

Simple Gifts

A SERIES OF DEVOTIONS ON STEWARDSHIP



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fit for a king

A gift fit for a king



“And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh” (Matt. 2:11).

In these figures that the New Testament calls Magi, we see a fitting image for us as we begin a month-long focus on financial stewardship. While we don't know much about these strange men who appear suddenly and then just as suddenly disappear from the scene of Scripture, we are left with one very clear image. These Wise Men, whoever they are, brought gifts!

These men, with extravagant generosity, give us a clear focus on our life of worship before the Lord. To a King to which they had no claim on, they bring the best of what they have. Wealth, worship, witness and a foreshadowing of woe is what they give.

Gold is the wealth. It is a gift fit for a king! Frankincense is the worship. The prayers of the ancients were symbolized by the smoke of the incense rising upward (REV. 8:4). But what about the myrrh? That was an expensive spice for burial. This foreshadows what this Child will do for them, and for us—give His life for the sins of the world as His name means. None of these gifts were cheap. They cost them dearly.

But they didn't see it as a cost. They saw it as worship. This king would be their king. He would be your king too! In this next month, consider the gifts you will bring to our king. The gifts that the Lord calls us to bring are best called simple gifts. These gifts

are to follow the model of the Magi. Not inexpensive nor seen as costly. But flowing from a heart that is full of the glory that is revealed to us in the babe of Bethlehem who has come to die for us. Our gifts flow from gratitude for what our Lord has done for us and the world. They don't have to be golden, fragrant, nor a sign of death. Rather they are to be gifts that rejoice in the new baptismal life we have in this Jesus. The Jesus—who is the Savior revealed to us.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, You are our King and Lord. As the Magi worshiped You with extravagant gifts, grant us Your grace that we might be willing to give the very best of us in service to You and to our neighbor. Amen.

Light

The gift of light



“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you” (Is. 60:1–2).

Light. It was the very first thing that the Creator spoke into existence. We marvel at the way He created it. But today, it is important that we contemplate just what a simple, yet profound gift light is for us.

Did you know that without light, there would be no life on this planet? That is significant! The light that shines on our planet interacts with the green plants all around the globe and the result is the production of oxygen. No oxygen, no breath. No breath means no life. Like all things in our beloved creation, it all ties together.

Light is also a key gift that our Lord gives us in our spiritual life too! Without the light that is Jesus we too would, as Paul says in Ephesians 2, be dead in our trespasses and sins. Sin is darkness and death. Jesus is the light of life.

In Jesus, this light has shown upon us. Our sin is exposed. Our death is deserved. But as the light of life pierces the darkness in which we lay, one very *simple*, yet truly profound *gift* is given. His glory rises upon us! His love shines upon us and we are given what we don't deserve—life!

This light doesn't stop with us either. How we use this gift of light for the sake of our neighbor also reveals

God's glory! As we consider this simple gift of light, may the Holy Spirit use that light to show just how good our Lord has been to us and how He is calling us to respond. This is all part of the wonderful task of stewardship for which we have been made and redeemed. As His light shines on us, we are created to reflect it to those around us in what we say, what we do and how we give! Simple gifts ... yet profound results!

Prayer

Gracious Lord, as Your light has arisen upon us in the light of the world that is Jesus, so let Your light shine in and through us today and every day. Grant us the grace to identify and use the simple gifts You call us to share in the light of Your grace today and throughout this year. Amen.

the Gospel

The gift of the Gospel



“For this reason, I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles—assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly” (Eph. 3:1–3).

There is that word: stewardship. It is a word that so many Christian people balk at. In fact, it isn’t really a joke that when the word “stewardship” is mentioned in church, men guard their wallets and women clutch their purses. The Church has earned this response. Over the generations, the Church has allowed the word stewardship to become equated with the financial resources necessary to compensate staff and pay bills.

So, as we consider simple gifts, does it surprise you that Paul would willingly talk about stewardship with the people of Ephesus? Notice what He isn’t talking about: money. What Paul is talking about is REAL stewardship, which deals with stewardship of God’s grace. That is the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

The greatest gift that our Lord has given us to steward is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Truthfully, it is the ONLY gift we are given to steward. How you are led by God to steward the resources entrusted to you by God are to be stewarded for the sake of the Gospel. How you use your stuff tells a great deal about what you think of the Gospel. If your stuff is used to help your family, friends, congregation and community to better understand the Gospel, you are a faithful steward. If it

is about you and your comforts, or even their comforts, that isn’t faithful stewardship.

