

VI. Christian Stewardship in Biblical Perspective

Lifestyle Stewardship

“Found Faithful—On Mission”

I Timothy 1:3–4

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We'll start by looking at I Timothy 1. This is Paul writing to Timothy who was headed back to Ephesus in a ministry of church revitalization. I Timothy 1:3–4 says [3] *As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, [4] nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith.*

The grass withers, the flower fades, the Word of God abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

Our ministry theme for the year is Lifestyle Stewardship, found faithful and I did five studies on this. I stopped the study as we went into our World Missions, Easter and then COVID-19 hit and because of the dynamics I have really been led to deal with the essentials of a Christian's life through the study of the Apostles' Creed. So for now I'm coming back to our theme of stewardship acknowledging that the first five studies were focused on the Biblical concept of stewardship, with a focus on personal stewardship and the next three studies on this will be with the exhortation Biblically of a steward to be found faithful but not to go at it individually. It will have ramifications individually but I want to go at it corporately. What is the stewardship God has required of His church?

I cannot cover everything that God would hold us accountable for as stewards as a local church manifesting Christ's glorious, redeemed church in this world. But there are three things I want to address that I think are absolutely crucial for multiple reasons. How do I commit my time, talents, my spiritual, mental and physical gifts/abilities, my treasures, tithes and offerings? We do this every year so that our deacons have everything they need to see how we are doing in our own stewardship but why do we do it? We do it because our time, talent, treasure, our spiritual resources, gifts and abilities are brought together as the body of Christ and devoted to something through the ministry of Briarwood Presbyterian Church. What is that ministry? What is that mission? What is it that God has called His church to do and what does it mean to embrace it as a congregation?

When the Bible talks about you as a Christian there are many word pictures. You are called a sinner, why? It is because we're saved by grace. You're called a saint because God's grace has set you apart. You have been forgiven of all your guilt, shame and you have been set free from the power of sin, redeemed from the penalties of sin and are being sanctified by the grace of God in terms of leaving the practice of sin. And you're being prepared for eternal life with Christ in a new heavens and new earth in which there is no presence of sin. You are declared righteous in Christ and forgiven of all of your sins.

As a Christian you are also a soldier in the army of the Lord. What is the army supposed to be doing? It is supposed to be doing church. You're also a servant in the body of Christ. What is that body of Christ supposed to do with servanthood. You're also a steward and no steward will ever be profitable in the Kingdom of God but we can be faithful. What is required of a steward? It is to be found faithful and to hear Christ say 'Well done, good and faithful

servant.’ Where do we start together with stewardship in Christ’s church? The key is to first start is on personal stewardship.

This is truly a statement from my heart. The best discipleship tool I know of to help a Christian grow in grace to have a Bible-framed, Spirit-filled, Christ-centered, God-glorifying life is the Westminster Shorter Catechism. It teaches you the stewardship of life. How does it start? The first step of discipleship is to explain why you are here. Regardless of Darwinian evolution, you are not the chance explosion of some atoms. You have been made by God in His image. For what purpose? More than that you have been saved by God to a new life and every single day you are sustained by the hand of God for you have the breath of life. The catechism draws right from Scripture for the *chief end* (purpose, mission, singular) of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. That is not two missions for it is two sides of one coin. That is your relationship in life (enjoy Him) and your responsibility (to glorify God). The more you glorify Him the more you enjoy Him and the more you enjoy Him the more you glorify Him. When you get that down now you’re ready to make decisions about anything and everything in your life. Everything is now determined by what you know in that statement.

It is no different in corporate stewardship of Christ’s church than it is from personal stewardship. Corporate stewardship is determined by why Christ’s church is here. Christ’s church is not here just to be here for it is here for a purpose. Christ’s church is not here simply to stay here. So what is the purpose Christ’s church is here? Where did you go to find out your purpose in life? You went to God’s Word. The I Timothy text tells us they were charged to teach God’s stewardship by faith. Faith comes from the hearing of God’s Word (Romans 10:17). God’s Word is true and therefore I build my faith on God’s Word. My whole existence is defined by that. What is true personally is also true corporately.

