

Simplify – Stewarding Simplicity

1/9/22

Proverbs 3:5-10

Sunday AM

Hanging in the Metropolitan Museum of Art is an interesting 15th century Flemish oil painting known as the *Merode Altarpiece*. The painting offers a unique perspective of the annunciation when the angel Gabriel shared w/ Mary that she'd been chosen to give birth to the Savior. As the story goes, once an art critic reviewed the piece only to be confounded by the obvious attention to detail and stroke patterns bearing evidence the creating artist was a master – yet was completely confounded b/c the dimensions and proportions were awkwardly out of alignment. That is, until he learned that the piece was intended to be hung over an altar and viewed from the kneeling position. So, taking his position below the painting, the critic was able to see the piece as the artist had intended.

Lesson – all of life requires **perspective**. Even more – it requires a **perspective of humility**. This is the idea behind this series – especially today, as we look at the biblical perspective of stewarding simplicity.

simplicity is the state of being simple, uncomplicated, and straight-forward – reduced to the basic essentials.

So, *stewarding simplicity* is the art of living free of unnecessary excesses and complications by focusing on only that which is essential and pertinent to life. It's majoring on the majors and minoring on the minors.

Last week, Craig did a great job of setting the stage for living a simplified life by encouraging us from 1 Peter 1:13-16 to declutter our souls. In case you missed it, he challenged us to get (1) ***Our Minds Set Up***; (2) ***Our Conduct Lined Up***; and (3) ***Our Convictions Firmed Up*** so that they align w/ God's Word, will, and way.

As we continue our study, I want to take a few min. to gain some perspective of what it means to *steward simplicity* by understanding the principle of the **tithe**.

Let's be honest. For most people – **tithing** is a 4-letter word. We don't like it b/c of what it demands of us. Thus, you'll hear people mis-teach Scripture saying things like the tithe is OT or under the Law – and doesn't apply to NT believers. Or, God isn't interested in whether I tithe or not. Or the tithe is just about the church needing money. You also will find too many pastors who mis-teach it in order to get people to give. Yet none of these are an accurate reality but a completely wrong perspective of what is actually an amazing blessing of God to us. For at the heart of the tithe is the very secret to living a fulfilled, God-honoring life in the center of His will.

This reminds me of the new mom who was hysterical b/c her son had swallowed a quarter. She yelled at her husband to call the Dr., but he called their pastor. Confounded, the wife said, "We don't need our pastor, we need medical help." But the husband replied, "It'll be okay – our pastor can get money out of anyone."

I want to assure you that my goal today isn't to get any money out of you, but to get a biblical understanding of stewardship and its relevance to our daily lives in you. For if we're ever going to simplify our lives, it begins w/ managing every area of our lives under God.

But yes – stewardship often begins w/ our finances, b/c in most cases, it's our love/pursuit of money that prevents us from living yielded to God – so God calls us to give in order to help us to depend on Him. Thus, you could say that our offerings are the doorway to the stewarding of every area of our lives.

tithe – means a *tenth part* and refers to giving to God as an act of worship the first/best portions of every area of our lives – including our time, talents, treasures, tongue, temple, and testimony. We begin learning of the principle of the tithe *before the Law* in **Genesis 4**:

Now Adam had relations w/ his wife, Eve, and she became pregnant. When she gave birth to Cain, she said, "W/ the Lord's help, I have produced a man!" Later she gave birth to his brother and named him Abel. When they grew up, Abel became a shepherd, while Cain cultivated the ground. When it was time for the harvest, Cain presented some of his crops as a gift to the Lord. Abel also brought a gift – the first and best portions of the firstborn lambs from his flock. The Lord accepted Abel and his gift, but he did not accept Cain and his gift. This made Cain very angry, and he looked dejected. Genesis 4:1-4

Note the obvious question – Why did God accept Abel's offering but reject Cain's offering?

The simple answer is perspective. Abel saw His offering as an act of *worship*, so He gave God his first and best; whereas, Cain saw his offering as an *obligation* so He offered God his least/leftovers.

SEE – in giving God the first/best 10th, we are:

- Acknowledging that every blessing in life comes from Him and we're stewards of these blessings
- Willingly setting God on the throne of our lives giving Him 1st place as the object of our worship
- Trusting God's way is better than our way by readily submitting to His will for our lives
- Asking/allowing God to use our lives for His glory

SEE – the story of Cain/Abel reminds us that giving and generosity are always more about one's attitude and ambition than it is about the amount.

Which brings us to a 2nd passage in **Proverbs 3:9-10**:

Honor the Lord w/ your blessings, 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

This verse speaks to the 1st rule of Biblical stewardship – which is – God is far more interested in what He wants to give **TO** us than what He can get **FROM** us.

I **HONOR** the Lord

This phrase speaks to our **purpose/objective**. *In everything we do, in word or in deed, we're to do it to bring honor/glory to God.* (see Colossians 3:17)

Why do you do what you do? It is to win the applause of men or the applause of heaven? Is it to bring honor to your name or honor to God's name?

