

The Joy of Generosity

Devotions for Church Leaders on Stewardship

“Biblical Principles”

The “Joy of Generosity” devotions are designed for church leaders to use in their regularly scheduled meetings to help them as leaders meditate on God’s plan for whole-life stewardship and facilitate a stewardship mindset in their churches.

There are three sets of devotions to choose from in the “Joy of Generosity” series:

- 1) Biblical Principles – 7 devotionals*
- 2) Money Matters – 5 devotionals*
- 3) Generous Giving- 7 devotionals*

These devotions were developed by Barnabas Foundation (www.barnabasfoundation.com) and are adapted from “The Joy of Generosity” (HomeLink series) written by Robert C. Heerspink and released by Faith Alive Christian Resources (www.faihaliveresources.com).



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Who Owns What?

Read 1 Chronicles 29:10-20

“Everything comes from you. . . .”

In today’s Scripture, David reminds the people of Israel about the source of their gifts. He offers a prayer of praise to God for the wholehearted response of God’s people to the challenge to supply gold, silver, and precious stones for building the temple—more than 190 tons of gold along with 375 tons of silver! Such giving is just cause for celebration and praise (1 Chron. 29:9).

But David looks beyond the giving of God’s people to remember that the ultimate source of these riches is God. All that the Israelites have brought to the storehouses already belongs to God. “Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand” (v. 14).

God’s generosity amazes us. Paul tells us that God “richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment” (1 Tim. 6:17). God delights in watching us enjoy a lavish bounty. That’s why God so packed our world with delightful things. God created grand mountain vistas, juicy peaches, and marvelous music. Could we live without these things? To be sure, God could have created a much more utilitarian world of monochrome hues and monotonous sights, sounds, and tastes. But God didn’t. God crammed the world full of good things.

It’s no sin to enjoy God’s world. We can enjoy a salad—and a steak too. We can drive or ride to work or school—and take family trips to national parks. We can read a newspaper—and good books. God has given us these things and more “for our enjoyment.”

Yet there is one thing we must never forget: “Everything in heaven and earth is [God’s]” (1 Chron. 29:11). These things are not ours, but God’s.

Something to Think About

Do you ever feel guilty enjoying the good things that God has given to you? How can we enjoy the things God entrusts to us and still remain faithful disciples of the Giver?



Who Am I?

Read Matthew 25:14-30.

“You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things.”

A few years ago, a biographer researched the life of the Duke of Wellington. He had no difficulty tracing the major events of his life, but pushing beyond public knowledge to an understanding of the private side of the duke remained difficult. Then this researcher came across a box of the duke’s financial records. When the researcher learned what the duke had done with his money, he finally discovered the duke’s deepest values and most important priorities.

If someone were to come across our financial records a hundred years from now, what would our check registers or our QuickBooks files say about us? Would we be embarrassed by our use of money? Would our financial records give any sign that we sought to live as faithful stewards of the treasures God had entrusted to us?

We don’t use the word steward very much in our culture. The only steward most of us meet is the one who brings us a cup of coffee or a bag of peanuts on a flight. But in biblical times, stewards were among the most important people in society. A steward had command over the resources of another.

In a world without fax machines, cell phones, or pagers, a wealthy man had no choice but to entrust his holdings to his steward while he was away from his estate.

In the parable from Matthew, Jesus teaches that all of us are stewards entrusted by God with vast wealth. Even the steward who received just one talent was given a fortune worth the equivalent of thirty-five years of daily wages.

But exercising our stewardship is often intimidating. Whenever we use our gifts, we risk what we think might be failure. It’s tempting to think that if God is really so powerful, God hardly needs our meager efforts to multiply his wealth!

Each of us faces the temptation of compromising our calling. Is it really so evil to do nothing with all the resources God has left in our keeping? Jesus’ parable answers this question with a resounding yes! As the master illustrates, God treats us severely when we offer excuses to justify our reluctance to be stewards.

It’s good to know that another option is open to us. We can seize our role as stewards with the eagerness of the first two stewards in the parable. Both of these faithful stewards multiply the master’s resources. And both receive the same reward at their master’s return: “Well done, good and faithful servant!” (Matt. 25:21).

At the end of time, will we hear those same words from our Lord?

Something to Think About

What do you think of when you hear the word stewardship? Why is our stewardship far more than writing a check to a good cause?



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Stewards of the Mysteries

Read 1 Corinthians 4:1-5

“Men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God.”