Christ’s church has its mission, not from its pastor or its elders or its members or the world. The church has its mission from God Himself. God has given us with great clarity why we are here. The church of Jesus Christ was purchased by the blood of Christ and has been built by Christ. Jesus says “I will build My church...” (Matthew 16:18). The church of Jesus Christ is declared to be triumphant. Why will the gates of hell not prevail against His church? It is because the church has a mission, a message and ministries. In this study and the next two I will tell you about the stewardship of our mission, our message and our ministries.

Our personal stewardship is funneled through the corporate stewardship of what God has called His church to be and do. What is it that we exist to do? Briarwood tells anyone and everyone what our mission statement is. We don’t hide it. Our mission statement has not changed over the 60 plus years of our existence for it’s the same as it was at the beginning. Briarwood has had two pastors and the mission didn’t change when they got another pastor. Why? It is because the mission doesn’t come from the pastor. The style of the church changed when the second pastor came due to the difference in personality, strengths and weaknesses of each pastor. My mission as a pastor is the same as the first one because we are pastoring Christ’s church and Christ gives us our mission. As a pastor we can communicate and teach the mission but we don’t give it. The elders of the church oversee the mission but they don’t give it either. The members of the church can enable it and engage in it but they don’t give it and the world doesn’t give it.

Christ gives us our mission and our message and He is outlying for us our ministries. One of the things that pains me is to hear a person say about their church ‘we had this mission and we got a new pastor so now we have this mission’ which means you either have the wrong pastor or you had the wrong pastor because the mission doesn’t come from the pastor. When I

came to Briarwood there were a lot of things that had to change in my life. One phrase I used all the time when I pastored in Miami and Charlotte was ‘Can I be frank with you?’ When I came here that totally disappeared from my vocabulary due to the fact that the former pastor was Frank Barker. That is a mountain too tall for me anyway. I can communicate to you what Frank communicated to you and that is why Briarwood exists. The reason it hasn’t changed is because God’s Word hasn’t changed and we have this stewardship as a church of our mission from God’s Word.

Briarwood’s mission is given in every new member’s class, at every mission’s conference, it’s communicated with a motto and it is printed on everything we publish. I even preach sermons on it. Briarwood’s mission is for God’s glory we are committed to equipping Christians to worship God and reach Birmingham to reach the world for Christ. That mission statement comes not only from four key texts of Scripture, but four predominant key texts.

A mission statement answers five questions. One, who are we? Briarwood. What do we do? We do two things – vertically we worship God and horizontally we reach people. How do we do this? By equipping Christians through discipleship. Why do we do this? We do it for God’s glory and for Christ. Where do we do this? We do it in Birmingham in order to send it to the world, because we’re to go to all the nations that the nations would be glad to hear about Jesus and we exist to give them that Glad News.

What four texts did this come from? One is Colossians 1:18 which says *[18] And He is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything He might be preeminent.* Another one is Ephesians 4:11–12 which says *[11] And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, [12] to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.* A third text is Acts 1:4–9, verse 8 in particular which says *[8] But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.* Our Jerusalem is Birmingham. Our Judea is Alabama. Our Samaria is North American and to the end of the earth is the rest of the world, to get the Gospel there.

The fourth key text our mission statement comes from is the Great Commission text. The Great Commission is mentioned in all four Gospels but definitive text is Matthew 28. I love this text in Matthew 28. Here is the Owner of the church who bought this church with His blood. Here is the Designer of the church for He builds His church. Here is the Power of the church Who has sent us the Holy Spirit. Jesus tells us here why we are here. Matthew 28:16–20 says *[16] Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. [17] And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. [18] And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. [19] Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

In this text He tells us our mission, our message, our ministry and He promises to be with us. He even gives us the duration of this mission. How long are we to be accomplishing the mission He has given us? We are to be doing this to the end of the age. This is what He has given to His church in every culture in every generation until He comes again. This is what we are to be doing – make disciples. There is one imperative but earlier in my life I had this wrong due to a church I grew up in where the pastor said while preaching on this text ‘There is one important word in the Bible and it’s in this text. That most important word is ‘go.’ You take the ‘go’ out of Gospel and you’re left with *spel*, you take the ‘go’ our of good and you’re left with

od and you take the ‘go’ out of God and you’re left just with ‘d.’” I had wondered how long could he go on like this?

