

“It All Belongs to God”

Most of us at one time or another have rented something. A house or an apartment. Perhaps a car, if we're on vacation or if our vehicle is in the body shop. People rent tuxedos for wedding, U-Haul's to move (been there and done that), maybe a tool or a log splitter. There are businesses from which we can rent furniture or a TV. Rental companies serve a very useful purpose.

I've been on the other end of rentals. Several times Nancy and I rented a house to someone. We had some good experiences, and some bad ones. One tenant cheated us out of a \$400 phone bill, and another renter didn't pay the rent, and we had a problem getting them to leave. Two of our kids in college rented a place with other students. I'm glad I wasn't the owner! But in several cases, the houses they rather were quite rundown, and the rents were rather high for the condition of the home.

There is a difference in being a renter, verses an owner, isn't there. ***The concept of renting something that belongs to someone else is similar to an idea in the Bible that's really important: that of “stewardship.”*** We don't use the word “stewardship” much in common, ordinary talk. Nor do we use the word “steward” much either. But a “steward” is a *caretaker* or *manager* - someone entrusted to care for something that belongs to someone else. Our son Kraig, when he was growing up, had a close friend named Greg, who lived just across the street from our house. When each family went on vacation we would care for each others' pets. One time when Greg and his family went on vacation we watched his pet hamster. Unfortunately, the week they were away, the hamster died. You know, it's kind of hard when the owner comes back and you have to say, “We took care of your pet – unfortunately it died,” or “Welcome back, here's your dead hamster.” You feel badly enough if something happens to something that belongs to you. It's worse if it belongs to someone else.

The Bible's teaching on “stewardship” communicates a profound truth: Everything we have belongs to God, our Creator. We are not owners, but only stewards (managers). And we will have to give an account of how we have managed what was only entrusted to us.

In Luke 12, Jesus tells several stories that relate to stewardship. Jesus asks, “Who then is the faithful and prudent manager?” (Luke 12:42). The King James Version renders that verse, “Who then is the faithful and wise steward?” The “steward” in this story was a *trusted slave* who ran the master's house for him. He had almost unlimited power to manage the owner's estate and household.

We are to be like the faithful steward who wisely manages the household while his master is away. “And the Lord said, ‘Who then is the faithful and prudent manager whom his master will put in charge of his slaves, to give them their allowance of food at the proper time? Blessed is that slave whom his master will find at work when he arrives. Truly I tell you, he will put that one in charge of all his possessions’” (Luke 12:42-44). We are not to be like the steward who plays fast and loose and is caught by surprise when his master shows up unexpectedly. “But if that slave says to himself, ‘My master is delayed in coming,’ and if he begins to beat the other slaves, men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk, the master of that slave will come

on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour that he does not know, and will cut him in pieces, and put him with the unfaithful. That slave who knew what his master wanted, but did not prepare himself or do what was wanted, will receive a severe beating” (Luke 12:44-47). Notice the harsh words!

The context for these Scriptures is Christ’s return. Jesus says, “You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour” (verse 40). Jesus will return in power and glory at the end of time. At that point, we will have to give an accounting of our stewardship, how we have managed the things God has entrusted to us.

Jesus’ words on stewardship confront the way many people view what we possess. *We say:* What I have is mine. *Jesus says:* No it isn’t. It all belongs to God. *We say:* I have no one to answer to other than myself for what I do with my possessions. *Jesus says:* Not true. You will have to give an account to God of what you have done with what you have been given.

It makes a big difference in our thinking when we realize that it all belongs to God. Let’s think a bit more about our *stewardship*. ***There is the stewardship of the earth.*** Psalm 24:1 says, “The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it, the world and those who live in it.” In the 1970’s and 1980’s we heard a lot about ecology: taking care of the planet and its ecosystems. That emphasis has to some extent died off. Americans don’t have a very good track record of our stewardship of the earth and its resources. I’ve read accounts of the early American days when buffalo were plentiful and roamed the plains. People would shoot them for sport (from train windows), until they became almost extinct. Fortunately, they’ve been preserved (as some of you can testify to if you’ve been to Yellowstone Park or other places where buffalo are plentiful).

We tend to waste precious natural resources. Water, for example. We are a throwaway society. We throwaway diapers, plastic containers, TV’s, computers – it’s often cheaper to buy a new item than to get the old one repaired. Fortunately, we are reversing that trend somewhat: we are recycling items, driving more fuel efficient vehicles, and reducing industrial pollution. Global warming is a hot political issue. Some scientists say it’s fact; others deny that. I hear one Christian leader suggest that even if global warming is not happening, it is better to err on the side of caution, and try to reduce the amounts of greenhouse gases, and reduce pollution.

Long before the focus on ecology, the Bible taught that we are to be responsible stewards or managers of God’s good creation. Until we figure out how to travel to other planets and live there, this is the only planet have!

There is the stewardship of time. Ephesians 5:5-17 says, “Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.” Time is a precious gift from God. This Scripture says we are to make the most of time God gives us. Many of us recognize that traditional hymn, “Take my life and let it be consecrated Lord to thee”. One stanza of that song has these words, “Take my moments and my days, let them flow in ceaseless praise.” How can we allow God to make our moments and our days honor and praise Him?

One of the keys in being a good steward of the time allotted to us is that we try to live a balanced life, that we have time for all the facets of a well-rounded life. Many of us are “out of balance” when it comes to the use of our time. Some people *work* too much. We don’t take enough time for family, or to relax. This has been one of my downfalls over the years. You may find it hard to believe, but this is a problem with many pastors. Some people *loaf* too much! We can waste time, or fritter it away with trivial pursuits. Some of us don’t take enough time to nourish our souls, through prayer and the Word of God, to develop the spiritual dimension of life. Some people get caught up in a life of self-centered endeavors. They are “into themselves”.

