

VIII. Christian Stewardship in Biblical Perspective

Lifestyle Stewardship

“Found Faithful—In Ministry”

Matthew 28:16–20

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We’re in this three part series of the stewardship of the Lord’s church, back in this familiar text in Matthew 28. Jesus has been resurrected but not yet ascended and this is one of His 15 appearances that is recorded in God’s Word. Matthew 28:16–20 which says [16] *Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to **the** mountain* (could be the mountain where the Sermon on the Mount took place or where the transfiguration took place or could be where both took place) *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.”*

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.

As I was anticipating this third study on the stewardship of the church to be on mission, on message and in ministry there were a couple of events that came to my mind from my childhood. I want to share one of them now and then one of them at the end of this study. I was born in Charlotte, North Carolina and I had no siblings for four and half years. Then my sister was born but for those four years I had gotten used to my father and mother’s pattern. Our ancestral home was in Augusta, Georgia and then had many friends in Charleston, South Carolina. My parents were blue collar workers and couldn’t afford to take a day off to travel so we always traveled at night. I did that with my family but it was mainly for one reason – it wouldn’t be long until the kid goes to sleep so the trip could be done without all those questions, like ‘are we there yet?’

Back when we did this there wasn’t the seat belt law so I would sleep laid out across the backseat where I could look out the window and see the stars at night as I fell asleep. Now when my sister was born I was moved to the floorboard where two suitcases were put to make it as level as it could be and she got the back seat. She got the penthouse and I got the outhouse and that is the way it worked. Twelve years later I got two more sisters. The way my mom tried solving this problem was getting an etch-a-sketch for each of us and that was our version of high tech back then. The other thing we’d get was the book of connect the dots to understand what was there. That is what I want to do now in this study – connect the dots.

So I want to connect the dots on our time, talent and treasures, in other words, personal stewardship. So far our study has been on corporate or church stewardship – the church being a good steward of our God-given mission, message and the church being found faithful as stewards of our God-given ministries. The reason I’ve done this is because they are inseparable and interdependent. We (the church) can’t be found faithful on mission, on message and in ministry if each member is not found faithful with the use of your God-given time, talent and treasures. It doesn’t just happen and as you pray through your personal stewardship as you bring it as an offering in praise to God who gave His Son to save us as He offered Himself as our Redeemer, you have to know what it is used for. What do we do with those sacred stewardship

gifts of time, talents and treasures? What do we do as a church to stewards – elders, deacons, staff, members – and how and why is it done?

Personal stewardship and church stewardship are inseparable. Every day when we get up we may not all have the same amount of money in our bank accounts but we all have 24 hours in a day. What are we going to do with it? The Bible tells us to redeem the time (Ephesians 5:16). How do you redeem the time? The first thing out of the shoot is the Lord's Day because the key to the other six days is the Lord's Day and it's perfectly clear in the Bible.

Here is what the Prophet Isaiah says in Isaiah 58:13–14, [13] *"If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the LORD honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, or seeking your own pleasure, or talking idly; [14] then you shall take delight in the LORD, and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."* You were not made to go all out seven days a week and give an hour to Jesus on Sunday. You are called to remember the Day of the Lord, the Sabbath, to set it aside for personal rest, renewal, spiritual refreshment and worship.

Jesus said in Mark 2:27–28, [27] *And He (Jesus) said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. [28] So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath."* It is God's gift that orchestrates how we use our time, sets the thermostat and template for the other six days. Then with that kind of framework we're able to learn the blessings of Biblical priorities – what comes first, how does that lead to second, etc. according to God's Word. We learn why those things are important and how to use our time to nurture those things in our life that are important – marriage, family, relationships. I know my parenting is not going to be effective unless my marriage is where it ought to be. As I learn to serve the Lord that makes me an employee who does his work heartily as unto the Lord.