This perspective is helpful. It also causes us some grief. None of us are always faithful in our stewardship for the sake of the Gospel. What Paul calls us to in these words is repentance. Today we ask the Lord to work in and through our stewardship so that the people around us will KNOW about our stewardship of the Gospel as individuals and as a congregation.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, as You entrusted the Gospel of Jesus Christ to Your servant Paul, so You have entrusted it to me. I admit that I have not always been faithful in my stewardship of the Gospel. I have been more worried about my comfort and my legacy than the extension of the Gospel. Lead me to see and use the simple gifts You have entrusted to me for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ! Amen.

stewardship

Stewardship gifts



“... so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him” (Eph. 3:10–12).

What is the goal of our stewardship? This is really the WHY question of stewardship. Human beings were created for the task of being stewards. Read Genesis chapters one and two and we will see this. We were created to have dominion and subdue creation in a way that reflects the image of God in which we were created. This takes place in the way that we work and keep the creation entrusted to us by God.

The only problem we have with stewardship is found in Genesis chapter three. There, in an act of rebellion and sin, stewards named Eve and Adam claimed ownership over that which God had created them to steward. We have a word for claiming ownership over something that belongs to another. That word is theft. But they were stealing more than a fruit. They were stealing God’s place and God’s glory! Ever since that fateful day in the garden, we have followed suit. What God has given us to steward, we have attempted to own.

So, God once again shows His glory in establishing the eternal purpose of Jesus Christ. In going to the cross, Jesus restores us in forgiveness to the task of once again stewarding what God has given us. Forgiven and

restored in Jesus, we are once again stewards. Not just of creation, but of the Gospel as it is served by creation, including us!

Today we pray again that we would be able to recognize the simple gifts the Lord has given us to steward for the sake of the Gospel. In this we make known the manifold wisdom of God. As we faithfully steward the simple gifts God has entrusted to us, we point people to the redemption and restoration of our stewardship through Jesus Christ. Remember, the world sees Jesus through your stewardship. What are you showing the world in how you steward God’s simple gifts?

Prayer

Blessed Lord, Your simple gifts are given from Your generous heart to a people who tend to want to own rather than serve. Lead us to repent of our ownership and then steward creation for the sake of the Gospel so that the manifold wisdom of Your grace might be shown through us. Amen.

God's creation

God's gift of creation



"Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, 'Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him'" (Matt. 2:1-2).

Ever wonder what would possess these strange figures called the Wise Men to traverse the countryside to bring gifts to a king that wasn't really theirs by law? The Magi give us an answer right in the words of their question to Herod and the religious leaders in Jerusalem. "For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." It was the star that pointed to the giving of the single greatest gift God has given to humanity.

The Wise Men didn't come because of a feeling in their gut. They didn't saddle up their camels because they got an invitation in the mail nor did they see a Facebook notification or Snapchat. It was the star that told them! Creation talks about the glory of God. This is exactly what the psalmist says, *"The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge"* (PS. 19:1-2).

If the heavens can declare the handiwork of God because He made them, how about the simple gifts that the Lord has given you? The answer is yes! How one stewards the simple gifts our Lord bestows answers the question, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?" When we are intentional in our stewardship of all God has given for the sake of the kingdom of God,

we are pointing those around us to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, Jesus Himself. However, if we claim ownership of God's creation, WE are claiming to be the king. Not only is this foolishness, it is idolatry!

Today, reflect on the way you manage the simple gifts our Lord has given you. Are you using them in a manner which, like the star of Bethlehem, points people to Jesus? If not, ask the Lord to forgive you and point you to the One who is born King of the Jews ... for He is YOUR king!

Prayer

Giving Lord, Your simple gifts were created to abound with the news of Your glory. Our sinfulness often leads us, like Herod and the others in Jerusalem, to miss Jesus all together. As You used created things to lead the Wise Men to Jesus, so grant us Your grace to use the simple gifts You have entrusted to us to bring people to their Lord and King Jesus! Amen.

Christ our light

The gift of Christ is our light



“When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.’” (Matt. 2:3–6).

Earlier in this journey of *Simple Gifts* we reflected on light. Today we spend a moment reflecting on the potential negative of light. What could be bad about light? Well, when the light comes on, that which you do wrong can no longer be hidden. When the light comes on you can't hide the fact that you are sneaking a midnight snack, snatching some loot or cheating on your spouse! The light reveals things. Sometimes what we see isn't always pleasant.

As the light shone on Jerusalem all those centuries ago, it brought to light two very clear and disturbing realities. First, the evil King Herod was not a godly man. Second, the very people who should have seen the same star that the Magi saw, missed it! The light of Christ reveals evil and ignorance.