Of course, it is true, we often are not completely free to do what we want with our time. We have to work and earn a living. We may be tied down to raising our children, or perhaps caring for an elderly or sick family member, etc. But in the time that’s left, being a better steward of time may mean being more deliberate in how we plan our day or week, perhaps reordering priorities, so that we have time for work and time for rest and play, time for self and time for others, time to get involved in healthy life interests and time to nourish our souls. “Take my moments and my days, let them flow in ceaseless praise.”

What about the stewardship of our body. Romans 12:1 says, “I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.” Note: we are to present our *bodies* as a living sacrifice to God.

Biblical faith affirms that our physical body is part of God’s good creation, and should be treated with honor and respect as a gift of God. What about the current health and fitness craze in our country? Is that a good thing? I think so! The spawning of health clubs and gyms, books on dieting. I have a confession to make here. I shouldn’t be preaching on this. I have a sweet tooth. I love desserts. All along I have blamed this on my dad, who always had to have dessert at a meal. But more recently I found out that my mom may be worse! When we recently moved her out of her apartment to the skilled care unit we found boxes of candy and cookies all over the place. Our daughter Karin and her family are healthy eaters. They put me to shame. So when they visit us, I sometimes have to sneak back into the kitchen after a meal and hope the boys aren’t looking when I grab a cookie or a piece of cake or pie.

Of course there is no guarantee that we won’t get sick or get a disease, even if we do eat healthy, but we can do our part in taking care of our body. That includes a healthy diet, exercise, and adequate rest.

Being a good steward of our also means keeping it pure. 1 Corinthians 6:20 says, “For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.” The context of this verse indicates that it means keeping our body sexually pure. I read a CNN article posted earlier this year that spoke of the rise in sexually transmitted diseases (STD’s). It says, “Rates of syphilis, gonorrhea and chlamydia have climbed for the fourth consecutive year in the United States, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention announced Tuesday at the National STD Prevention Conference in Washington. Last year, nearly 2.3 million US cases of these sexually transmitted

diseases were diagnosed, according to preliminary data. That's the highest number ever reported nationwide, breaking the record set in 2016 by more than 200,000 cases, according to the CDC.” One of the leaders of that conference, Dr. Edward Hook, said it’s time we call this a public health crisis. We should note that these diseases, if left untreated, can cause severe and permanent health issues, including damage to the reproductive system, to the heart and nervous system, as well as other organs. There is also a real possibility that one of these three diseases, gonorrhea, may already be becoming resistant to antibiotics, and that at some point this will be an untreatable disease.

The Christian perspective (and it seems novel and quaint to many today) is that sex is a wonderful gift of God that is meant for marriage. And abstaining from sex outside of marriage is a way to treat our body with respect, and honor our Creator, and to avoid STD’s.

We have looked at the stewardship of the earth, of time, and of the body. ***There is also the stewardship of the mind.*** Romans 12:1 tells us, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.” If we are followers of Jesus, we should not be shaped and molded by the world’s values. And a way we can steer away from having that happen is by letting God renew our minds. How we think and reason, our mind and intentions, greatly shape how we act.

Good stewardship of the mind includes being careful what we feed into our minds. It’s affected by the books and magazines we read, the TV programs we watch, the web sites we visit on the internet. We can feed our mind on garbage, trash, or we can feed our mind on what is good. There is wonderful advice given in Philippians 4:8: “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.” When our thought life is messed up, our behaviors and actions are messed up too.

Being a good caretaker of the mind God has given us also means developing our mind and exercising our mind. In some ways, we Americans have been programmed to be lazy in our thinking. We are used to seeing the news in 30 or 45 second news bites that cover serious issues in a superficial way. Even in the church we can shy away from serious discussions on complex moral and spiritual questions. I certainly hope my sermons aren’t just “fluff”, just superficial. This is an opportunity to put in a plug for our adult Sunday School class. I believe the topics we cover are challenging and thought-provoking.

The human mind is a wonderful gift of God. Our goal should be to have the mind of Christ: to think as Jesus thought, to view life as Jesus viewed life, to desire what Jesus desired. “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5).

The stewardship of talents is another important facet of how we manage God’s gifts. 1 Peter 4:10 says, “Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.” (This Scripture refers to spiritual gifts, but I think we can also

apply it to natural talents). Everyone has some talent or ability that is God given. What are your talents? A lady was having surgery on her hand. In the consultation with the surgeon prior to the operation she asked, “When this surgery is over and I’m healed, will I be able to play the piano?” “Absolutely,” the doctor assured her. “Great,” she said! “I’ve always wanted to be able to play the piano, and I haven’t been able to do it up to this point!”

Maybe you play some musical instrument...or are good at writing or painting...or you can do plumbing or electrical work...or you have a knack for sewing or making crafts or cooking or home décor. We often put ourselves down: “Oh, I’m just not that talented.” But don’t put yourself down because your ability may seem ordinary or commonplace. If I get a new pair of pants, I have to rely on someone else to sew up the hem on the pant legs. I can’t do that. (That “someone” who I rely on is my wife Nancy!). If you’re putting food out for a church function, you don’t want to rely on me – but for some of you, that’s a breeze, and comes naturally.

In the verse from 1 Peter, chapter 4, did you notice what it says about being good stewards of the gifts you’ve been given? It says to use these “to serve one another.” God didn’t give us talents and abilities just to be used for selfish ends – but to bless and serve others.

Jesus said, “Who then is the faithful and wise steward?” (Luke 12:42). Nothing we have is really ours to keep. We only borrow it for a little while. May we be faithful managers and caretakers of the earth, our time, our body and mind, and the talents God has given us.

Jesus said, “From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required, and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded” (Luke 12:48b).

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