

“Conversations with Harry Reeder and Bruce Stallings”

Part Thirty-two

November 1, 2020 • Sunday Evening

This is our supplemental and substitutionary ministry until we're able to fully open up our Sunday evening worship safely, appropriately and effectively. This is a special edition because we are now walking into our every member commitment season. We're looking at this matter of personal stewardship which is, how do I steward the time, talents – physical and spiritual – and treasures, resources and finances that God has given to me? Then as we spend time taking inventory and praying, we have a Lord's Day where we commit that to the Lord which is coming up. It is a wonderful time of commitment and consecration.

As we walk through these three sermons on stewardship, God's given His church a mission, a message, and ministries and your personal stewardship is your engagement, your involvement, and you being God's instrument to resource us as a church being able to gather to get that mission done. I think of it like a sports team and I'll just football, American style, where we all have different gifts and abilities, but we give our time for the practice and for the game. We give our talents to it, whether it's a quarterback or a left tackle or whatever position it is and then we bring our resources for we have skin in the game.

Part of our resourcing is God's tithe which is His for that's not really our resource, that's our faithfulness to bring the resource He has entrusted to us. Then our offerings, like thank offerings, love offerings and faith promise offerings go with it. If you're a member of our church all of your commitments of your time, talents and treasure under the leadership of our elders and deacons will be marshaled in that direction. Our job is to try to equip and disciple you so that together with the resources, we're able to move forward with our time, talents and treasures to get this mission done until Jesus comes again as we stay faithfulness to the message and the ministries that He has ordained.

During this time, we have an elder who has a great, instructive and inspirational challenge to give to us with four points that I think will be helpful. Then there will be an opportunity to look at what happens nationally in our ministries. I pray this will be enjoyable and hopefully encouraging and I know it'll be instructive and by God's grace, inspirational. Bruce, will lead us into it.

Bruce:

One of the things we look forward to each year at the stewardship season is the opportunity to gather together as a congregation, come to our convocation and hear from our stewardship Education Committee testimony shared with us, and then an opportunity to hear from our different ministry partners and how the Lord is blessing them and how our investment in their ministry is honoring Him. We get just a taste of some of the fruit of that investment. We get the opportunity to do that now as we listen to Mark Edwards, then to these ministry partners and then our stewardship education chairman.

Mark Edwards:

I'm very excited to be here today during our every member commitment season to talk about stewardship. This is something that I've had a lifelong interest in. Right after I got out of college, someone recommended a book called Master Your Money, written by Ron Blue and that's what started my lifelong interest in stewardship, its principles and what that means to my

family as I try to see God's will in that area. I've also had the opportunity to teach on the subject, and one of the things I quickly learned was that it's difficult to talk about financial stewardship and not also include the other aspects of stewardship which are our talent and our time. So certainly, Godly stewardship encompasses all of these things. I wish I could tell you that I had mastered all of the Biblical truths that we'll be talking about today, but the reality is, we're all on a journey here. It's part of our sanctification and we all are just seeking God's will in this area. I know His plan is for us to seek Him.

This year's theme from the Stewardship Committee is to be found faithful and that comes from I Corinthians 4:2 which says [2] *Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful.* We all want to be found faithful but we all have to also figure out exactly what that means because we are not all created with the same opportunities or gifting, but we all are accountable. Scripture really doesn't provide any easy three step process for defining really what it means to be found faithful, but it does provide some very clear Biblical themes that we can for handling money and possessions. I have identified four themes or four cornerstones I want to cover today that if we apply to our lives, can hopefully get us on the right path.

The first one is that Godly stewardship is a response to the two greatest commandments, which are to love God and love our neighbors as ourselves. I think giving at least in part, accomplishes both of these. First, as it relates to God, giving is a form of worship. It expresses our love and reverence for God and we're submitting to His authority. In doing that, it helps free us from the love of money and the other pitfalls associated with money. As it relates to loving others, some type of giving is always required. I love the quote that says "You can give without loving, but you cannot love without giving." When we give financially to the church, it goes toward missionaries or those in need, and we're answering the call to love others as ourselves.

The second cornerstone is we are most like God when we are giving. God is a giver. He gave us this life, this earth, and everything that we have. He gives us an opportunity to spend eternity with Him. We can do a lot of things as Christians, like read our Bibles, we pray, we do all different types of worship, but we're most like Him when we are giving and as Christians, it should be our desire to be like Him. So the pursuit of godliness really includes living with a gift giving mindset in all aspects of giving.