The light of the Lord that shines on our stewardship can be just as damning to us. As we reflect on God's generosity toward us, it shines a light on our response. What does it show? Often, it reveals our stinginess in support of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the fact that we miss out on just how significant the role we have as

stewards of resources plays in the sharing of the light of the Gospel.

As this light continues to shine on us today, may the Lord who calls us to faith and service, grant us His grace to reflect honestly and respond generously to His call to be stewards. Repentance is the answer to evil and ignorance. Jesus is just the light we need!

Prayer

Light of the world, Jesus the Christ, shine on us. Show us where we have fallen short as stewards of the simple gifts You give for us to show Your glory to our neighbors and the world. Overcome the evil in us and enlighten our ignorance that we may serve You and that others see the light of life in us! Amen.

LOW

A gift of joy



“And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was.

When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy” (Matt. 2:9b–10).

Did you know that stewardship can lead you to know true joy? For those who have been in the Church for any length of time, this might sound really surprising. But the Wise Men show us this joy.

The Wise Men did not know joy because of what they had done. They knew the joy of receiving the gift of God! The creation, through the star, had caused them to set out on a journey. It brought them to an unwitting and unwilling Herod. But what finally pointed them to their ultimate goal, the King of the Jews? It was the Word. The Word of God that the scribes had quoted to Herod proved to be true. They had found the palace of the king!

But it was no palace. It was a place. It was a simple home. The Lord had come to dwell among His people in the simplest of ways. Through stewardship of creation and Word, they were led to find this place. Pointed to the truth by the management of Word and world, the Wise Men found joy. This joy is more than a feeling. It is a person. The joy comes from meeting Jesus.

Your stewardship of God’s simple gifts is used by Him to guide others to Jesus. Most times that is your faithful financial support of our work together in the Church. Other times it is found in the simple acts of

generosity that show the people around you that you have the joy of knowing Jesus. This takes money, time and a willingness to be in the Word and at the Lord’s Table. You can only steward the joy of God’s presence when you are present with Him. That is where you find the joy the Wise Men know. It is that joy, as steward, that you are called to give to others!

Yes, you too can be a steward of the Wise Men’s joy. The simple gift of God’s Word will show this to you. In the coming year, make it a priority to be in God’s house and at His Table weekly. Then you will know the contagious joy of being a steward of God’s simple gifts!

Prayer

Lord God, You led the Wise Men by a star, first to Jerusalem and then to Jesus. You have also led us to Jesus through the leading of faithful stewards of the Gospel and Your creation. This gives us the same joy that the Wise Men knew so long ago in Bethlehem. Grant us Your grace to be radically generous with the joy You have given us in Jesus so that we might give that joy away as well! Amen.

redemption

God's ultimate gift of redemption



"But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine'" (Is. 43:1).

Let's start with a question: Of what will you be more likely to take greater care? Something you own? Or something that isn't yours?

This might be a slippery slope question for a devotion during a stewardship series based on God's simple gifts. However, as one hears the words of our Lord through the prophet Isaiah, it is a question that does bring a great deal of comfort.

As God plainly states through Isaiah, stewards that have been created and are being sustained by God have no reason to fear. Why? Because they belong to God! They are owned fully by Him. With His mighty power the Lord created them. By His amazing grace, He has redeemed them in the innocent suffering and death of His beloved Son Jesus! You, my friend in Christ, are doubly owned!

God, as the Owner of all things by virtue of creation, sees you as a treasured possession. He promises never to hold out on you. He may not make you stupendously wealthy, incredibly intelligent or dashing beautiful. But you do have the sure and certain promise that God IS with you. In Word and Sacrament, our Lord dwells with you, giving you His gifts of life and salvation!

As one contemplates the simple gifts our Lord gives and how we might be called to share them with the Church for the Gospel and our neighbors for God's glory, we need not fear. We have His promise that He will be with us. For this reason, we can indeed be extravagantly generous! We have the Lord's promise! He will not abandon us.

The faithful stewardship and generosity to which we are called is to be a confession of our trust in His promise. It isn't always easy. But this is the stewardship to which we have been called. But it isn't about us. It is all about the One who owns us! In Him we believe. In Him we trust. In Him we have no reason to fear. Because of Him we are free to be faithful stewards of all He has. It is for His glory and our neighbor's benefit!

Prayer

Lord God, Creator and Redeemer of all things, there isn't anything that our life in this world can throw at us that is bigger than You. Grant us Your grace to trust You in all things, including our financial stewardship for the sake of the Gospel. Drive away fear and grant us steadfast faith to trust You boldly in how we live and how we give! Amen.

