle

The OP is simple – *whoever owns it decides it*. The owner gets to call the shots and make the decisions. Anyone under an owner is a steward of the owner.

Explain – If you work for someone, then you're a steward of their business and how you manage your performance will determine their success. You serve to accomplish the mission set forth by the owner.

READY – God is the owner of everything – making us stewards/managers of His blessings.

The earth is the Lord's and everything in it. The world, and all who live in it. Psalm 24:1

For some reason this is a hard principle for many people to grasp. We tend to think b/c something is in our possession, it's our possession, but that's not true.

Example – Recently, I was on a golf cart ride w/ Colin and we stopped at Wendy's to grab a snack. After I handed the bag to Colin, I asked him for a French fry and he told me "NO!" I said, "Son, I just bought this for you, can I please have a fry?" And he said, "No, it's mine!" **Oh, how quickly we forget.** BTW, he finally shared a fry w/ me.

To understand the OP, we need to go back to the story of creation – back to the beginning.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth... Genesis 1:1

What happened in the beginning? **God created!** And b/c He created it – He owns it. The first truth of stewardship is simple – **God owns everything.**

He owns you. He owns me. He owns everything – Why? B/c He made it.

I'm reminded of a church that was growing so fast it ran out of parking. They went across the street to a supermarket that was closed on Sundays and made a deal w/ the owner to use his lot. The owner agreed w/ (1) condition. "You can use the parking lot 51 Sundays out of the year, but on the 52nd Sunday, I'm going to chain it off." The church asked, "Why?" The owner said, "B/c I never want you to forget that the parking lot belongs to the grocery store, and not the church."

Point – Just b/c God owns everything doesn't mean it's being used the way He intended for it to be used. **It depends on how we manage what He has given us.**

II The TITHING Principle

Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it. Malachi 3:10

Everyone, hold up 10 fingers. Now, pull down all but one finger. This is the tithe. It's the first/best 10th of all that God has blessed/entrusted to you.

tithe (first 10th) God wants His people to give Him the 1st 10th of every area of their lives including their treasures, time, talents, tongue, temple, and testimony.

Honor the Lord w/ your wealth, w/ the first fruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over w/ new wine. Proverbs 3:9-10

The first fruits include the very best you have to offer – the cream of the crop. Not the least and leftovers, but the first and best.

We can't forget that God owns it all, and not just the 1st 10%. He owns 100%, but affords us the opportunity to manage the other 90% in a way that honors Him as we engage life and care for our families. The 1st 10th is a reminder to us of where it all comes from.

I'm reminded of the parable Jesus told of the Rich fool:

The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' "Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry."'" "But God said, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' "This is how it will be w/ whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God."

Jesus reminds us everything we have comes from God and we're stewards called to manage these blessings in a manner that honors Him. The tithe is God's reminder that He owns it all and we're just managers.

The purpose of tithing is to teach us to put God first in every situation. LB

Now as I've already stated, stewardship is not solely about your treasure (money), it is also about your time, talents, tongue, temple, and testimony – and God wants the 1st 10th of every area of your life. **But to be clear – the tithe begins w/ your wealth b/c your wallet is the doorway to your heart and life.**

III The **TREASURE** Principle

Remember – *Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. Mt. 6:24*

The TP is about the heart. It's about making sure that the focus of your life is to honor God in every way. It's about living today in light of eternity.

Upon J.D. Rockefeller's death, one of the wealthiest men to have ever lived, someone asked his accountant, "How much did he leave." He responded, "All of it!"

You can't take it w/ you but you can send it ahead.

Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, crushed down, full and running over, they will give to you. For in the same measure as you give, it will be given to you again. Luke 6:38

The TP is about how we honor God w/ the other 90%. It's one thing to tithe and another thing to live w/ a giving heart bent toward eternal things.

Several yrs ago, I learned from a friend (3) ways I can keep a generous heart toward eternal things.

Always give a **Seed Faith Offering** – a small regular faith gift placed in the offering plate every time it's passed asking for God to increase His blessings.

Grace Gift Offering is a one time, or special gift, given to meet a specific need of ministry to further God's work.

Sacrificial Gift Offering is a one time or continual gift that requires a step of faith due to the personal cost incurred to further God's work.