

Stewardship in Life – Luke 16:10-13, Ephesians 5:15-16

As we continue our series on Back to Basics this morning, we are going to look at an issue many people see as optional in our faith. However, this morning's topic is just as important for the Christian as the previous topics which we have covered so far in this series; that God is the only true living God, that His Word is complete, true, and Holy, and that true freedom only comes through a genuine relationship with Jesus. Today we are going to spend our time together addressing what God says about **Stewardship in Life**.

Very few times since God called me as your pastor have, I taught on money and the proper use of money. Perhaps, it's because I haven't felt the need to do this, or maybe, because many people protest when there are sermons on money. While stewardship absolutely includes the issue of money, I think you'll be pleased to know that when the Bible speaks of stewardship, it addresses much more than money. Wise use and management of our money is just one part of what it means to be a good steward with the blessings God has given us. What you'll find as you study the entirety of God's Word and as you grow in your spiritual walk, is stewardship also includes things such as: caring for others, caring for the land, caring for the animals, managing our time wisely, controlling our tongues, and of course managing how we support the church. Because the Bible directs us to steward many things, there is no way we can cover all of them this morning, so we are only going to focus on a few of them.

Let's begin first with a basic definition for Biblical stewardship. According to the Holman Bible Dictionary, stewardship is "Utilizing and managing all resources God provides for the glory of God and the betterment of His creation." Every Christian is therefore responsible to intelligently manage and use every resource and every spiritual gift given them to help advance the Kingdom.

Turn with me to Luke, Chapter 16. If your Bible is like mine in the manner, it's laid out, then you'll see that this chapter begins with a parable about money and ends with the story of the rich man and Lazarus. Let's read verses 10-13. **Read Luke 16:10-13.**

Jesus spoke these words just after sharing the parable about the unjust steward. In the parable, the steward is caught squandering the money of his master and is asked to give an account for how he had used it. Knowing that he had been caught, he then uses the money to buy friendships in hopes that when he loses his job, he'll at least still have some friends that will care for him. Even with all the unjust practices of this servant, his master commends him for his shrewdness. What is it Jesus was teaching then? Certainly, He wasn't condoning dishonest handling of money. No, Jesus wanted us to understand that if the wicked can be shrewd in temporal things, how much shrewder should we be with eternal things.

We know from our text that Jesus is saying if we cannot be trusted with earthly things such as money, He is not going to trust us with the truly valuable things of the Spirit. He says if we prove we can manage the small things, then he'll allow us to manage larger things. If we fail at handling something which belongs to someone else, what do you think our chances of getting something from another person else will be? Not very likely. Then Jesus tells us that you cannot serve two masters, you cannot serve both God and money. And don't overlook the fact that these four verses are found in between this parable and the one of Lazarus and the Rich Man. Both parables deal with money matters and speak about how wise or how foolish we can be when it comes to how we use money. These verses teach us that it's more important to see money as belonging to God, given to us as a blessing, to be used for the purposes of His Kingdom. If you view money in any other light, then perhaps you are outside of what Jesus said, "*you cannot serve both God and money.*"

I will never tell anyone how to use their money. All I can do is show you in the Scriptures what God says about how we are to view this resource and how we are to use this resource properly. Jesus says here, how we spend our money reveals the truth of our heart and lets us know where we are spiritually. I'll say this, if you are not giving some portion of your money back to the Kingdom, then you need to evaluate the condition of your heart this morning. God doesn't need your money, but He does want your faithful understanding and obedience when it comes to sharing that which He has blessed you with.

Did you know that God also owns your time. He created the 24-hour clock, by the way. If you are a genuine believer and you have dedicated your heart and life to Jesus, then you must also believe there is not a moment of each day that truly belongs to you. Let's look at another passage this morning. **Read Ephesians 5:15-16.**

Ephesians is a great book to study if you want to know your position as a Christian. Paul spends the first four chapters of this book explaining how believing in Christ brings unity and strength to the believer and to the body of Christ. In chapter 4, he tells the church at Ephesus to "walk" in unity. When Paul uses the term, "walk", he literally means "live". Chapter 5 begins with Paul instructed them to "*live*" with one another in love, just as *Christ loved us and gave Himself for us*. And, when we get to verses 15 and 16, Paul tells us to "live" wisely, and use our time wisely because the days are becoming increasingly more evil. If God is concerned with our money, don't you think it would be natural for Him to also be concerned about how we spend out time. Think of it like this. You can always make more money, but you cannot make more time. We get 24 hours every day, and we can use it wisely, for His purposes, or we can waste it however we choose, but once it's gone, it's not coming back.