Annie Johnson Flynt, who was stricken with severe health issues, wrote many hymns and poems. One was titled 'He Giveth More Grace' and the last stanza of that great hymn says;
*His love has no limits, His grace has no measure,
His power no boundary, known unto men;
For out of His infinite riches in Jesus
He giveth and giveth and giveth again.* God is a giver.

The third theme or cornerstone is that we should live like stewards instead of owners. A steward is a person who cares or manages something for someone else. How do we develop the mindset and character of a Godly steward? I have five principles that address this. First and most important is recognizing that God owns it all and that we're just managing the resources for Him. As such, we view our possessions as a responsibility and not a right and we're accountable for those things. The more that we truly believe that, the easier it is to be a Godly steward. On the other hand, an owner looks at his possessions strictly as his, that he can manage any way he sees fit, and that his accountability really is only to himself. The second one is that stewards are prayerful about spending decisions and have a desire to see God's will with their finances. Owners really are just focused on their own agenda. Thirdly, is that stewards are available. They live their lives in such a way that makes them financially available and the enemy doesn't want

us to be available. He wants us to be in bondage so that we will be ineffective for God's Kingdom. The fourth is, for a Godly steward, financial freedom comes when we accept and practice Biblical principles with our finances. Owners view financial freedom from a prosperity mindset. There's nothing wrong with wealth as long as it's a byproduct of being faithful. Fifthly, is that stewards recognize that money is a servant. With owners, money becomes a master. Money is a terrible master but can be an excellent servant.

The fourth theme or cornerstone is that we're to live with an eternal perspective with our finance. Jesus tells the parable of the rich fool in Luke 12:16-21 which says [16] *And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, [17] and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' [18] And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. [19] And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry." [20] But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' [21] So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."*

What is the rich man's biggest issue? It wasn't his wealth. It was his lack of an eternal perspective. He could have made eternal investments with his abundance, but he chose to live really in the now, just with a temporal mindset. He didn't balance saving and giving. He basically just saved everything. Now, giving is the ultimate long term investment because the returns compound forever. So, in order for us to live within eternal perspective, we must value what God values, to care about the things that move God. Through Jesus' example it's pretty clear what God cares about, like advancing the Gospel and caring for the vulnerable. I think a great way to think strategically about giving is to build an eternity portfolio, which would be balanced in evangelism, discipleship, and mercy. And I think giving to the church is a great foundation for that building an eternity portfolio.

Our family has always made it a practice to tithe to our local church and then we make offerings beyond our tithe as God leads us. Tithing was part of the Old Covenant and is mentioned several places in the Old Testament. While the New Testament doesn't address it specifically as a command, it clearly addresses the themes of stewardship and giving. Jesus spoke extensively about money and possession – 16 of His 38 parables were on the topic, and He obviously knew that finances would challenge us maybe as much as anything else in our lives.

While tithing is not necessarily a New Testament command, it's certainly considered a Godly practice, and it's a great foundational way to live with a steward's mindset because it incorporates returning our first fruits to the Lord and doing it on a regular basis. There are many New Testament examples of giving beyond the tithe, but not short of it. Tithing really shouldn't be viewed as the ceiling for giving, but the entry point. For the church tithing is the financial fuel that supports everything that we do here, the ministry that we do in word and deed, evangelism, discipleship and mercy.

Another way to think about the call to be found faithful is not just a call to us individually, it's also a call to the church. As leaders, we also must continue to be found faithful in the way that we steward your tithes and offerings as the church has done for over half a century. The bottom line, is that tithing really isn't that hard when we have the mindset of a steward and that we also know that the church is going to be found faithful as stewards of those gifts.

So in closing, I want to point to a story from the New Testament, and this was at the point where Peter, James and John were about to leave their lives as fishermen and follow Jesus full time and become fishers of men. After they'd been out fishing all night and not successful, hadn't caught anything, Jesus in the early morning hours called them in from the shore and suggested that they cast their nets on the other side of the boat into deeper water. They ended up catching so many fish they couldn't get them all back in the boat.

So I have a question. What is deeper water look like for you? Is it better financial stewardship in your life? Maybe you feel like that's already a strength so it could be something else. Maybe it's better using the talents that God has giving you, or maybe it's being more available with your time. The reality is that we all have deeper water out there for us if we're willing to trust God, as the fisherman did in becoming fishers of men.