Baptism

Baptismal gifts



“We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4).

Baptism is a tremendous stewardship concept. Lutherans often don’t tend to talk about it much, but our stewardship is driven by our baptismal identity. What makes this even more remarkable is that it takes us back to a point in time when our first parents were NOT faithful stewards.

Re-read Genesis 3. Bible scholars call this chapter the fall into sin. Really, it is more like the first stewardship crisis. Adam and Eve were made for the purpose of stewarding the creation that God had spoken into existence. They didn’t own it. They were to serve God by serving as caretakers of creation. But in a beguiling blink of an eye, it all changed. They reached out and took—not just the fruit from the forbidden tree, but they attempted to steal God’s place. With this rebellion comes death.

Driven out of the garden, Adam and Eve were never relieved of their duties of stewardship. The work of stewardship would bring only death. That is, until Christ came to do the work that we could never do. He was the PERFECT steward of God’s Word and will. His death on the cross and tomb-robbing resurrection changed everything!

Baptism restores our place. Death no longer can hold us. We have new life. This new life is manifest in our

stewardship of all things! Our new baptismal life in Christ is a restoration in our stewardship! Baptized into Christ, we live like no one else. As baptized stewards, we then can give of ourselves freely because our ultimate fear, death, has been done away with!

As you remember your Baptism today, remember its call and promise that you have been restored for His purposes as stewards of all things! This is both freeing and purposeful all at the same time!

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, as a perfect steward of God’s Word and will, You have opened the door to a restoration of our relationship with the Father. This relationship of stewardship is the one for which we have been created. Grant us Your grace in Holy Baptism to live like redeemed stewards, free from fear and full of generous life for the sake of the Gospel. Amen.

God's gift of life



"For one who has died has been set free from sin" (Rom. 6:7).

Here we go again, talking about death. Death can be so unsettling for those of us who want nothing more than to possess life. Death is so final. The one who dies tends to stay dead. Those who are dead can't do anything. If stewardship is something we have been created and redeemed to do, what good is death?

But once again, our Lord, through His servant Paul, reminds us of the great stewardship of life that has been given to us in Jesus Christ. We are not called to free ourselves from death for stewardship. It is Christ's death on the cross that sets us free. His death is far from being in vain. In fact, it is His death that gives us the greatest freedom: life!

Life is meant to be lived and lived to the fullest. However, because we were once in bondage to death, we have not been set free to do whatever we please. God has set us free from death in Christ for a purpose. The purpose, like the life we now live in Christ, comes from outside of us. Stewardship of the new life we have in Christ is never about us. It is always about the One who gives us life: Jesus

All that we are and have then becomes a living, breathing, baptism-inspired billboard for the new life that comes to all those in Christ. How we live and how we give of ourselves is to be for the glory of Christ and for the sake of our neighbor. We give freely of ourselves because Jesus has given freely of His life for

us. He gave that life so that we might know the love of God. We give so that others might experience that love which comes in Jesus.

We are free. Free from death. That means we are free to live. This free life is a steward life. We give all that we are and have for the sake and glory of the One who gave it all to make it possible. This is the new life we are called to live for Him!

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, Your death set us free from death. Those free from death are given life. May that life flow out from us to others. Lead us to live and love as stewards of this gift of life in such a way that others would crave this grace as well. Use us as Your instruments in this new life. Amen.

faithful stewardship

The gift of faithful stewardship



“Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased’” (Luke 3:21–22).

God was pleased. With whom was He pleased? His son Jesus of course! But have you ever wondered why? What had Jesus done up to this point to cause such pleasure for His Father? Well, He didn’t get murdered by Herod. He was in the temple like a good Jewish boy. He hadn’t done anything exceptional up to this point. No healings. No teaching. No resurrections. Even in Luke 3, all Jesus does is go down into the water and is baptized by His cousin John. Nothing spectacular to inspire pleasure in the Father has been seen yet.

But that is what gives us the greatest stewardship lesson. Stewardship isn’t about the spectacular. You don’t have to give millions of dollars to be a Father-pleasing steward. You don’t have to go to Africa for mission work to get the same kind of “atta boy” from God. Stewardship that is faithful and God-pleasing is found in everyday life. It is the husband loving his wife because she is a gift from God. It is a mom feeding her baby in the middle of the night because she has been given this new life to steward. It is a child doing their level best because their talents are gifts from God.

This happens every day. You have been doing it. Simple gifts have been entrusted to you. Your faithful

presence in worship, your generosity for the Gospel, the investment in your family with the message of the Gospel and so many other mundane efforts are stewardship. It is your faithfulness to the callings you have been given.