When I read these verses and think deeply about their meaning, I find myself understanding that I must learn to become more intentional about how I spend my time. Perhaps this is what occurs in one's heart as we grow more mature as Christians. God begins to teach us about the importance of spending time in His Word, spending time in prayer, spending time with Him. This is what Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount. He was talking about how we spend our time. Do we spend our time trying to gain the material things of a temporal world, or do we invest our time in things which have eternal blessings? In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus follows up this teaching by saying, "*For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*" Where is your heart? Where your heart is will always be revealed by how you spend your time. You give your time, or the substance of your life, to what you love the most. For some it is money, for others it is pleasure and entertainment, for some it's their career, for some it is sports or recreation, but for some it is the kingdom of God. Where your heart is can be clearly seen by how you spend your time.

Another important area of Stewarding in Life concerns how we use our voice, or how we use our words, to be more specific. As growing disciples of Jesus Christ, we must become disciplined in how we speak to others, just as we would become disciplined in how much we eat, how much we sleep, how much we exercise or how much we spend on this or that. We must develop disciplines which intentionally help us work toward the goal of becoming more like Christ.

Since we are in the book of Ephesians, turn back to chapter 4. Look at what Paul has to say in verses 25 and 29-32. **Read Ephesians 4:25, 29-32.** Paul understood the power associated with speech and how our words can and should be used. The things he's instructing us on here become very important for us as we live in a world that is filled with anger, and hate, and maliciousness. It is our role, Christian, to make sure we speak truth to people in a manner consistent with how Jesus spoke to people. Too often we forget the many warnings found throughout Scripture concerning this. Instead, we choose to say things our way, when we want to, and how we want to, and most of the time without any consideration for other people or circumstances. King Solomon gave us some powerful advice concerning the stewardship of our mouth.

Here are some of his warnings found in Proverbs:

Proverbs 8:13: God hates all forms of evil, to include perverted speech. If the words which come from your mouth are perverted in any manner, then the root behind them is evil.

Proverbs 15:1-2: When you say things with the intent of causing pain, or to stir the pot, then you are not speaking with a wise heart, but the heart of a fool.

Proverbs 13:3: Frivolous speech only causes harm. It is better for us to think before we speak, especially if we're upset about something.

But look at these words from Proverbs:

Proverbs 21:23: Whoever keeps – in other words, whoever stewards his mouth and tongue will prevent trouble.

Proverbs 17:27-28: We are to be knowledgeable and intelligent disciples. Sometimes it's best to remain silent and let the Holy Spirit usher us into certain conversations.

I don't want you to only consider the wise words of King Solomon, however. Let's look at what Jesus has to say about what comes out of our mouth.

Read Matthew 15:10-20.

Folks, if you struggle with the words which leave your mouth, I ask you to consider the condition of your heart. After all, a heart filled with things such as mercy, grace, compassion, and love will never say things out of the way, or with the intention to cause harm. Instead, the words which flow from the mouth will build up and offer grace. The words will match closely with the way Jesus addressed people.

At the end of the day, either we are, or we are not dedicated followers of Christ. Our world and our churches are filled with pretenders and hypocrites. We need to come to terms with the reality that our faith requires us to recognize and uphold some basic concepts. While there are many more we could address, the ones mentioned today stand as strong starting points for us to grow spiritually. If we are Christians in name only, if our faith doesn't make it any further than our lips, and these basic tenants never translate into a changed life, a life lived with the kind of discipline Jesus calls for, a life which demonstrates surrender and sacrifice, we are no different from many of the other religious philosophies of our day. Jesus called us to surrender. That means everything and not just the things we choose. It is a call to follow Him in totality, not just partially. It is a call to life service. We cannot expect the world around us to believe that we really believe in Jesus if we are not willing to practice what we preach and work to become better stewards of the things God has blessed us with.

Jesus did not give us lip service. He gave us His life. On Calvary's cross He laid it all down. He left the glory of heaven for the work of the cross. He surrendered to the agony of the cross, all for love, so that you and I could one day inherit eternal life. If He held nothing back for you, why would you hold back anything from Him? What does your stewardship say about the authenticity of your faith? What does it say about where your trust really is? What does it say about your heart?