As we learn to set the priorities of life we learn to set the margins of life and if you don't let me assure you there is a world that will take all of your time away from you. Or you will redeem the time under the Lordship of Christ as a faithful steward. It all begins with the Lord's Day. It doesn't end there but it begins there.

What about talents? You have physical talents and spiritual talents and we want to be good stewards of those. An illustration I have of this was from a church I attended that had a wonderful singles ministry. There were about four young men in that group that were very gifted with their hands and they loved to tinker with cars. Then there were about three other men who had the insight and the gift of mercy. These two groups of men got together in a Bible study and came up with ministry where every sixth Saturday it was known as Car Care Saturday. All the widows and single women would bring their cars to get worked on through the mercy and abilities of these men. Here the spiritual talents and the physical gifts came together as these women were well treated not only as they waited but as their car was having maintenance done on it.

Then comes the whole dynamic of treasures so that not only are we stewarding our abilities and relationships but also our resources. God has worked in my life how it is more blessed to give than to receive but He first had to work in my life to tell me the tithe is not giving for if I kept the tithe then I rob God. You don't rob people if you give them a gift but you rob a person if you keep what belongs to them. We worship the Lord with His tithe and our offerings. So we bring to God His tithe in worship and then we bring offerings, like a faith promise offering beyond the tithe for world missions. Every time we do communion we have a time of alms giving which all goes to the mercy ministry which is beyond the tithe. All that works

together but here is where I want you to see how this all connects, the interdependency and indispensability of this.

All of that personal stewardship as it comes in praise to God, brought into the church of Jesus Christ which He purchased with His own blood, is then used for what Jesus said the church is to do and say – the mission, message and ministries of the church. In other words, why did our elders set a policy back in 1960 with our founding pastor that 50 percent of the financial gifts will go outside the church? Why is it that we pray about those who are gifted that we are sending out to go plant churches or do missions? It is because we have a mission and when people give themselves, their time, talents and treasures, it's all directed to the mission, the message and the ministry. We cannot do the mission with the message if the people of God do not do their time, talents and treasure. As the people of God give their time, talent and treasure unto Christ, they do it with the anticipation of what He will do with it through the body of Christ, His church. So here is our mission, our message and our ministry.

In 1980, as I was finishing up seminary anticipating where I was going to serve, I was really struggling. I remember what sealed it for me. I grew up in the Christian Missionary Alliance church and not the Presbyterian Church of America, but with my theology and convictions about church government I knew I wasn't going to be able to be a part of the Alliance church although I was very grateful for what I learned there. As I investigated the PCA church what sealed the deal for me was when I looked at the mast head of the pamphlet that was sent to me. It said 'True to the Scriptures, faithful to the Reformed faith, fulfill the Great Commission.' There's depth, breadth and height in that statement.

Being true to the Scriptures is all I labor for in my denomination now. The Word of God alone is our only rule of faith and practice. Being faithful to the Reformed faith is the reclamation from the corruption in the church from doctrine and leadership, true to the Reformed faith as it is delivered to us through the Reformation to get us back to first century Biblical Christianity, apostolic vision and ministry and fulfill the Great Commission. Right there is our mission, our message and ministries. Let's look back at Matthew 28 so I can show you the four ministries we are to have to stay on mission and on message.

Matthew 28:18–19 says [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."*

The word 'go' here is a participle. I think the best translation of this word here is to say 'as you are *going*...make disciples.' Our mission is the imperative which is to make disciples. The message is the whole counsel of God and we are to teach them to observe the whole counsel of God, all that He has commanded us, saturated in the contours of the connecting tissues of the Gospel. You never go beyond the Gospel but with the whole counsel of God you can go higher, further, deeper and gloriously wider. What does the Gospel mean in my marriage, my family, my parenting, in being an employer/employee, etc. The Gospel equips me in all the areas of life. The Gospel is that of first importance, now what are our ministries? The very first ministry we are to be doing is not given as a command in this Great Commission because He assumes you are doing it as a believer. It has to do with 'as you are going' and that is evangelism. It is the ministry of outreach – personal evangelism.