Most secrets are meant to be kept from others. But here in this passage, Paul is talking about a different kind of secret—a secret meant to be shared. We are stewards, says Paul, of the “secret things of God” (1 Cor. 4:1). What are these secret things? Elsewhere Paul tells us that the secret things involve the new community of Jews and Gentiles (Eph. 3:2) that God is creating through the work of Christ crucified (1 Cor. 2:6-8). At heart, this is nothing less than the good news of Jesus Christ!

We are stewards of the gospel of the great Steward, Jesus Christ. God entrusted his eternal Son to carry out a plan that God had devised before the foundation of the world to redeem fallen creation. And now God entrusts us with the task of sharing the news of the Steward’s work with others.

Our stewardship, then, begins with the gospel. We are first of all stewards of gospel truth. In our society, where many people replace ultimate truth with individual opinion, this may be the most radical stewardship of all! If we aren’t good stewards of the gospel, then other forms of stewardship quickly lose their power and significance.

Stewardship of the gospel means that we keep the gospel—we preserve its truth. If we receive the gospel as a trust, then it’s not our job to reshape it or to remake it into a message more tantalizing to the world around us.

But stewardship of the gospel means we also give the gospel away. This is the amazing nature of gospel stewardship. It’s exercised as we share the good news with others. Who in your circle of family, friends, co-workers, and neighbors needs to know that you have a secret you are eager to tell?

Something to Think About

What holds us back from sharing the message of Christ with others?



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Stewards of Relationships

Read Genesis 4:1-9

“Am I my brother’s keeper?”

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That question was first asked by Cain. And the setting was the aftermath of a murder. In a fit of jealous rage Cain killed his brother, Abel. God was on the spot immediately. God once asked Adam, “Where are you?” Now God asks Cain, “Where is your brother, Abel?” God’s question makes plain that we are stewards not just of ourselves but of our family, friends, and neighbors.

Cain wasn’t so ready to give in to God’s questioning. “Am I my brother’s keeper?” he replied—a sarcastic reference to Abel’s occupation as the keeper of sheep. Cain was really saying, “Must I shepherd the shepherd?” Of course, God expected Cain to say yes to his own question. Our stewardship includes our relationships with others.

Frankly, this kind of stewardship is difficult. Linus, the blanket-carrying member of the Peanuts gang, once observed, “I love humanity; it’s people I can’t stand.” Most of us can relate. Once we move beyond humanity to real people, complete with oddities and rough edges, we sometimes lose our enthusiasm for caring for others.

When that happens, it’s a good idea to remember that this form of stewardship—which Cain rejected and which we often avoid—is embraced by God himself. The psalmist says, “The Lord himself watches over [keeps] you! The Lord stands beside you as your protective shade” (Ps. 121:5, NLT).

Something to Think About

Have you ever failed to seize an opportunity to be a “keeper” to another person? What held you back? Inconvenience? Fear? A sense of inadequacy? If you are to seize the next opportunity that comes your way, what do you need to ask God to do?



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Stewards of the Environment

Read Genesis 1:26-31

“Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

During the oil shortage of the 1970s, I spoke with a gentleman who assured me that it was impossible for our world to run out of oil. I asked him why he thought so. “Simple!” he replied. “God wouldn’t let it happen!”

I went away from that conversation with a new awareness of how little we understand about our stewardship of God’s creation. Some claim that our text today justifies exploiting and squandering the earth’s resources. I claim instead that this text emphasizes our responsibility to unfold the potential of God’s creation.

God does not magically replenish the earth’s oil supplies. God does not work overnight to reestablish the earth’s rain forests. Instead, God has placed us as caretakers on this earth to tend these and other resources carefully and wisely. We are given dominion over God’s creation. That dominion is like the authority of a shepherd who tends and feeds his flock. Ultimately, the nature of our dominion is demonstrated by Jesus Christ, who rules in unselfish service and love.

In the verses prior to this mandate, Scripture tells us that God created humanity in God’s image or likeness (Gen. 1:26-27). In the ancient world, kings established statues of themselves in places of their empire where they could not be present. By his image the king asserted his rule over that part of his empire.

The second command of the law, of course, forbade Israel to construct any likeness of God. Still, the image of Israel’s God was to be clearly displayed in the adults and children who exercised a healthy authority over all aspects of God’s created world. That image-bearing responsibility is still ours today.

Because of this charge, Christians need to move to the forefront on ecological issues. We need to be concerned about clean air, pure water, and the careful use of earth’s resources. Even though practical decisions regarding these matters are complex, Christians must enter into the debate. We do so not because we believe in “Mother Earth.” We do so because we believe in a God who has entrusted us with the care of this wonderful world.

