Valley Presbyterian Church (USA)
Oasis of Grace

GOD'S GIFT OF BEING A STEWARD

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Today, we continue the sermon series on the beliefs of those in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). We lift up what it means in these times of our lives and how God is calling us to embrace the Christian life as a steward.

In our world today, there are speakers and preachers who preach the "Prosperity Gospel". In other words, if you do this or follow this word you will get all the prosperity you desire and want. You'll become rich beyond your wildest dreams. Your life will be complete and you will experience much joy.

Well, a faithful Christian will follow more of a way of seeing that all he or she has, comes from God. Of course, this runs contrary to the secularist views of who is one's true God.

The E*ternal Perspectives Ministries* with Randy Alcorn writes about individuals who have a change of heart and direction when they have acknowledged the Sovereignty of God in their lives.

A couple of those being gifted and ordinary stewards are Jerry and Muriel Caven. Their story reflects redirected lives to God. It is written of them, "After successfully establishing a restaurant chain, two banks, a ranch, farm and real estate ventures, Jerry Caven says that's when the real fun started.

"At age 59 I was headed into retirement, looking for a nice lake home. Then God changed our plans and led Muriel and me to put our money and time overseas. It's been exciting. Before we gave token amounts, now we put substantial money into *Christ's endeavors.* Our hearts are in another country now. We visit and minister there often."

So what changed the Cavens' attitude toward giving? "it was realizing God's ownership that got through to us. Once we understood we were giving away God's money to God's work, we had a peace and joy we never had back when we thought it was our money! After seeing the way poor Christians in other countries trust him, we've asked God if he wants us to give away all of 'our' money. He hasn't led us to do that yet. But we've meant it when we asked."

Jerry says, "A non-Christian couple saw us giving, and saw how much it excited and changed us. Then they started giving too, even before knowing Christ. They saw the joy and they wanted in on it!"

He added, "One of the big results of our giving is that we no longer hold things too close to our hearts. We can let them go, realizing they won't last…but we will."

Friends, with what God gives to us in life, we are to be good stewards of the blessings in life. You and I have a responsibility to utilize our gifts for the benefit of God and his purposes in the world. That is a real challenge to us for sure.

Jesus shared the parable of the talents in the Gospel of Matthew chapter 25 verses 14 thru 30 for guidance of the Christian's life. This parable also says quite a lot of how disciples are entrusted with gifts and how they, you and I, use them for the greater good of God's Kingdom.

Jesus says, **14"For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his servants/slaves and entrusted his property to them; 15to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away.** Each disciple, each servant was given talents for God's work.

Each servant/slave was given the talents to use as they please. **16The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. 17In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. 18But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.** The Lord intends the talents to be used for his purpose and not kept hidden or stashed away or in some cases hidden off shore someplace.

There is going to be an accounting of the talents given to the faithful to see how each disciple has done in life. Jesus says, **19After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. 20Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.' 21His master said to him, 'well done, good and trustworthy servant/slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' 22And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.' 23His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy servant/slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.'** The slaves who brought five and two talents more were willing to risk what they were given for the Lord.

The servant/slave who was given one talent went and hid it because there was fear of the master. As the parable goes, **24 Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; 25so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.'**

The master was not happy because the talent that was entrusted to the servant/slave was hidden. **26But his master replied, 'You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? 27Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. 28So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents.** The servant/slave was left with nothing but empty hope and wasted talent.

Jesus concludes the parable, **[29]For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance** (Give out of our abundance.); **but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away.** The Lord then spoke to the one who had hidden that which was so graciously given. **[30]As for this worthless servant/slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'**

Friends, what all this means is that each of us has been provided with gracious talents for the ministry of God's kingdom in the world today. God the Son, Jesus, has taught each of us to make good on the gifts we were given by God for Godly purposes. We risk everything for the Lord by expanding and growing the kingdom of his love.

However, if we shy away from and hide the talents we were given then we fail to understand who we are serving. We are like the servant/slave who hid the one talent out of fear to risk for the kingdom of love.

Ecclesiastes tells us that for every season there is a time for everything. You and I both know that life is going to come to an end before we know it. We just don't know what time we have left but we do have time to reflect on our lives. Overall, you and I must look deeply into our souls to see how we have lived our faith with God leading the way.

My dear brothers and sisters, please remember that we are the recipients of God's blessings. Those whose lives reflect a good and faithful steward lives beyond oneself. As it says in T*he Book of Order*, "Those who follow the discipline of Christian stewardship will find themselves called to lives of simplicity, generosity, honesty, hospitality, compassion, receptivity, and concern for the earth and God's creatures."

Friends, may our blessings be counted by how we live our lives. The lyrics in *Count Your Blessings* by Johnson Oatman ring clear today.

Count your blessings, name them one by one,
Count your blessings, see what God has done!
Count your blessings, name them one by one,
*Count your many blessings, see what God has done.

What has God done in your life this day and the days ahead.

Let us pray a prayer from *The Steward's Journal.* Let us pray: "Lord, set me free to lead with joy. Teach me to love. Remind me that all of this is yours, Lord, and I give it all back to you. Make me more like you in every way and help me trust that all I have from you right now is all I need. I love you, Lord." In Christ's Holy Name. Amen.

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Scriptural Support

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Ecclesiastes 3:1-11 (NIV) A Time for Everything

3 There is a time for everything,
and a season for every activity under the heavens:
2 a time to be born and a time to die,
a time to plant and a time to uproot,
3 a time to kill and a time to heal,
a time to tear down and a time to build,
4 a time to weep and a time to laugh,
a time to mourn and a time to dance,
5 a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,
a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing,
6 a time to search and a time to give up,
a time to keep and a time to throw away,
7 a time to tear and a time to mend,
a time to be silent and a time to speak,
8 a time to love and a time to hate,
a time for war and a time for peace.
9 What do workers gain from their toil? **10** I have seen the burden God has laid on the human race. **11** He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet[a] no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.

Matthew 25:14-30 (NRSV) The Parable of the Talents

14 "For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; **15** to one he gave five talents,[a] to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. **16** The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. **17** In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. **18** But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

19 After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. **20** Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.' **21** His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.'

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gathering where you did not scatter seed; 25 so I was afraid, and I went and hid
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