No church can do its mission without evangelism of the message and you can't do evangelism by programs. It's personal. If you and I do not share Christ with the lost we don't do evangelism. It's not a program. We can have ministry initiatives and events to equip us how

to do evangelism, but if we're not sharing the Gospel then we don't have anyone to bring to those events. It's not events that evangelize for they provide the occasion. A program doesn't evangelize but it can provide training. Evangelism is people who go and share with others the Good News that Jesus saves sinners – the whole message of God connected and contoured by the Gospel of saving grace in Christ. Evangelism is a process. I have never prayed with someone when leading them to Christ where someone else had not planted the seed before me. Conversion is a glorious moment but evangelism is a continuous moment – planting, watering, cultivating. This is the ministry of outreach.

The second ministry is one of inreach because when someone comes to Christ by His Spirit they are enfolded into the body of Christ. We see this in the book of Acts when the Disciples preached the Gospel people were baptized and added to the body of Christ. This is the sign and seal of the Covenant whereby the initiation of God's people formally takes place as they are brought into the body of Christ where we can love one another, love one another, love with one another and the world will know you are His disciples by your love for one another. Jesus says in John 13:34–35 [34] *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.* [35] *By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.* This is the ministry of enfolding (inreach).

One of my favorite moments when a person gives their life to Jesus is to share with them John 6:47. As soon as they give their life to Jesus I will first tell them to go tell three people that they gave their life to Jesus. Then I tell them to read the Gospel of John and get back with me. Then I share with them John 6:47 which says [47] *Truly (amen), truly (amen), I say to you, whoever believes in Me has eternal life.* In Christ, this is now yours and Jesus put two amens at the front of this verse. Then I let them know they have a new record where their sins are gone – your guilt and shame is gone and the righteousness of Christ is yours. They have a new heart because they have been born again and are a new creation in Christ. By God's grace they are going to get a new mind – the mind of Christ. They have a new life because the old has passed away and the new has come. They have a new home because they are headed to a new heavens and a new earth in a place that He is preparing for them. They also have a new family for them and their family – it is the family of God, the forever family of God. You are brought in and we are called to love one another.

The third ministry is that of equipping as we teach them to observe all that Jesus commanded. We teach the whole counsel of God with the connecting tissues with the leading edge of the Gospel of saving grace, all that God has for them. It is telling them who they are in Christ, what they do in Christ and how that applies to all of their life – marriage, family, parenting, work, friends, citizen, statesmanship, counseling of one another etc. The church is to equip them [31] *So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God* (I Corinthians 10:31).

I have no great insights here for I just pastor a church and this church believes if Jesus did it then let's do it the way Jesus did. Did Jesus make disciples, evangelize, enfold, equip, teach God's Word? Yes, and when He taught them for three years how did He disciple? He would stand and preach in large groups. Then He would go with the 70, the 12 and the three. He had preaching and teaching in large groups in worship and then He had teaching, mentoring, and discipling in the smaller groups. If needed for a season or a reason it could be a life on a life, one on one, but that's the way He did the equipping that was being done. Thus we have Lord's Day gathering, discipling and equipping through expository preaching of the whole counsel of God. Our 70s are our congregational communities and then out of those come small groups of 12 and

three. Then we have available one on one whenever necessary in a season and reason. We don't do this perfectly but this is how we steward our ministries. This is how we try to be found faithful not only in the mission and message but to ministries.

Fourthly, is the ministry of exaltation. Jesus disciplined these men for three years so when they saw Him even through their doubts, what did they do? They worshiped – exaltation. We know how to gather for worship and when we scatter, we worship. Romans 12:1 says *[1] I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.* Here is the thermostat and template of worship as God's people gather. Hebrews 10:25 says *[25] (do) not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.* We worship in spirit and in truth and then that lays the template for lifestyle worship in every arena of life, even eating and drinking is done to the glory of God. Do you see the outcome of this? Here is someone who is a sinner under the dominion of sin and falling short of the glory of God – they are evangelized, enfolded, equipped and now their greatest delight is the glory of God. Now they want Him to be praised.