New person:

Erika was my last patient of the day, so I had a little time left at the end of the day so I asked her, "Erika, when the time comes, many years from now, I hope, you know for sure that you're going to heaven. She hesitated and said, 'I hope so. I think so. I've never done any terrible things like kill anybody. I try to do good things.' I asked her, "Why did Jesus die?" With a puzzled look, she said, 'I don't know.' Then I had the wonderful opportunity of sharing with her the great news of a God that loves her immeasurably and gave everything, including His life, so that she could be with Him forever. It was a beautiful thing to watch. She had a mask on, but I could see the joy and excitement in her eyes to see God working in her heart, revealing that truth to her as I spoke the Gospel to her. She said she'd never heard anything like this. I explained to her that it was through a simple prayer of faith that she could receive this gift that Jesus was offering and then I asked her if she wanted to pray that prayer. She looked at me like I was crazy and said, 'Why wouldn't somebody want to receive this gift?' and she prayed that prayer. It was a privilege and blessing to see this precious sister in Christ born into the Kingdom of God that day.

Cedric Moore:

Things are going well in the middle of a pandemic and I wanted to thank you that our ministry is still going on. We're going door to door, reaching out during this time, since schools are closed and so much of our ministry takes place inside of schools. We're putting on our mask and finding ways to be the hands of feet of Christ during this time and still doing discipleship. I do some of it online but a lot it is still taking place face to face in a social distance way. An update I wanted to share is, currently this year we have four graduates that are alumni now with Young Life that are going through training. I'm so excited to see them grow and stepping back into their community to disciple others. Thank you for what you do and I'm so grateful for your support.

Mark and Bree:

We are part of the legacy Sunday school community. We moved to our neighborhood about five years ago and began intentionally praying that the Lord would use us in our neighborhood, through going to the park, the library and just walking around. We have been able to meet many of our neighbors and we started having cookouts in the backyard. We have really had the opportunity to build relationships, love and serve our neighbors.

We have been part of a weekly small group with firewood since moving to Birmingham about two years ago. I really felt the Lord calling us to use that weekly group to share Christ with our neighbors and the existing couples that were part of that group have shared that same vision to intentionally share with unbelievers. So, we invited those couples in our neighborhood that we had built relationships with, and over the last year and a half have really seen one couple in particular remain faithful to that group and have seen God really work in their lives. It's really been a blessing to be challenged weekly, to boldly share and a challenge for our own walks personally, to really walk with the Lord. That has been a tremendous blessing and we thank you and are grateful for the support through the legacy community. We're grateful to really be a part of this ministry and for your continued prayers.

Mary Grace:

I am a freshman at the Vestavia Hills High School. Emma, Claire and I had the opportunity to start First Priority at our high school. First Priority is an opportunity for us to just share the Gospel with students that attend our high school. The theme is 'every last one' so I like spreading the Gospel to every student at our school. We had our first meeting on March 10th and we really didn't know what to expect. We had the leadership team together, we had Miss Debbie speaking for our first meeting even though First Priority is supposed to be a student led organization. From then on the students have led it. We didn't know what to expect, but we had over 70 to 80 students. So many now come to the First Priority meetings because Miss Debbie was able to pump them up. When COVID hit we were really unsure how we were going to continue First Priority especially since we were so encouraged by that first meeting.

We saw how Briarwood Youth Group was using zoom to continue staying in touch with students so we decided to try that for First Priority and it was actually a really good turnout. We were still able to worship, have fun games and share the Gospel message. I have grown up at Briarwood and I have always learned such good truths. I have learned how we are supposed to live our lives, live for Christ and share the Gospel, not just reading His Word. As I grow closer to the Lord it has made me want to share the Gospel with others.

New person:

I am very thankful for the partnership of Briarwood Presbyterian Church with Emmanuel Upstate and with people that recently came to Christ, and especially for people that are the only believer in their homes and families. Please continue to pray for our ministry.

Carolina Phillips:

My grandmother and I decided we were going to look for a church just to give us community and find something to do. We walked into Briarwood one day and we really liked it and I got connected with a college ministry here where I met a few people like Olivia Sims and Genevieve. Genevieve began discipling me during that time. I had never read the Bible before, and she began to read it with me and guiding me along with it. I started like learning even more about God. Genevieve told me that I had to give my life to Christ and I couldn't just do the work and not put my best efforts forward. With her help I eventually found God and I've been so happy ever since. I found joy in my life because of that.