Then I went off to seminary and studied this Matthew 28 text and the ‘go’ is a participle which means ‘as you’re going’ and it actually has three participles – going, baptizing and teaching. None of these three are the imperative for the imperative is ‘make disciples.’ That is our mission and why we are here. You are not the state and you’re not the family. You are the family of God, the army of God, the body of Christ, to do this mission, now steward it. We are to do this until He comes again. He will be with us and when He comes He wants to find us faithful. This is our mission.

Then He gives us the four ministries that we need to engage in order to accomplish the mission. The first ministry is evangelism. Going – seek to save the lost. Notice He doesn’t command us to go but He expects us to go. He commands us as to what we’re supposed to do when we’re going and that is to make disciples. We can have programs of training, have events for evangelism, create bridges and all that but a church cannot do evangelism in making disciples if you are not evangelizing. You have to share your faith with others. The church can’t speak for you. Don’t let the world silence you. Speak Christ to others. The church is here to equip you to evangelize but you have to speak to others.

Then the second ministry is enfolding – when a person comes to Christ then bring them in for they have lived in the orphanage of sin. Bring them into the family of God. How do you do that? They were baptized and added to the church, the believer and the household were brought into the household of God. This is known as enfolding. I am not satisfied with my performance or your performance in evangelism, but I am overwhelmed how the membership of Briarwood enfolds people into the church. I love the way you love new people and people in general. I love the way you shepherd other. We’re not perfect and we have room for improvement but I thank God for all you are doing but we can excel still more.

The third ministry is teaching them to observe all that Jesus has commanded us which is equipping ministries. We equip them by teaching them. To disciple you have to evangelize, enfold and equip. So what is the fourth one where there are only three participles?

Did Jesus disciple anyone while He was here doing His public ministry for three years? Yes. The eleven that are listening to Him in the Matthew 28 text, did He disciple them for three years? Yes. As soon as they saw Him what did they do? They worshipped Him. It even overcame their doubts. The fourth ministry is exaltation. Think of it like the only sanctified sport that is in existence – baseball. I’m going to mix metaphors. First base is evangelism – winning people to Jesus. You get to second base by enfolding them. You get to third base by equipping them. We score when those who were sinners coming short of the glory of God now desire to gather with God’s people and give glory and praise to God then live lives in worship as living sacrifices for God.

There is one more thing. We have one imperative and that’s to make disciples but we also have one message – to teach, preach and disciple with the whole counsel of God. Teaching them to observe **all** that I have commanded you. The lead, circumference, center, substance in that message is the Gospel. You never go beyond the Gospel but you can go deeper, higher, wider and further with the Gospel as its implications in our life as a foundation, formation, and motivation. So here is the Gospel mission that is ours. We have a mission as a church and that’s why we capitalize equipping Christians to worship, to reach with the Gospel of saving grace in Christ, enfold and love. No program can do it. The stewardship of this message rests on me and you. Do we embrace it together?

The key to adversity is to do this with no discrimination, just reach everyone within the sound of your voice. Jesus said to spread the seed to the whole field – everywhere. Then we disciple. Do you know what brings unity? Unity is not that we have diversity but unity is that we who were not a people have become the people of God. I played on sports teams that had so much diversity but we were one, because everything we used with our gifts and abilities was on that field. When you watch a sports team play look at how they act on the sidelines. They hug each other. They don't clump up ethnically or demographically. You see them coming together because together we get the mission done. The mission brings the people of God together who have come to Christ because the mission came to them and the mission came to them with the message that Jesus saves.