The Father was well pleased with Jesus because of what He had done up to that point. He was also well pleased with what He was going to do. The same is true of you, faithful steward. He is pleased with what you have done and what He knows you will do. He knows you will heed His Word and answer His call. He has given you all the grace you need to be His faithful steward. With you He is well pleased.

Prayer

Loving Father, You were well pleased with the faithful work of Your Son both before and after His Baptism in the Jordan. Grant us the grace to be faithful in the stewardship of our daily lives. When we fall short, lead us back to Jesus. We know that it is because of Him that You are pleased with us. Lead us to be faithful stewards of His Gospel every day! Amen.

Savior

The Savior's gift



“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior” (Is. 43:2–3a).

Savior. That is a word in which we in the Church have so often taken great comfort. We love to talk about our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! And we should. We have much to be thankful for in the person and work of Jesus. We should shout it from the rooftop!

But, when was the last time you contemplated the word “Savior”? To say that Jesus is your Savior is also saying something about you. It shows your weakness. To say that Jesus is your Savior means that you are confessing that you can’t save yourself.

This flies in the face of what we have been saying since we were three-years-old. We always want to do things ourselves. The child wants to be independent. The youth can’t wait to leave home and be independent. The senior citizen does whatever can be done to be as independent as possible. The sinner in us wants to be independent from God’s rules. The sinful steward often wants to get by with giving as little credit and stewardship as possible to the Lord! But all of these strivings for independence usually end badly! What a mess we can make of our lives at times. We are overwhelmed, consumed and drowned.

But Jesus IS our Savior. All those times we have tried to be independent of Him, He has been right there to catch us when we have fallen. When we have hoarded, He has been generous with His grace. When we have claimed ownership of that which is His and deserved death in the process, He has been there to save us and give us life! He is our Savior! Of that we can be thankful for every day!

We are called then to be stewards of this Savior. We serve and live for Him every day. Our lives, and all our possessions, belong to Him. They are to be used for His glory every day! We are saved in Him. In Him we have life!

Prayer

Lord of promise, You are there for us to save us from ourselves every day. Save us again this day from ungratefulness, selfishness and unfaithful stewardship of all we are and all we have. Save us so that we in turn can be used by You to save others. Amen.

steward of peace

Stewards of the gift of peace



"The Lord sits enthroned over the flood; the Lord sits enthroned as king forever. May the Lord give strength to his people! May the Lord bless his people with peace!" (Ps. 29:10–11).

Peace! That is sure something that is in short supply these days. Watch the news? You see that peace doesn't exist in faraway lands. But then again, it doesn't exist in our community either. Violence is all around us. Bodies, lives, homes and spirits are broken all around us. Families feel the lack of peace that comes in divorce, indebtedness and over-scheduling. Kids feel the lack of peace that comes from not wanting to be in school, not wanting to be kind to classmates and respectful to teachers. There isn't peace in our workplaces. At times, there isn't even peace in our churches.

Can we be stewards of something we don't have? In a word, YES! We are called to be stewards of peace because we most certainly do have peace. While there isn't an absence of hostility in so many sectors of our life, there is an absence of hostility in one very critical section: our life with God. God, in Christ, has reconciled the world to Himself. He has blessed us with a peace that passes all understanding. We are declared right with Him. Death no longer assaults us. God has given us peace in the forgiveness of sins and the new life that goes with it! And we are to be stewards of this peace. That means we are created and called to share this peace with others who seemingly go out of their way to wreck our peace.

How are we stewards of this peace? We give it freely. As we are forgiven in Christ, so we also forgive! And this isn't limited to those who we may beg and grovel for it. We are called to be as radically generous with the forgiveness and peace that we offer as God is with us. Yes, that means you offer forgiveness to those who haven't sought it or deserved it!

This doesn't seem fair! But then again, God's forgiveness of your sins isn't fair either. It is grace. God has called you to be the same kind of peace to others as Jesus is to you. In stewarding this peace, you are spreading it around, just like the Lord wants! Give it freely. It will be a blessing to others and to you!

Prayer

King of peace, You have authored peace with us in Your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. Grant us Your grace that we be free and generous stewards of this peace with others. Grant that as they receive the peace You have given through us, they too might be at peace with You. Amen.

three

Three gifts



“Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in his ways! You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands; you shall be blessed, and it shall be well with you” (Ps. 128:1–2).

Fear, faith and stewardship. Three things that go together. And it isn’t because you can have faith that any talk of stewardship will create fear in the hearers! These three seemingly unique topics go together because they flow from the same source—the Lord Himself.