In this instance, Solomon is encouraging us to use every *gift, talent, and blessing* in our lives to shine a light on the person, presence, and power of God.

II **FIRST-FRUITS** of all of your crops

This is the **means** or **provision** of how we're to honor God. That is, w/ the first/best of every area/blessing in our lives, we're to strive to use it to honor God.

Time	prioritizing God in your day
Talents	using your gifts, talents, abilities for Him
Treasures	using your financial resources for G.C.
Tongue	honoring God and others w/ your speech
Temple	taking care of your physical/mental body
Testimony	guarding your reputation/influence

When I make my priority to give God the first/best of these areas of my life, it changes my priorities, values, and behaviors – affecting every area of my life. **An example is a 10 min. conversation...**

DEEPER – *Early in Israel's history*, God commanded His people to bring to Him the first/best of all their crops/livestock and all else w/ which He'd blessed them. They were instructed to dedicate their firstborn child to Him. This is a significant truth b/c giving of one's first-fruits served (1) as a token of their gratitude to the Lord for His blessings to them; (2) as a proclamation of their dependence and stewardship for the rest of the harvest – the fact that all of it belonged to God; and (3) as an acknowledgement that God had redeemed/delivered them from Egyptian bondage.

The same is true for the N.T. believer. Paul reminds us that the ultimate reason for giving our first/best to God today is b/c God gave His first/best to us in Jesus to redeem/deliver us from the bondage of sin. (POSB)

You know the grace that has come to us thru Jesus the Anointed. He set aside His infinite riches in heaven to be born into the lowest of circumstances so that you may gain great riches thru His humble poverty and sacrificial death. 2 Corinthians 8:9

IOW – b/c God so love you – He gave His first/best to you to rescue you from what you deserve by bearing on Himself what He didn't deserve so that He could give you His best will/plan for your life.

This serves as more than a reason for us to give; it also shows us how to give – like Him – w/ our first/best.

III Your **BARNS** will be filled to overflowing

To be clear – this is NOT a health/wealth prosperity teaching, but it is a promise from God that if we put Him first, offering to Him our first/best of every area of our lives – He will reveal His will, guide our steps, and meet us at the point of our need for His glory.

This is where the rubber meets the proverbial road in stewardship. Uniquely tied to stewarding our blessings is God's specific will for our lives. That is, the reason/purpose for which God created us.

If I will honor the Lord by putting Him first in my life – then He will direct my steps toward His will for me.

But here's the issue – b/c we're sinful, self-centered, and short-sighted by nature, we often don't understand that our time, talents, treasures, tongue, temple, and testimony (our blessings) are about discovering and living out God's will for us. Instead, we often see them as a means by which we can live independently (and oftentimes in defiance of God).

So, to help/bless us – God asks for a ***tithe*** of every area of our lives so that we will trust in Him instead of in ourselves so that He can bless us for His glory.

THUS – when we honor God by giving Him the first and best of every area of our lives – we enable Him to do for us and thru us what only He can do.

The farmer can plow, sow, water, and weed, but he can't make the seed grow – only God can produce the harvest. The gardener can dress/prune the vine, but only God can fill the vine w/ grapes. The order of this process is clear thru-out Scripture: B/c God gave to us in Jesus – we are to give to Him a portion of our blessing to ensure that our perspective in life never gets out of whack or out of sync w/ Him.

Let me close w/ a sweet story. A little girl thought pearls were just the most beautiful of all jewelry. So, one day at the store, she begged her dad to buy her a plastic pearl necklace – which he did. She wore them everywhere and on all occasions. One day, the dad decided he was going to bless his daughter w/ a genuine pearl necklace.

So, w/ the real pearls in hand, he went up to his daughter's room to talk w/ her about her pearls. Of course, she gushed about how much she loved them. So, when he asked her to give him her pearls, she became very anxious. In turn, she offered him something else in return, but refused to surrender her pearls. The next evening, the dad returned to her room to once again ask for her pearls, and once again, she declined and offered him something else. After 3 or 4 days, the girl finally relented – and said to her dad, “I can tell this is important to you that I give you my pearls that I love so much... and if they mean this much too you... here... you can have them b/c I know you love me and you will take care of them. And as the girl reached out to surrender her plastic pearls, her dad, pulled out the real pearls to bless his daughter.

In many ways, I believe this is the great truth of biblical stewardship. God is asking us to surrender what we believe will bless/satisfy us, to give us even more than we can ask or imagine – but we have to let go and trust Him, b/c we know His heart for us.

Remember, God isn't so much interested in getting it from you as He is interested in getting it to you.

It all begins w/ having a right understanding of the tithe. It's not O.T. and it's not the Law – and it's certainly not about your money. The tithe is about giving to God the first/best 10th of every area of your life b/c you want to live in dependence and under the generous hand of God b/c you desire God's best for you and your family.