

At my dad's funeral a couple of weeks ago, I had the chance to express my memories and appreciation for what he had made of his life. And as I did so, I couldn't help but think of the day my family would be doing the same for me. The death of someone close to you will do that. As I thought about it, I kept asking myself two questions: What am I making of my life? How am I stewarding everything that has been given to me? It was a challenging, but necessary, conversation I continue to have with myself.

There will come a day for all of us where we will be laid to rest and someone will have some words to say about what we've made of our lives. Hopefully good things! Thinking about that day may cause you to ask the same questions of yourselves that I have been asking of myself recently. What are you making of your life? How are you stewarding everything that has been given to you? And that's what I want to talk about over the next few weeks.

This morning we are kicking off a new series called *Human Resources*. We are going to spend the next few Sundays considering how to view, and what to do, with **all** God has given us. My intent for this series is that it goes far beyond money. You see, for many of us, the idea of stewardship has always been talked about in the context of money and giving. And while we're going to talk about money and generosity, which is a good thing since Jesus talked about money and generosity a lot, I want us to take a look at every aspect of our lives: our abilities, our relationships, our time, our stuff, our God-given purpose and, yes, our money. And my prayer is that we would see all of these things God provides not just as resources to be utilized but as **the means to making the most of the life God has given us**.

The best place to begin is...in the beginning. We don't have to get out of Genesis 1 for us to have a great understanding of what God has called us to do and what God has given to us for that pursuit. In it are contained two foundational truths central to any conversation about stewardship.

**Everything we have is owned by God.** If we have any shot at doing this well, we have to get this down. Until then, everything else we discuss will be confused.

**[Genesis 1:1] In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.** At the very beginning, there was God. Eternal, powerful, sovereign, creating something from nothing at the mere expression of words. This is the first of over 30 mentions of "God" in Genesis 1. He is on the move, and this is all about Him and his will. The inescapable truth of that chapter is that **He who creates, owns**. Just ask any two-year-old building something down in our Kid's Ministry this morning. "It's mine!" God is the creator. Therefore, God is the owner. It's all his.

That ownership extends beyond the stuff we have. It includes you. **[Psalm 24:1] <sup>1</sup> The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein.**

God's ownership includes your life. God's ownership includes your body. The New Testament says, "You are not your own. You were bought with a price." That means your very life is on loan from God. There is nothing that exists in your world that is outside of the ownership of God. You are the steward.

This is the place to start because it confronts the belief that what we have really belongs to us. If you consider your stuff as your own, then you'll be tempted to consider that it exists to serve your needs and purposes. But if we can get to the place where we acknowledge that everything we have really belongs to God, it will shift our thinking. If this doesn't belong to me, then maybe it's intended for something or someone other than just me.

That's where the idea of stewardship comes in. **Stewardship is the management of something that belongs to someone else.** Think about Joseph in the Bible. He was the manager of Potiphar's house. He did not own it, but he oversaw it. Some of you work with a financial advisor. You have assets that you have asked them to help invest and manage. They do not take over ownership of your assets, but they do take over stewardship. Maybe some of you have house-sat before. You get to live in the house and enjoy the surroundings, but you also have to take care of it. And the more you take care of it, the more you'll enjoy it. But it never belongs to you. Or, maybe like me, you have a new 16-year-old in your house who does not own the car they are driving, but they better be stewarding it well! God owns it all. We are his managers.

### **Everything we have was given by God.**

This is the second place to start because it confronts the idea that we are responsible for all we have; our success, abilities, wealth, status, etc. And just like our belief that we own it tempts us to use all things for ourselves, the belief that we are responsible for it diminishes gratitude and leads to the same conclusion. Yes, we must put what God gives us to work, work hard, take risks, and persevere through difficult times. But ultimately, your intellect and abilities were given to you by God, the success you've had was made possible by God, and the favor you have received has been by God's grace. When we grasp that it's all been given by God, it will create in us a desire to manage it well.

So if God owns it all and God has given it to us to steward, what is he up to? Is he randomly creating and giving out stuff, or is there are a greater purpose at work?

**[Genesis 1:26-31] <sup>26</sup> Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." <sup>27</sup> So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. <sup>28</sup> And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." <sup>29</sup> And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. <sup>30</sup> And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. <sup>31</sup> And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.**

You may have read this passage many times and now kind of fly through it. But these six verses show the abundance of resources God pours out on humanity. They are the means through which we steward the purpose of God.

The first resource given is **God's image**. We are set apart from all creation as beings who bear the image of God. That means God has given us, in a limited way, his character, wisdom, abilities, spiritual and moral discernment, and the capacity for relationship. And the purpose he has given relates directly to that image. **We are mirrors and manufacturers**. We are to be God's representatives by reflecting that image and we are to fill the earth with that image so that God would be known, would be glorified, throughout.

Next is **God's blessing**. He showers us with his favor to accomplish what he has called us to. We can respond in thanksgiving or in taking it for granted.

He has given us **relationships**. He is a relational God and being made in his image means we can have a relationship with him and with each other. There is something unique given to married couples in this passage, but our relational capacity extends to all others. Jesus gave the great commandment to love God and love one another. That means we are in this together and our relationships are to be lovingly stewarded. Moms, this is especially relevant to you today. Your children were created by God and given to you by God. You are called to steward that relationship and foster the character of God in your children who possess his image. If I can encourage you, a recent survey shows Christian teenagers talk about faith with mothers more than any other person. That is stewardship opportunity!