Created by God, the steward is accountable. This accountability was originally without fear. The steward worked and kept (GEN. 2:15) the creation called into existence by the Lord. That arrangement lasted until sin came into the equation. Then fear came with it. Adam and Eve hid from their accountability in fear of the Lord. To fail as a steward in this way deserves death. From that moment on, as stewards they would never fully measure up. Death is the lasting legacy.

Until Jesus! When the simple gift of Jesus is offered in the babe of Bethlehem and the Christ of the cross, fear gives way to faith. Jesus took accountability for our failed stewardship and we were restored. Baptized into Christ, the Holy Spirit creates faith which leads to a restoration of faithful stewardship! Set on this new path the steward’s accountability is balanced between fear and faith. We know that we are accountable to live and work for the Lord. When we succeed, it is to God’s credit. When we fail, our faith in Christ leads us to confession and absolution, which once again sets us on the path of faithful stewardship.

This use of God’s simple gifts is captured in the words of the psalmist. Fear of the Lord leads to work. Work leads to blessing. Faith sees this blessing as a gift from God. The baptized steward sees this and clearly confesses that it is indeed well with us. May the Lord lead us to this triune stewardship of His simple gifts!

Prayer

Lord as Your stewards, we work in fear of our shortcomings and sin, in faith in Christ’s redemption and restoration and eager desire to serve as faithful stewards of Your simple gifts. Lead us by grace through faith to see, rejoice and serve in this faithful stewardship! As You have blessed us with Your work in Jesus, may our work as stewards be a blessing to others. Amen.

generations

Gifts for the generations to come



"The Lord bless you from Zion! May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life! May you see your children's children! Peace be upon Israel!" (Ps. 128:5–6).

Stewardship is a generational thing. Without fail, those who grasp and practice the depth and joy of faithful stewardship have almost always learned it, not from a book or seminar, but from the faithful example of those who paved the way before them. In many churches, the visible generosity of the sanctuary is a clear example. That God's people would be willing to sacrifice for the sake of the joy of the Gospel being proclaimed to subsequent generations, even when they rest from their labors with Jesus is nothing short of remarkable!

We know peace with God because it was passed down to us from earlier generations. This puts our stewardship in a much clearer perspective. So often we have thought of stewardship considering what is needed for the here and now. But the blessing from God is generational. As the Lord allows us to see our children's children, it gives us the opportunity as stewards of God's grace to share the Gospel and its treasure with the generations that follow. This generational stewardship is really nothing other than sharing the peace that is ours in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

As stewards we respond to God's giving of simple gifts with joy. Joy like this is contagious! It is our goal to have it be catching from one generation to the next. How you respond today, both with the action of faithful stewardship as well as the depth of your generosity, is what causes this joy to spread. Knowing that we are sharing this simple gift is the greatest blessing!

Prayer

Generous Lord, You have caused us to be heirs of the Gospel because of the generosity of the generations before us. We are grateful for these simple gifts. We pray that by Your Holy Spirit You would continue to spread the joy of this prosperity with the generations after us by leading us to be faithful stewards of these simple gifts today. Show Jesus to them through us now and even after we rest from our labors with You! Amen.

Jesus

The gift of Jesus



“For Zion’s sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not be quiet, until her righteousness goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a burning torch” (Is. 62:1).

For too long stewardship has been a quiet thing, often thought of as something only between “me and Jesus.” Silent stewardship is less than faithful. In a desire to not want to seem “holier than thou” or that we are trying to make ourselves look better than we really are, we miss out on a powerful component of stewardship of the Gospel. Silent stewardship isn’t as contagious as visible stewardship.

Silent stewardship flies in the face of our call to make disciples of all nations. If someone had a cure for cancer but kept it to themselves, this selfishness would be viewed as criminal. To know how to end suffering and death and doing nothing to share it would be the height of irresponsibility.

In the same way, the steward can’t keep silent! Now, this is not a call to make stewardship about us. Faithful stewardship is always about Jesus. But to hide the stewardship of the light of the Gospel under the bushel basket of false humility is not good either. As faithful stewards today, we visibly live out our stewardship in such a way that points to Jesus.

The message of Jesus and the righteousness He has won for us is a torch that burns brightly in our sin-darkened world. While not talking about amounts and effort in stewardship, it is about pointing to the sufficiency of Jesus and His stewardship of His life,

death and resurrection for us. As we live as faithful stewards of creation and joyfully crediting it all to the Lord, others see it. In this, they too will see Jesus and His righteousness for them! We can’t keep this quiet!