There are the ministries of the church. Your personal stewardship is indispensable and inseparable from the stewardship of Christ's church. To do this mission, message and ministries that carry the message to accomplish the mission the people of God have to embrace it. You don't just drive by and drop in on a Sunday that's convenient. They become stewards and found faithful with their God-given time, talents and treasures. What is the leadership absolutely committed to do? They are to take all that stewardship and bring it with faithful stewardship to fulfill our mission, message and ministry.

Wouldn't it be wonderful to see a case study of this? There is one in Acts 2. The first New Testament church was in Jerusalem. The church in Jerusalem was conceived in a prayer meeting in Acts one as it was birthed in a sermon that Peter preached in Acts 2. Peter can't finish the sermon so they break in right in the midst of his sermon. Acts 2:37–41 says *[37] Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" [38] And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. [39] For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." [40] And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." [41] So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.*

What did the Apostles do in Jerusalem? They evangelized – be saved. The enfolded as those being saved were baptized and added to the church. They were being equipped with the Word of God after asking what they should do and in Acts 2:42 we see they devoted themselves to the Apostles teaching. Then they began to praise God from whom all blessings flow. Now let's see how they carried it out.

Acts 2:42–47 says *[42] And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread (Lord's Supper) and the prayers. [43] And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. [44] And all who believed were together and had all things in common. [45] And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. [46] And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, [47] praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.*

Here is the Great Commission in Jerusalem and will later go to Judea, Samaria and the utter most parts of the world, but the way it started in Jerusalem was they took the whole counsel of God and the Gospel and went out to make disciples through evangelism, enfolding, equipping and exaltation. Those that were added to Christ the Apostles kept on equipping them with all the He had commanded them. Then those added devoted themselves to the Word and began evangelizing, enfolding and equipping others as the Lord kept adding to their number day by day. This church started with 11, went to 120 and then to 3,000 and even more as the church continues to expand but they kept evangelizing, enfolding, equipping and praising God house to house and at the temple – exaltation and worship. Look at the personal stewardship for they couldn't have done it without the people devoting their times, talents and treasures. They were even giving way beyond the tithe. They were selling their possessions to give to those to meet the needs – one together enfolded.

Do you see the mix of personal stewardship and the stewardship of this church? This ends up taking hold of Jerusalem. It is so powerful that the government will start killing them in about 14 years. Then it will go to the world in Acts 13–28. One of my favorite verses in the Bible is Acts 17:6b where an unconverted pagan in Europe 25 years after the ascension of Jesus says, *[6b] shouting, "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also."* The Apostles mission was not to turn the world upside down for that was the consequence. The Apostles mission was to turn sinners right side up. When sinners get turned right side up their marriages, families, business, their witness and lives get turned right side up and they become the salt of the earth. They become lights to the world. They now know how to love mercy, do justice and walk humbly before God as the church stays focused on its mission and its comprehensive message it turns out comprehensive Christians that whatever they do, they do to the glory of God.

For us to turn out world shaking Christians they have to get right side up and that means the church has to stay on mission – make disciples, on message – the whole counsel of God saturated with the Gospel and in ministry of evangelism, enfolding, equipping, and exaltation. We individually personally in our stewardship and in our church stewardship need to be found faithful. Sinners right side up gloriously turns the world upside down for Christ.

I praise God because I'm in a nation that desperately needs to be shook. I don't know if we're at the nadir of being given over to the desires of our heart or have we been brought to the point that only the Gospel will make any sense to people who have given themselves over to the destruction and rebellion of God's glorious truth – the sanctity of life, sexuality, gender, marriage, family etc. Is this God giving us over as we see in Romans 1 or is He bringing a glorious awakening? I don't know but I do know what we're called to do and that is to make disciples, be faithful to His Word, be engaged in evangelism, enfolding, equipping and the praise of our God that He would be exalted. If He is lifted up He will draw all men to Himself.