Brant and Mary Adamson:

We have enjoyed worshiping with you for about six months now at Briarwood virtually and it's been a great blessing to us to share in your music, preaching and the exposition of God's Word. We thank you for the opportunity and the technology that you've made available so that we can enjoy it.

I'm sure many or most of you have found these last months of being more homebound because of COVID has been really challenging and potentially pretty discouraging emotionally. I cannot tell you how many days Brant and I have come home in the evening and said, 'Let's tune into Briarwood tonight.' I find it such an encouraging time to be drawn back into the Word of God and to join other believers in a city that we've never even visited but we feel such a deep connection with. I think that's been one of the silver linings to this whole COVID season. I hope it's an encouragement to you to know that these two people in the middle of Nebraska have been really encouraged by being a part of your church family virtually. God bless you.

New Person:

I'd like to share one story with you about Aubrey. Aubrey was in our 4K class last year and they were so surprised and delighted to find out that Aubrey was going to be a big sister and she was thrilled. It was Christmas all day, every day, because she was so excited about having her very own live baby. In June, baby brother arrived and Aubrey's mother called her teacher from last year about two months into the summer. She said, "Miss Daniels, you'll never believe what Aubrey did." Miss Daniels was thinking, 'I'm not sure I want to know what Aubrey did with her baby brother.' The mom said, "I heard Aubrey talking and I went to her door and she was on her knees by the crib talking to her baby brother. I could tell she was telling him a story, but I didn't know what it was until the very end when she raised her little arm and said, 'Moses said, Pharaoh, let my people go.' Then she quietly said to her, baby brother, 'I know lots of Bible stories and I'm going to tell you every single one.'"

Alonzo and Vanessa Jones:

We are the founders of Biblical Marriage Institute (BMI). First, we just want to say thank you for standing with Biblical Marriage Institute. Hosea 4:6 says people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. In America a million marriages end in divorce every year. Many of those marriages could have been saved if the couples had knowledge of how to build and maintain a Biblical marriage.

BMI helps prevent marital and family breakdown through Biblical education and mentoring. Just this year, we mentored two couples who were on the brink of a divorce. By God's grace, these marriages were saved. One couple told us 'We feel like we have a new marriage. It's better than it's ever been.' We thank God for what He's done for these couples and others like you.

Success stories like these are possible because of your prayers and your support. So, again, thank you.

John with Harvest USA:

A pastor called me and said, 'Can you come and speak to a group of men?' This was in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, which is just about an hour from Philadelphia. When I arrived there, I saw about 50 horse and buggies. This was Amish country. I sat there thinking, 'this is going to be a God thing.' I went inside and saw about 60 men sitting around a table in their white shirts and black pants and all their black hats stacked in a corner. They said to me, "John, pornography

and homosexuality has gotten into our community and we don't know what to do.” I was amazed not because of that, but because they were asking the help of an Englishman for that’s what they call outsiders for help. God has just enabled us to in some ways help this broken community, which is a very sexy, broken meaning, and understand more about the Gospel. Out 17 member staff could not do any of this without your investment in what we do here at Harvest USA. So, we just want to thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

Matt Owens from Christ the Redeemer:

This is the church that we launched in Quincy, Massachusetts through Christ and your support. Our first meeting was on March 1st in this space, and then two weeks later, the pandemic (COVID) shut things down. We met virtually or remotely for nearly four months, but now I'm thankful to say we're back meeting again. The Lord's Word is being proclaimed here. I would ask that you pray for us and that God's Word be proclaimed in this space. But not only that, that the Gospel would send us out into the communities around us to proclaim His Word to our neighbors and our neighborhoods.

New Person:

I want to share with you all what's going on at Urban Hope Community church through your prayers and your support with our ministry here in Fairfield. We've been going through this pandemic with revival prayer. That's been a thing. We've been continuously doing prayer meetings once a month, praying for a revival in the city of Fairfield, and in our nation as well. We have seen amazing work by the Lord through that time. Particularly, I can think of two young men who have really come on strong in regards to their desire, their hunger to know the Lord and to spread that among their peers in the community and is among the demographic of young men that we are pursuing here in Fairfield. It's been amazing to see their passion and their desire to be at almost every event that we offer during this time. They are just soaking up the Word and soaking up what's taking place here because of their desire to just grow in the Lord. They are spreading that among their peers. It's been really exciting to see them on fire ultimately for the Lord. We continue to push forward through this pandemic. Many people are attending our services on Sundays. That's given us a desire to continue to push forth with the work. It gets hard, it gets tiring, but the Lord sustains us and continues to allow us to endure through this. We have a lot of excitement going on because we're in a season and period of growth within our church through the various ministries that we have right now. Much of this is due to the prayers and support of the greater Kingdom and Briarwood is included in that. We are very thankful for your prayers and support and ask that you will continue to do that.