Prayer

Lord of creation, Your voice thundered into chaos and created everything we have. Your Word became flesh and we beheld glory. By Your grace, do not allow us to remain silent in proclaiming the Gospel. Lead us to be faithful and generous stewards. In this, keep us from being silent as You lead us to point others to Jesus so that they know the joy that has been freely given to us. Amen.

Holy Spirit

God's gift of the Holy Spirit



"You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says 'Jesus is accursed!' and no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except in the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:2-3).

When something takes our heart away from the Lord it is an idol. Every sin is a matter of idolatry. We are led astray from fearing, loving and trusting in God above all things. As we trust in wealth, or effort, or pride, or greed, or lust, or sloth, we are really doing nothing other than allowing ourselves to be held captive to worthless idols.

In the same way, unfaithful stewardship is a matter of idolatry. When we hoard our resources for fear that we might be left with nothing, we fail to confess that Jesus is Lord of our life and will provide for us. So, in the area of stewardship, we are very often very Corinthian. We are led astray by worthless idols.

But it is the Holy Spirit that leads us to forsake these idols and embrace the wonderful, liberating truth that Jesus is Lord! This means it is not our decision in matters of stewardship. It is really the Holy Spirit that is leading. What you make as a commitment to the Lord's work is not your decision. It is guided by the Holy Spirit. The only thing we can really do is get in the way.

Today, as you prayerfully consider your stewardship of the Lord's simple gifts, pray that the Holy Spirit will lead you away from worthless idols and by His power

confess with your life, your lips and your gifts that Jesus is Lord. Let Him speak through you today!

Prayer

Spirit of God, You have carried the Word of God and spread it across the generations and globe. We can't confess Jesus with our lips, lives or stewardship without You in our lives. Work in and through us that this precious gift would be shared simply and freely through us. Amen.

A variety of gifts



“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Cor. 12:4–7).

“What good am I?” That was the question that 94-year-old Hulda Steubner asked me a few months into my very first pastorate. She had lived a hard life that had taken its toll on her. Her body was worn out from 75 years of farming. Her heart was broken because of her daughter’s impending death at the hands of cancer. She couldn’t drive. She couldn’t get to church. The trip from her bed to the kitchen table was about all she could do for the morning.

In answer to her question I wove her arthritic hands into a folded position. I asked her if she would pray for me, the work of Trinity in Sheldon and the Church at large. I told her if she did that, she was doing work that many could not. Her shocked response came, “I do that every night ... IN GERMAN!”

Every person, young or old, short or tall, veteran or rookie in the faith have gifts to be used for the kingdom. They are not the same. But those simple gifts are there! You don’t even have to know what those gifts are. Just allowing the Holy Spirit to move you to financial generosity, generosity of your service or talents, is a manifesting of His work for the common good.

Ask the Lord to guide you today and in the coming days as you consider your commitment to the work

of the Lord in this place. Dare to pray that the Spirit move you beyond your comfort zone and into the freedom of knowing that the Lord gives His simple gifts to you for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

Prayer

Lord, as You moved Hulda to serve within her limitations, remove any barrier that might exist in our lives that would prevent us from being faithful stewards of the Gospel. Lead us to pray, to give and to live in such a way that, through us, others see Jesus! Amen.

given to you

The gifts that you have been given



"All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills" (1 Cor. 12:11).

If only I had gifts like other people! If I had what they had, I know that I would be a much better steward of the Gospel. It would make logical sense that if we had more to steward, there would be more stewardship. But know that this is actually the devil talking! He has been getting human beings to think that God is holding out on them since the Garden of Eden! What a liar! When we listen to him, we too buy into the lie that we don't have the gifts we need.

You have the simple gifts which the Lord wills you to have. We may not have the gifts we WANT, but we most certainly have the gifts we need! After all, they are His gifts. He gives them freely. Jesus is one of those gifts. Your life is a gift. All that you have to support this body and life are gifts! All you use to support the Gospel of Jesus Christ are these gifts! His gifts used for the sake of the neighbor for the glory of God! One Spirit. One Church. Varied gifts all coming together to do amazing things for the world!

If you think you don't have gifts, consider the timeless hymn, "Hark, the Voice of Jesus Crying" ...

"Let none hear you idly saying,
'There is nothing I can do,'

While the multitudes are dying
And the Master calls for you.

Take the task He gives you gladly,
Let His work your pleasure be;

Answer quickly when He calleth,
'Here am I, send me, send me!'"
(LSB 826:4)

Prayer

Father in Heaven, You give every one of us unique and varied gifts. These gifts are to be used for Your kingdom. Grant me the grace today to confess that I have the gifts You desire me to have for the sake of my neighbor and extension of the kingdom of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Lead me by faith to say, "Here am I, send me," to use those gifts! Amen.

the world

The Word is a gift



“... the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward” (Ps. 19:9–11).