I get asked this quiet often, 'Is Briarwood a missional church?' There would have been a time I would have more quickly said 'yes' but that time has passed. The reason I would have said 'yes' is the historical use of the word missional which used to mean the lifestyle of a missionary. In other words, the missionary who had given themselves to fulfill the mission also embraced a lifestyle that enabled them to fulfill the mission. So that was called a missional lifestyle. My problem isn't that missional is a word I don't like, but the problem is what it has become, because the value of the word missional that describes the lifestyle of someone who is on mission, is directly related to the mission they're on. If they get on the wrong mission then missional is no longer a good word.

Beyond that, today missional is no longer used to describe the lifestyle of those on mission, for it has become the mission. That's the mission to say we're missional but the reason that has happened is because the mission has become lost. This is not the first time. In the corruption of the world the corruption got the church off mission in the 13th and 14th century and we had to have a reformation that we'll be celebrating next week. The political and secular liberalism of the day, not classic liberalism which is good, made its way into the church and the church got off mission. Whenever you get off mission you will get off message because the mission controls the message and then you lose your ministries. That secular political-ism and secular liberalism led to theological liberalism and the loss of the mission in the church. When church gets off mission its message and ministries have been adulterated.

I think the same thing is happening today, now. The progressive message of the culture has led to an amalgamation of progressivism in the church and now progressive Christianity has spawned a progressive Gospel. The progressive Gospel message is that we have a message that will transform the culture. Now the mission of the church has become cultural transformation and salvation. I do not believe that is our mission. The church has a lane to stay in but it produces Christians that go into every lane. The only way we can produce Christians to go into every lane is to stay in our lane and on our mission. If we lose our mission we'll lose our message and if we lose our message we'll lose our ministries. Cultural transformation is a glorious consequence of our mission. It is not our mission. Our mission is sinner's salvation and transformation.

When sinners get saved and transformed, guess what happens? Their marriages, families, work place and neighborhoods change, why? It is because they are salt and light. The church does not become the Christian, the church discipled the Christians who go out. The church's mission is narrow and focused. Its message is comprehensive for we're teaching them to observe all that Christ has commanded them. If we stay on our mission of discipleship with the whole counsel of God then we produce Christians that are salt of the earth and light to the world. Then we produce Christian who know how to love mercy, do justice and walk humbly with God. If

we start taking their mission as our mission then we don't produce Christians who are able to do that for we have truncated what God is doing. We are here to make disciples with a prophetic voice, a priestly ministry and the claims of King Jesus in the lives of men and women.

The world has found ways to corrupt the church's mission and we saw this in 13th and 14th century. Then we had to have a Reformation. We are losing it again. Some churches believe their mission is church growth. If you believe your mission is church growth it's just a matter of time before you come up with a pragmatic gospel that will put people in the seats/pews. You will adulterate worship from God-centered to man-centered. If we believe the purpose of the church is to be counseled to self-esteem then we'll end up with a therapy gospel. I'm all for self-esteem but that's not our purpose for that's a consequence. If we believe we exist for the utopia of social justice it is just a matter of time that we come up with a social gospel. If we believe you we exist to make sure you're successful in life then we'll come up with a prosperity gospel. The mission ultimately defines the message.

Our mission is you're a sinner and you can't save yourself. We'll say it the best way we can but it's bad news. There is only One who can save you and we are here to bring Him to you and you to Him. We'll do anything we can to show you how much He loves you. He will forgive you and change you and change everything around you when He lays hold of you. This is what we are here to do and live to do. This is what God has called us to do. When this happens people's lives change. It draws people in for statistical growth is a consequence. The mission is crucial and that's why it's number one in this series. We make disciples through the ministries of upreach (exaltation), outreach (evangelism), inreach (enfolding) and downreach (equipping in the Lord and for the Lord).

I prefer to use another term other than missional. Here we are talking about the Great Commission. Why is it a Great Commission? It is because of Who gave it, Jesus Christ and He gave it to us to the end of the age. So I prefer to say we are "missioned" for we have been missioned by Christ, the Head of the church and this is why He put us here and He is leaving us here to call, perfect, send and sanctify His people until He comes again.