He has given us **material possessions** to meet our material needs. We are not to hoard it, nor are we to be wasteful. God provides for our needs and we are to be generous with what we have.

He has given us **work** to do. If you continue reading in chapter 2, God puts Adam in the Garden and tells him to work it. Work is a blessing and pre-Fall condition. It is holy, and it is something I want to talk about more in the future.

And, finally, God gives us **time**. There was evening and morning each day of creation. God gave man time as a rhythm to live our lives, to balance between rest and work, and to create margin to connect with him and each other. If ever there was a time for us to talk about the stewardship of time, it's now.

While there are other things we can add to that list, it's clear God began with an expectation for our lives. He provides us resources to fulfill that expectation and delegates to us a responsibility to steward those resources for his purposes. I want to close with three encouragements I pray spurs you on as you consider how you are living the life God has given to you.

**You have all you need to live a well-stewarded life.** You are lacking in nothing you need to accomplish what God is calling you to. You have life, you have the image of God, you have been enabled by God's Spirit, and God knows and has superintended the relationships you have, where you live, how much money you have, and the number of days you have left to live. Can we all be equipped to become more effective at what we do? Sure. And that's the role of the

church. But you are a bucket of God-provided resources that he has created to be poured out to fulfill the calling he has on your life.

If we understand that, I believe it should be both liberating and inspiring. There is freedom when we understand we are not the creator, owner, or giver of these resources. That's God's business. You don't have to stress out about how to make it, earn it, keep it, or make anything happen. You don't have to worry about not having enough. Our job is to receive and go. God provides. Our attitude simply must be "I will faithfully steward whatever you give to me."

I believe it's also inspiring because there's no need to wait around. We can have an eagerness to get in the game. I always loved coaching young boys who realized they had the knowledge and skill to play the game. You couldn't keep them off the field. It should be the same for us. You have all you need right now to make an impact for God. Your stewardship can start today. And in five years, maybe you'll have more or different resources, and that will be exactly what you need to live out what God is calling you to at that place and time. But, until then, there is no need to wait. You have all you need. Get moving!

### **A well-stewarded life is the means to a flourishing life.**

A conversation about stewardship can very quickly devolve into a list of "musts" and "shoulds". But that's now what God wants for us. Ancient religions had their gods creating humans to be slave labor, to do the things the gods did not want to do, and to provide for the gods what they did not want to provide for themselves. But the God of the Bible, the one true God, created us to be co-creators with him. Not slaves, but co-workers. 1 Corinthians 3 says, "**For we are God's fellow workers**". God created us to be a participant with him in fulfilling his purposes. **Our most fulfilling and abundant life is found in that pursuit.** That's way more than a to-do list. It's an invitation to a flourishing life. But in order for us to flourish in the way God intends for us to flourish, we must rightly steward the resources he has given. It's when we poorly steward those resources that our lives are diminished.

We have to look no further than Genesis 3 to see how this happens. Until then, Adam and Eve lived a flourishing life in perfect union with God as they stewarded all God gave them. The fall of man can certainly be attributed to pride, but that pride manifested into poor stewardship.

Adam and Eve poorly stewarded the Word of God (listened to serpent), their relationship with God (disobedience), their relationship with each other (silence in temptation), and the material resources God provided. "Eat from any tree but this one." In the midst of great abundance, they still wanted more. It was when this poor stewardship happened that they no longer flourished in their lives. They were conflicted with God (hiding), with each other (blaming), and with creation (groaning). Work became laborious and labor became painful. The image of God was distorted, death entered the world and eternal beings, who were given time to establish a rhythm to balance his days, now viewed it as a countdown clock to the end of his days. Poor stewardship led to the fall of mankind. Flourishing became languishing. And that's the same challenge we face in the stewardship of our resources.

The key here is to go back to chapter 1. After creating them, the first thing God gave was his blessing. When we give someone our blessing, we're saying "I'm for you, I want to see you thrive, and I will give you what you need to make that happen." All we have isn't just raw materials to use as we manufacture a life for God. Everything we have is a blessing from God. It's the outpouring of grace. It's the expression of his love for us. And it's the resources he gives for us to flourish in what he's called us to. The purpose of God and our fulfillment are not opposed to one another. In fact, it's just they opposite. They are inextricably related, because when we pursue the former, we experience the latter.

**A well-stewarded life is the means to a rewarded eternal life.** At the end of your life, not only will you be remembered by a friend or family member for what you made of your life, but each of us has an appointment with God where he will do the same thing.

**[Colossians 3:23-24] <sup>23</sup> Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, <sup>24</sup> knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.**

We often talk of the day of judgment as time to fear, where God will open up a filing cabinet full of material on all the things we did wrong. But this is a day we do not need to approach with dread. You have already been approved through the work of Christ. This is a time of reward for those who have stewarded well all God has blessed them with. It is a time to say to God "Here is all I've done with all you've given me." That means what you do now will echo throughout eternity.

And so I want to close by asking you the same question that ended our bumper video. It's a question that recognizes that God created, owns, and gives all things, and he does so for a purpose, a purpose to glorify him, and bless us. God gives good gifts, so let me ask you: **What will you do with yours?**

**BAPTISM**