God’s Word is a treasure. Nothing in all the world possesses the value of the Word. It has such great value because of what it can do. The world was created by it. This Word became flesh and redeemed us. This Word claimed us as God’s own precious child in the waters of Holy Baptism. The Word has done this and so many other things. It has inestimable power and therefore unsearchable value.

It is the Word of which we are ultimately stewards. Nothing you have has any value compared to this Word. How we use the worldly gifts which the Lord has entrusted us for the extension of this Word in the world is really the end goal of our stewardship.

As we use this Word in our own lives and share it in the lives of others, there is indeed great reward. This return on investment is not measured in dollars and cents. It is marked by calling sinners to repentance and setting them free to be everything the Lord has given them to be and do. God’s ultimate goal for faithful stewards is to use their simple gifts in such a way that souls are rescued from death and given an eternal life that has a value and reward that is literally out of this world!

Prayer

Word of Life, You speak to us with a power and a tenderness that we can never fully appreciate or understand. It is sweet in our ears and sweeter as it is spoken with our lips and lives. Grant us the simple gift of faith which seeks to share this treasure with those around us so that they may know this sweetness as well. Amen.

the Body

The Body of Christ is a gift



“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:12–13).

When was the last time you thought about your little toe? The only time you ever think of your little toe is when you stub it on the coffee table leg in the middle of the night. Or how about your appendix? When was the last time you gave it a thought? If you have ever thought about it, it was probably when it was inflamed, and you were about to have surgery to remove it.

There are many parts of the body that don't seem very important. But God has fearfully and wonderfully made the machine that is the human body. It is inter-related and interconnected in such a way that continues to baffle those who study it.

What is most remarkable is that there are no parts of the body that are useless. Just because we don't always appreciate and understand how parts work or why they are even there, doesn't mean that they are not important. There was once a woman who lost both her little toes to amputation and had to spend four weeks in rehab learning to walk without them. Think they aren't important? She knew it!

You are part of the body of Christ. You have a divinely created place in the body that is your congregation. When you don't think you are important, or you feel

that you don't have a place, know that you are missed terribly, and the body is not complete without you! When you don't use the simple gifts which the Lord has given you, the body is diminished. It is weakened. It can't fully do what it has been given to do!

You have a place and a part to play. Consider it. Pray that the Lord would lead you to embrace and carry out this role. Let the Holy Spirit use you in His ways for His work!

Prayer

Lord Jesus, the body of which You are the head is an amazing creation. You have grafted us into this body by Baptism. Lead us to see, embrace and relish in using the gifts we have been given simply and completely for the sake of the kingdom! Amen.

Love

No greater gift than love



*“But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way”
(1 Cor. 12:31).*

Higher gifts. More excellent way. These sound like comparatives. They are, if you are talking about us. But these words that the Holy Spirit gives to Paul are not about us. They are only and always about what He desires us to have!

The Lord wants you to know that your simple gifts are in no way simplistic. They are glory! But not your glory. They are His glory. If you read the entire chapter of 1 Corinthians 12 you see some fantastic gifts being called lower gifts. Healing. Tongues. Interpretation. These are all fantastic if you were to have them. It is hard to see any way in which these are lesser gifts.

That is until you read what the Lord desires as a higher gift. 1 Corinthians 13 talks about it. The higher gift is love! There is no greater gift than love. Jesus talks about that in John 15:13 when He says that “greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friend.” This is the kind of love that we have been given. God loved the world so much that He gave us Jesus. Jesus loved us so much that He died and rose. There is no greater gift of love. Jesus says so!

And this greater love that God has given us in Jesus is an active love! It is given so that we can give it away. That is what our stewardship is all about. Giving freely of the greater love that we have been given!

The financial gifts we render are indeed lesser gifts. It doesn't mean that they aren't important or valuable.

But they are lesser if they are not connected to love. The love they are connected to by the Holy Spirit is a love that comes from the Lord, through us, to others. We become a conduit of love that flows out to those who need it. This involves service. This involves activity. It also involves financial resources. When taken together, packaged in love, these simple gifts do amazing things! Let's see together what the Lord will do with these simple gifts!

Prayer

Blessed Lord, we give You but Your own in all these gifts we bring to You this day and throughout this year. Fill our heart with a love of the Lord, a love of the Gospel and a love for our neighbors that will lead us to give of all of ourselves so that they may know the extravagant, radical love of God that comes in Jesus Christ! Amen.



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