

Stewardship Weekend—3 Devotions, Pastor Pufahl

Devotion #1: God's Trust Fall, Malachi 3:6-10

Stewardship is our focus today. But, I actually wonder to myself, "Self, what does the congregation know about stewardship?" So, let's have a little open forum-ish devotion. If you had to fill in the blank, what would you say to this – "Stewardship is..." And remember this, as I tell my catechism students, "There are no wrong answers, except for the wrong ones." So, how would you fill in that blank – Stewardship is...?

I thought that perhaps the first item you would think would be money. We were kind of joking in the office this week about a front cover picture for the bulletin. One said we should get the emoji with its tongue sticking out and the tongue was actually a dollar bill. Be honest, raise your hand if the first thing you thought about when focusing on stewardship was money? Quick story: My dad was on the stewardship board when I was growing up and I recall how he needed to go in front of the whole congregation to talk about this topic and almost felt sick to his stomach. After all, who wants to go in front of a group of people and talk about them emptying their pockets into the offering plate, right? But, is that really what stewardship is about? Listen to the first lesson, but just verses 6-9: **"I the LORD do not change. So you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed. ⁷ Ever since the time of your ancestors you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you," says the LORD Almighty. "But you ask, 'How are we to return?' ⁸ "Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me. "But you ask, 'How are we robbing you?' "In tithes and offerings. ⁹ You are under a curse—your whole nation—because you are robbing me.**

God is talking about the people robbing him. So clearly...stewardship is MONEY! God is only concerned with money, right? As long as you give enough, God will look the other way when it comes to sin. As long as you donate enough, there will be a special wing in heaven with your name on it – the "Pufahl Palace." That is NOT true. Listen to the final verse: **Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.**

Do you recall what a Trust Fall is? Simply, you trust someone to the point that if you fall back, they will catch you. In a way, that is what I see God saying here. This is God's trust fall. He is asking us to fall back on him. And, he is showing us that money really isn't the issue. If God wanted to, he could make you the richest person in the world. So then, stewardship really isn't about money, is it? Peel back the layers of that stewardship onion. Maybe the outside of it looks like it is all money but peel those layers back. Money is no issue to God. He owns all things. So, then what is stewardship? Here we see it is trust. In fact, notice what God says. TEST me! I believe this is the only time God says to test him. What does it mean to test God? Basically, to trust in him to the point that his name is on the line if he goes against what he says or fails you.

So, question – when has God ever failed you? Never. Will he fail you here? Nope. Think about what God says. He says the people were robbing him. Robbing him of what? Of his trust fall. Of taking their entire heart and trusting and believing in God. God doesn't need our money, but he WANTS our heart. Stewardship really is about our heart.

Have you robbed God of your heart? I know I have. I haven't always trusted in God. When he wants to do a trust fall with me, there are many times I question if he will actually be there to catch me. You feel the same? Then go back to the first part of this lesson: **"I the LORD do not change. So you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed.**

God doesn't change. His faithfulness doesn't change. His forgiveness for our lack of trust and bringing our whole heart to him, doesn't change. All so that we, who by faith are also descendants of Jacob, would not be destroyed. We would not be destroyed because God didn't change. He promised Jesus. He sent Jesus. And, Jesus did exactly what he was to do...heal our heart. He took our sin. He took our doubt and lack of trust and nailed it to the cross. Now, Jesus works on our hearts each day as we GROW in our stewardship out of love for him.

It may not happen overnight, but grow in your stewardship. Give God your whole heart. And when we fail, and we will, give Jesus your whole sin. Trust in our God who will never let you fall. Amen.

Devotion # 2: A Thankful Heart for Stewardship, 2 Corinthians 9:8-11

And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. ⁹ As it is written: "They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their righteousness endures forever."¹⁰ Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹ You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

As we are talking about stewardship and as we just heard that lesson, to whom is God speaking? I'm not talking specifically, but more in general. Yes, Paul is speaking to the Corinthian congregation, but in general, he is talking to Christians.