Here is the takeaway. Our Lord has so designed His church that the stewardship of our God-given mission, message and ministries are indispensably interdependent upon our personal stewardship of our God-given time, talents and treasures. May we be found faithful. What is the key to being found faithful? In the midst of the confusion, discouragement, challenge, adversity, and polarization I believe the key is what your fixed point is. What is your fixed point? Is it economic, political or is it Jesus?

When I was in the third grade there was a teacher's pet who had red-hair, pig tails and worked in the principal's office or at least that is what the teacher's pet seemed to always look like when I was growing up. I remember the day she came to my class and said to the teacher 'Ike Reeder's dad is at the principal's office waiting for him.' Boy I thought that was lethal. As

I was walking beside her to the principal's office she said to me 'Oh and your grandfather is there too.' I thought that was some good news because if he was there then there would be a witness. They were there to check me out of school. So we got in the car.

They don't tell me where we were going but I see the ball stadium for that was home to the Charlotte Hornets, the double A team for the Washington Senators. There is an exhibition game being played there because the parent team was on its way back to the Washington for open day and they always stop to play an exhibition game with another major league team. The Senators were playing the Boston Red Sox and my dad had checked me out of school to see this game. I loved the 'murderer's row' on the Senators but I loved the Red Sox more because of one man – the Splendid Splinter, the greatest hitter of all times, Ted Williams. He threw right and batted left and I threw right and batted left. Williams was my hero, number 9 for the Boston Red Sox. This meant I was going to get to see him play and he did not disappoint me that day. He went three for four and his last hit was a homerun.

I will never forget that day but I what I really loved about that day was we went in the turn style and we didn't have to pay because my dad my dad was with the Pittsburg Pirates and my grandfather was with the Washington Senators. We went down to the box seats where all the scouts were and my dad and grandfather were introducing me to all these people. Then all of a sudden my dad takes my left arm and my granddad takes my right arm as they pick me up and put me over the railing out onto the field. As I looked up my granddaddy says 'Ted, I want you to meet my grandson' and I shook hands with Ted Williams. I did not wash that hand for 42 days, but I'll never forget what he said to me – 'Kid, keep your eye on the ball all the time.'

That is what I'd say to you as a Christian especially with all this stuff going on around you – 'fix your eyes on Jesus if you want to be found faithful.' Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments that we could be together in your Word. Father, I pray that as we take these moments to consecrate to You that You would bless Your people. I bless Your glorious Name. Father, I pray for our elders, deacons, staff and membership that in the stewardship of our mission, our message and our four ministries we would be found faithful. I pray that we by Your grace will be able to accomplish it as Your people individually are found faithful, bringing their God-given time, talents and treasures to the glorious task of the mission, the message and the ministries. Then God I beg You to please visit us with a Gospel awakening and do it gloriously – surprise us and fill us with the joy of salvation. May Your churches be full of those who are found faithful to reach those faithfully who need You so Father bless Your people. Take this time to mediate on your personal stewardship to the Lord as your commitment to ask God who is faithful to you that you will be faithful to Him and pray that we as a church will be faithful on mission, on message and in ministry, not frightened by fears nor walk in the arrogance of self. I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Power Point

FOUND FAITHFUL—IN MINISTRY

- I. Ministry of OutReach – *Evangelism*
- II. Ministry of InReach – *Enfolding*
- III. Ministry of DownReach – *Equipping*
- IV. Ministry of UpReach – *Exaltation*

LIFE TAKEAWAY

On Mission – On Message – In Ministry

Our Lord has so designed His Church that the Stewardship of our God-given Mission, Message and Ministries are indispensably interdependent upon our Personal Stewardship of our God-given Time, Talents and Treasure.