Second half ministry:

This ministry is really all about coming alongside men to help them have an impact in God's Kingdom. One of the areas of focus for us, based on surveys from men, was to get involved with meaningful service in the community. So in the early stages of the COVID 19 pandemic, food banks in our community were reporting about a ten times uptick in their request for food from needy families. Our game plan was to call on men in our database and mobilize them to be drivers and donors. So about 22 men volunteered to drive, and we had about 60 families who responded to requests to donate. These men collected those non-perishables and delivered them to one of these ministries on a designated day. This gives you a glimpse about

what our ministry is involved in doing, and we're very excited what God is going to do in the future.

Christian Terrell:

My husband is Nathan, and we have three children, 4, 2, and 3 months old. We have benefited from the nursery ministry in so many ways. This spring, my daughter, who is 4, came in from the swings and was so excited to tell us that she had asked Jesus to take her yucky heart and make it clean. What a very, very special moment for us. We so appreciate the Briarwood staff and the nursery coming alongside of us and teaching these traits to our children so that we have moments like this at this very young age. I am so grateful for all that they do, for the staff, for the way they prepare their curriculum for Sunday mornings. Everything is so thoughtful. They really are coming alongside the parents to prepare these kids and grow them up to love the Lord and to know His Word.

Christ Presbyterian in Auburn, Alabama:

We thank Briarwood and everyone who has supported us and helped plant this church two years ago. This last summer we were able to become a self-governing church. I want to tell you a little bit about what the Lord has done in individual hearts. I want to tell you about a young girl named Isabelle who came to us in August. Isabelle had never been in a church in her entire life. Her father is Muslim. Her mother has a cultural Christianity. Isabelle came into our church and she said, "I'm sorry, I'm so awkward. I've never been to church before." She met my wife at the front door and got seated. Isabelle has been back with us each and every week and she has learned more and more about Christ and more and more about the church. I believe she was probably converted this summer before she came to us, but even now Isabelle has jumped right in to our inquirers class that meets at my house on Sunday evenings, and she is investing in that inquirers class and hoping to join our church later on this fall.

Your gift to our church and your investment in us since the very beginning has allowed us to reach out to young girls like Isabelle and to invite them into the church and welcome them into what it means to be a worshiping body of believers. So thank you so much and I want to just tell you how much we appreciate your kind gift to us and your support. God bless.

Jeff Flannery:

I am the stewardship chairman for the diaconate here at Briarwood Presbyterian Church. I hope you were as encouraged as I was to hear about the different ministries going on around Birmingham and around the world to further the Gospel of Christ. Thank you to Mark Edwards for his message on stewardship. I love the line 'We are most like Christ when we are giving' not just financial giving but giving of our time and talents also. To do this, we must be available. If there is anything making you or your family unavailable to do Kingdom work, I encourage you during this every member commitment season to reevaluate your family's time and priorities.

Mark also said that stewards are prayerful about their spending decisions. We are all not born with the same opportunities and gifting, but we are all accountable. So, I encourage you to prayerfully consider how you and your family can build your Kingdom portfolio. During this next week, I encourage you to spend time in the Word and in prayer so that you may be aware of the Holy Spirit's leading in your life. I encourage you to pray about your pledge to the church and how you can get involved.

Due to increased infection control measures we are offering multiple ways for you to submit your pledge. You can turn in your card next Sunday at the worship service. You can mail your card to the Church Accounting Office at 2200 Briarwood Way, Birmingham, Alabama, 35243. You can email your pledge to EMC response that Briarwood.org and you can also submit it online at Briarwood.org/EMC. There is also a link on the home page.

In closing, no matter how hard we try, we will never be a perfect steward, but the good news is for Christians is there was a perfect Steward who has found perfectly faithful and He loved His master with all of His heart, soul, mind and strength. That was Jesus and He offers us His righteousness. This should make us want to praise, worship and serve Him. We become good stewards not to gain His approval, but because we have His approval. The year 2020 has been a difficult year for many, but no matter your circumstance, I pray that you, your family and Briarwood Presbyterian Church would be found faithful so that for God's glory, our church can continue to equip Christians to worship God, to reach Birmingham and reach the world for Christ.