One day God’s creation will be made perfectly new. The apostle John tells us that we will see a “new heaven” and a “new earth” (Rev. 21:1). God thinks enough of the earth to perfectly restore it to its glorious state before the fall into sin. Until that day comes, God has entrusted us with the task of doing all we can to allow the grandeur of creation to shine.

Something to Think About

How should Christians view conservation efforts such as recycling? What changes could you make in your life to be a more careful consumer of the earth’s resources?



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Stewards of Our Abilities

Read 1 Corinthians 12:1-11.

“Now there are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but it is the same Holy Spirit who is the source of them all. . . . God manifests the Spirit through each person for the good of the entire church.” (NLT)

Although we can't see the Spirit, we see very clearly the way the Spirit works. We see the Spirit at work in the spiritual gifts God has entrusted to us.

Maybe you're tempted to protest that this form of stewardship just isn't for you. That's because we typically narrow the idea of spiritual gifts to specific kinds of “church work.” Preaching a sermon, teaching a church school class, or singing a solo—these, we think, demonstrate spiritual gifts. “But I'm not gifted in these ways,” you say.

Maybe not. But some form of spiritual gift is given to each person (1 Cor. 12:7). If we belong to Christ, the Spirit gives us gifts! Why so? So that we—“each one”—can help the “entire church”—every one of us!

Suddenly our definition of spiritual gifts expands. Swinging a hammer on a work project in the inner city becomes a spiritual gift. So does bringing a meal to a sick friend or driving an elderly neighbor to a doctor's appointment or organizing the agenda for a deacons' meeting. In fact, any ability that we put into practice for the sake of others, in devotion to Christ, becomes the exercise of a spiritual gift!

Do you know your spiritual gifts? If you do, you understand something of your job description in God's kingdom. And you have the answer to two common problems Christians often wrestle with.

What problems?

Let's look at Overworked Orville and Intimidated Irma. Overworked Orville never says no to any request that comes his way. He thinks that obedience means always saying yes to every opportunity to work in God's kingdom. Orville needs to discover that he can, in good conscience, turn down opportunities to serve if he is already busy.

Intimidated Irma believes there is nothing she can do well for the kingdom. She doesn't believe she has any gift for ministry. Irma needs to learn that every Christian is gifted by the Spirit for service to others in Christ's name. Are you like Orville or Irma?

If so, you need to understand that you can do some things well but not all things. You need to use your abilities to serve others in Christ's name. That's what spiritual gifts are all about!

Something to Think About

Are you serving the Lord in areas that put your spiritual gifts to their best use? How could you create a better fit between your gifts and your service? What can you do today to move in that direction?



Stewards of Our Time

Read Ephesians 5:8-20.

“Be very careful, then, how you live . . . making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.”

Time is a remarkable gift from God. The pages of our personal planners and the squares on our calendars represent the moments God has entrusted to our care. But how should we use them? We can fill those moments in an almost limitless variety of ways.

Paul reminds us that the very nature of our world discourages our stewardship of time. “The days are evil,” he writes (Eph. 5:15). And because evil seems so powerful in our world, we are tempted to despair of making a real difference. The author E. B. White once said, “When I get up in the morning I am torn between saving the world and enjoying the world. This makes it very difficult to plan my day.”

He’s right. Saving the world seems an impossible task. What difference will our little acts of goodness make in the overall scheme of things? No wonder so many people today allow time to run through their fingers like sand on the seashore. We pursue meaningless activities that kill time and the possibilities it presents.

Paul challenges us to be stewards of time, “making the most of our opportunities” (v. 15). Paul understands that because of Christ’s victory on the cross, time is redeemed. Our efforts to use time in ways that make a difference for the kingdom of God will not be wasted. God will establish our work through the power of his grace.

But then, should we go from one extreme to the other? Does seizing every opportunity mean we can never relax, never have a moment for ourselves, never take time to “smell the roses?” Is Paul calling us to become workaholics for the kingdom of God?

No! Here in these verses, Paul sets our use of time against an invitation to worship God. In so doing, he reminds us that using our time well is set against the backdrop of God’s divinely established rhythm for life. Early in Israel’s history, God set a pattern for us. “Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God” (Ex. 20:9-10).

God’s “six and one” pattern reminds us that we do not live by work alone. Not even God’s kingdom comes about by our work alone. Rather, our times are in God’s hand. God’s grace working through us makes a difference—not only for today but for eternity.

Something to Think About

What opportunities is God setting in your path that you have so far neglected to seize? How could you rearrange the way you use your time in order to turn opportunity into action?