Here's the takeaway. We want to be on mission, on message and in ministry. I will cover the message and ministry in the coming studies. If we're not on mission we'll get off message and we'll get the wrong message and we'll lose ministries. We have to be on mission and the reason is because I want to grow the church but I don't want the church mission to be church growth. I know if we stay on mission we're going to reach people and I desperately want cultural transformation. I want a culture that values life, marriage and gender, but I know the only way we'll get that is if we do discipleship and teach people the whole counsel of God so they become salt and light.

We have ten ministries on the sanctity of life and eight of them were started by people who were disciplined here at Briarwood. There is a prison dorm you can go to and have a picnic with you family whereas before you couldn't, because we didn't go in with any other agenda other than to bring Gospel discipleship and the message and ministry of reconciliation to God and others in Christ. Then it changes. Cultural transformation is a consequence, not our mission. I want people to see themselves made in the image of God with a Biblical concept of self-respect. I want people to be successful in life so they can use that platform to give glory to God. Those are consequences of us staying on mission and therefore on message and in ministry.

I don't want to lose our message to the progressive Christianity and progressive gospel and that means we have to stay on mission or we will lose it and the world will end up giving us

our mission. It's not the world, the pastor, the elders or the members for no one out there gives us our mission and our message. It is only Jesus. I want to do that mission and that message because I love Jesus. It's the reason I get out of bed in the morning. It's why I breathe and it's why I want you to breathe. You are in the only institution that is headed to eternity – it's Christ's church. Until it gets there this is what it does and this is what it says and this is what God has called us to do.

This is why we do Every Member Commitment here at Briarwood. It is because we want to get this mission done. We want this message to be proclaimed. We know we're imperfect and we praise God that He is with us until the end of the age. He is working with us and He is working on us. We love Jesus and we love His church because He loves His church. We love His message because He has given us the message. We love our ministries because He has ordained these ministries. We love the lost because He loves the lost.

What we want to be is for coming generations Briarwood desires to be a Christ-centered, Gospel-driven, and Spirit-filled equipping church where every member is a minister and every minister is a missionary, why? It's because we want to rescue the perishing. We want to disciple the redeemed. We want to send the people of God. Those people in your immediate and extended family that don't know Jesus, those people at work – it's not getting them for the church growth for they are headed to a Christless eternity with absolute isolation and torment that is indescribable under the judgment of God. Can you imagine the first 30 minutes? Then know that judgment is irrevocable. We have been put here to tell them that there is a Savior who loves them and gave Himself for them and that's our mission. And He will change them. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Holy Spirit would You please speak to our hearts? I ask that You speak to everyone in our church and those reading this that we will steward this mission until You come again and when You come again we will be found faithful. We are not profitable but we want to be faithful with the mission that You have given to us. If you are reading this today and you have not yet come to Jesus and you know the place you're headed to and the emptiness in life until you get there, I want to invite you to Jesus. There is fullness of joy evermore in Jesus. I want to invite you to Christ to be enfolded in the family of God to be trained and equipped in the Word of God by the power of the Spirit of God to live life as a worship statement to the glory of God. Just come to Jesus just as you are. Right now just confess and come to Him. If you want to talk and pray with someone please call me or anyone at Briarwood at (205) 776-5200 for we'd love to talk and pray with you. Now Jesus, I ask You to keep us as a people on the mission so we'll stay on the message and we might engage in the ministries that accomplish the mission and send into this world believers who are salt and light – ambassadors for Christ, equipped so that whether they eat or drink or whatever they do, having been taught by the whole counsel of God, they will do to the glory of God. I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Power Point

Found Faithful—On Mission

For God's Glory, Briarwood is committed to equipping Christians to worship God and reach Birmingham to reach the world for Christ.

Mt. 28:16–20, Acts 1:4–9, Eph. 4:11–16, Col. 1:18

Found Faithful—On Mission
Missional?
Missioned?

Life Takeaway
On Mission—On Message—In Ministry

For Coming Generations, Briarwood desires to be a Christ-centered, Gospel-driven, and Spirit-filled “EQUIPPING CHURCH.”

Every member a minister — Every member a missionary