That is an important fact to know about stewardship. This really has nothing to do with justification except for the fact that justification, or ALL JESUS DID FOR US to take away our sins and give us heaven, now means we can live for Jesus as Christians in our lives of stewardship. Does that make sense? Stewardship flows from justification, NOT the other way around. Stewardship is part of

sanctification. That is why I mention it is a matter of the heart. That is the CHANGED heart because of all Jesus did. True Christian stewardship cannot come from an unbelieving heart.

Think about this section. Remember Paul is speaking to Christians, speaking to you. So, do you believe it? Do you believe that God is able to bless you abundantly? That he will provide for you? That he will enrich you in every way and supply what you need?

A lot of times stewardship is defined by the 3 T's – Time, Talents, and Treasures. Do you believe what Paul is saying here is true in all three of those areas? Ok, then what does God say? After all you have been given, your generosity **will result in thanksgiving to God**. So then, have you always been THANKFUL to God for all he promises and things he does for you?

Isn't that really the hard thing to do? Give thanks, especially when it comes to the 3 T's of stewardship? When was the last time you thanked God for your time? Don't we usually instead complain about it? When we are having a great time, we complain it isn't long enough; when we are going through a difficult time, it takes too long. How about talents? Ever compare yourself to someone else and what they can do? Ever complain to God because you feel your talents aren't special enough or important enough? Do I really even need to tackle the "treasures" part? Are you always thankful for your treasures?

Stewardship is a matter of the heart. Where is our heart at times? I know where mine is at times...looking out for me; concerning myself with me; focusing on me. How is that shown? A lack of thanksgiving to God for all he does for me. Does that also show itself in your life?

Stewardship is a matter of the heart. My heart needs help and healing. And Jesus says to me, to you – DONE! Recall what the beginning portion said – **And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need**. I'm sure most will read that as earthly needs. Of course, that is part of it. But remember to whom Paul and God is speaking! To Christians. What makes a person a Christian? Well, a Christian is a follower of Christ. A believer. That means a person whose heart has been changed. No, we will not be perfect in this change, but Jesus is perfect. And, just like our lesson says – God will give us all we need. Well, what do we really need? We need a Savior. We need forgiveness for all our sin. We need eternal hope. And, we have all that...in Jesus!

Knowing that change has happened to you, what is the result? God said it...thanksgiving! Thank you, Jesus, for your forgiveness. Thank you for your love. Thank you for the promise of heaven. And, thank you for always providing for us! A thankful and changed heart...thank you Jesus!

Devotion # 3: Your talent – Jesus notices! Mark 12:41-44

How many of you feel like you have a talent? What is your talent? I've seen talent on the basketball court, hear talent from the balcony of church as people sing, or notice talent in the classroom.

What do you think are the greatest talents? Some feel the talents people have that a lot of people can see are the best! Some feel professional athletes have the greatest talent because they are on TV. Or, some feel doctors have the greatest talent because they can help heal people can keep them alive.

Let's say you asked me what my talent is and I told you that my talent is being the very best at tucking my children into bed. Maybe you laugh at that. That doesn't seem like a talent. Who would care about that talent, right? What if I told you that JESUS would care about that talent?

Today I have mentioned the word stewardship several times. Really, stewardship is a matter of the heart. I know that some might think that Jesus will notice only the big things we do. That's not true. If your talent is something small, or at least small to the world, it isn't small to Jesus. And, when it is done out of love for Jesus, not only does he notice, but you can imagine he smiles too.

I want you to think about this lesson from Mark 12: **Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. ⁴² But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents. ⁴³ Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. ⁴⁴ They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on."**

The money she gave was really nothing. No one noticed...except Jesus.

So maybe you think that Jesus doesn't notice your talents or care about what you do. He does. And, he loves it too. No matter what you do for Jesus, just always know, he notices.

Let's pray: *Dear Jesus, thank you for the many talents you have given to all of us. Help us to not only thank you for those talents but to do those talents for you in love for all you have done for us. We love you Jesus! Amen.*