

## **GOD-PLEASING STEWARDSHIP 1** **“MAINTAINING BALANCE”**

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It has been my tradition for the past 11, to spend some time each year talking about the important subject of money. 50% of all the parables have to do with money, one out of every 6 verses in the NT attributed to Jesus talks about money, there are more verses in the Bible about money than there are about grace, mercy, heaven and hell combined! Think it's important?

Yet, what is one of the most often heard criticisms of the church? “All they do is beg for money!” Well, we don't beg for it around here, but we certainly need to talk about it. Money is a necessary ingredient of life in this world, and this community is not immune from its necessity, its abuses, and its misunderstandings! I'm appalled by how many churches I learn of who speak nothing about this subject, and even more appalled by how many preachers I know who absolutely refuse to address it. I love talking about money, and I make no apologies for that. Consider this:

When you go to your doctor for your annual check-up, he or she will often begin by poking, prodding, and pressing on various places around your body, all the while asking, "Does this hurt? How about this?" If you wince or cry out in pain, one of two things has happened. Either the doctor has pushed too hard, without the right sensitivity. Or, more likely, there's something wrong, and the doctor will say, "We'd better do some more tests. It's not supposed to hurt there!" So it is when pastors preach on financial responsibility, and Godly Stewardship; and certain members cry out in discomfort, criticizing the message and even the messenger. Either the pastor has pushed too hard. Or perhaps there's something wrong. In that case, I say, "My friend, we're in need of the Great Physician because it's not supposed to hurt there." Our relationship with money is important!

God-Pleasing Stewardship involves way more than money, I know that; but it includes money, and the foundation of this series will be simply this: **It's all God's!** This verse is our series text:

*Everything we have has come from you, and we give you only what you first gave us!* 1 Chronicles 29:14

William Graham Scroggie once observed: “there are two ways in which a Christian may view his/her money – ‘how much of my money shall I use for God?’ or ‘how much of God’s money shall I use for myself?’” The answer to that question will occupy my sermons for the next 4 weeks. Today we begin by trying to find some balance in our understanding of stewardship. I believe, that to be a God-Pleasing Steward, or manager, balance is essential in these 4 areas:

#### **1. MAINTAINING BALANCE IN EARNING OUR MONEY**

*Then Moses called together the whole community of Israel and told them, ‘These are the instructions the Lord has commanded you to follow. You have six days each week for your ordinary work, but the seventh day must be a Sabbath day of complete rest, a holy day dedicated to the Lord.’ Exodus 35:1-2*

This passage makes clear that we are to earn our money working 6 days a week, (5 in this modern era), and on the 7<sup>th</sup> day we are to Sabbath. Sabbath means more than not playing cards, more than just not working, more than catching up on yard or house work. Keeping the Sabbath, means literally, connecting with God. If your everyday work involves people, then your Sabbath may need to involve silence, or solitude. Sabbath certainly involves worship, but when all of life is considered worship, then the ways of our worship may differ according to our personality, and our work.

This injunction to maintain the balance between work and rest or Sabbath, applies beyond how many days we work each week. It also applies to the attitude we maintain while we work, and the end product for which we work. If our only reason for work is to buy more toys, we’ll likely not be very fulfilled.

If our work consists of nothing more than earning a paycheck, we can blow on whatever we choose, then work has been lost in our selfish pursuit of happiness. If we work with a poor attitude, and do only the minimal necessary to keep from getting fired, I'm not sure we understand the real meaning of work, at least according to Jesus.

You see, God has ordained work, not just to earn a living, but to create a life. We are more than our work, I understand that; but all our work must be done to the glory of God. No matter its routine, boredom factor, or seeming meaninglessness; we work because God works, and expects us to do the same. Being a God-Pleasing Steward means we must maintain balance between work and rest, between earning a living and building a life, between cashing checks and becoming more Christ-like.

Work hard, but remember its still God's money. God, more than likely arranged for you to have the job you have, gave you the intelligence to earn the degree that qualified you to get the job you have, gave you gifts and skills that make you effective at the job you have, but remember...its still God's money, ALL of it! Remember, God gives the birds their food, but He doesn't throw it into their nests.

## **2. MAINTAINING BALANCE IN SAVING OUR MONEY**

*Look here, you rich people, weep and groan with anguish because of all the terrible troubles ahead of you. Your wealth is rotting away, and your fine clothes are moth-eaten rags. Your gold and silver have become worthless. The very wealth you were counting on will eat away your flesh in hell. This treasure you have accumulated will stand as evidence against you on the Day of Judgment...You have spent your years on earth in luxury, satisfying your every whim. Now your hearts are nice and fat, and ready for the slaughter. James 5: 1-6*

I believe that every person ought to learn to save, from an early age. I read this week that fully 50% of the people 30 and younger in the workforce today save absolutely nothing each year! Next week we'll be talking about managing debt, but the statistic will bear repeating: The average 30 year old worker is currently spending \$1.21 cents of every dollar they are earning! That is troubling.

Savings is not just an antiquated idea whose time has come and gone with the rise of the Stock Market and the fall of interest rates on savings accounts. Savings is not necessarily about money or amounts either, it's about maintaining control of our earnings, and being fiscally frugal with what we have. I believe every person ought to be investing in two forms of savings; one, saving for retirement, and two, saving for an emergency. I'm not a financial planner, but some I know suggest that people maintain an active and easily accessed saving account that totals 2 months of your current living expenses. Then when an emergency happens, or worse, you can at least not have to immediately rely on credit cards or loan debt. Saving for retirement is also a Godly form of stewardship. We should not be reliant on the government or relatives to take care of us when we grow older, we must and can, make plans for that now. It is my contention that if a person can't live on 80% of their income, then they probably can't live on 100% of the same. 10% ought to be put toward a saving plan, and 10% ought to be given back to God, which we'll discuss at a later date.

So save for a rainy day, but remember even with substantive retirement accounts or padded stock portfolios, and even modest savings accounts; that our trust must not reside in our local bank or broker...but in God alone! We must be smart, but we must never replace trusting God, with a savings or retirement account.

### **3. MAINTAINING BALANCE IN SPENDING OUR MONEY**

*Tell those who are rich in this world not to be proud and not to trust in their money. Money cannot be trusted. They should put their trust in God. He gives us all we need for our happiness. Tell them to do good and be rich in good works. They should give much to those in need and be ready to share. Then they will be gathering together riches for themselves. These good things are what they will build on for the future. Then they will have the only true life! 1 Tim. 6:17-19*

Donald Trump is fond of saying; "Whoever says money can't buy happiness, doesn't know where to shop." I don't think he's right, do you? Money can't buy happiness, but it can sure buy lots of other stuff.

That's part of the problem. Far too many sincere Christian people, even tithing people miss this important lesson. Giving our gifts, tithes, and offerings to God; doesn't free us to be reckless or irresponsible with the rest of our spending. Remember the foundation of this series: It's All Gods. If that is true beyond this Sunday morning or Stewardship Series mentality; then what we do with what's left over after we give, is just as important as what we give. Here is the basic difference between a God Pleasing Stewardship verses "begging for money." We ought to be learning together that since all we have, and all we are, are gifts from God; then what we give and what we keep; both matter in equal "balance" before God. Amen?

So give your best gifts to God. If you love Jesus, then follow His example and become a dedicated, intentional, even sometimes a sacrificial giver. Do the best you can; but remember how you spend what's left is also important. Balance. I love this quote, and I think it describes the balance that I'm talking about: Measure wealth not by the things you have, but by the things you have for which you would not take money.

#### **4. MAINTAINING BALANCE IN GIVING OUR MONEY**

*No one is to show up in the Presence of God empty-handed; each one must bring as much as he can **manage**, giving generously in response to the blessings of God, your God. Deut. 16:17*

One of the most important principles for balanced Christian living is the law of Hilarious Generosity, a term coined by Dave Sutherland and Kirk Nowery in their book, the 33 Laws of Stewardship. They describe how the word translated "cheerful" (as in "Cheerful giving") in most English Bibles literally means "hilarious." It carries the idea of one who is uproariously delighted to give. Quote: "Living by the Law of Hilarious Generosity, one does not give under the whiplash of necessity, complaining inwardly or being bitter in any way. Rather, one is thankful to even be able to give." I like that a lot. Giving is fun!

I was struck this week in my study for this series how much, how often and how willingly the OT Hebrews gave to God following their release from Egypt, and upon their arrival back in their promised land. For both the construction of the Tabernacle while wandering in the wilderness and as David led them to build Solomon's great temple, the people literally lined up to give, and they gave A LOT! I was struck with what could they possibly have to give? They left Egypt on the run, but must have snuck some treasures out as they left; they found enough gold to build that infamous calf in the shadow of Mt. Sinai, remember that?

I wondered about what motivated them to give so generously, when they didn't have very much...and why we so often don't...It struck me that it may have to do with how much closer they were living to their rescue from Pharaoh, and the bondage of Egypt. I know that people today need to learn how to give, be taught how to give, practice a God-Pleasing Stewardship life; but I wondered, if we lived a bit closer to our own rescue; might we be more motivated to give. If we lived more acutely aware of just how much from which we have been saved, if we lived nearer the shadow of our own Mt. Sinai, if we paused more often to remember the fresh water of the Nile, if we breathed more deeply from the stench of the garbage dump called Calvary...maybe we'd be more willing to give.

I commend and applaud so many of you for your disciplined giving, I am humbled by some of your and your sacrificial giving; and I want to encourage all of us who love Jesus, to continue to do best we can with our giving! It's not that God needs our money; it's All His, remember? It's not even that our community needs our money; it is a matter that we need to give! We need to learn the basic principle that a balanced life involves giving. We are not completely human if we don't give, and we are certainly not uniquely Christian if we don't give generously, intentionally, sometimes sacrificially, and above all 'cheerfully'; hilariously!

John Wesley lived what most would call a pretty balanced life. He was a disciplined, methodical man. Yea, he had some issues with his romantic endeavors, but for the most part he is a great example for all Methodists, all Christ Followers...to follow. He employed and taught a balanced approach to the matters we have been discussing.

This is what he believed: "Earn all you can; save all you can; so you can give all you can!" Wesley often claimed that if he died with more than a few pounds (dollars) in his pocket you could consider him a thief. History records that during his lifetime of ministry, collecting and dispensing thousands of dollars from his offerings; and during his lifetime of writing and publishing books, and tracts, and articles, he generated hundreds of thousands of dollars; and during his lifetime of establishing schools and churches and orphanages and clinics that literally millions of dollars passed through his hands. And when, after making arrangements for his own burial, he died; he had 87 cents in the pocket of the only suit he owned. Some would be tempted to say he died penniless; I offer...that he died hilarious! We must live balanced today, so we might die holy tomorrow! AMEN

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