

## Midweek Message

*“Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful.”*

*(1 Corinthians 4:2 ESV)*

This past Sunday we touched a little bit on stewardship as it's rendered in the Apostle Paul's letter to the Philippians, chapter 4. As we see in our passage above, God requires that stewards be faithful with what God has entrusted to them. In context, the Apostle Paul is speaking primarily about the gospel message which God had entrusted to him and how he must faithfully discharge his responsibility in its continued proclamation as well as all that accompanies it. I often wonder if we, who are believers in and followers of Jesus, realize that we too are stewards and that God requires us to be faithful in the discharge of our responsibilities as well. As I've said a few times during our current crisis, the mission of the church hasn't changed because of the pandemic but is the same as it's always been. No disaster, no wars, no crisis, nothing will ever change what God has called His church to be or do. The only thing that may change is how that mission is carried out in regard to whatever situation the church may find itself. Now, I don't wish to oversimplify things, but to make it easier to remember I would like summarize what God has entrusted to us in four principles that I believe can help us to be faithful stewards for the Lord.

First, we're to be faithful with our time. The Apostle Paul tells us, *“Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:16, 17 ESV)*. Time is important to each and every one of us. We've all heard others or perhaps have said ourselves such phrases as “I just don't have the time” or “where in the world has the time gone?” or “do we have enough time?” We live our lives as busy people in a busy culture who seem to desire being even more busy than we already are. Well, at least that's the way life occurs in a more normal time. The Psalmist tells us, *“So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom” (Psalm 90:12 ESV)*. Time is one of those things that seems to move very quickly and if we're not careful we can lose the most of what we could have had. As we're told in these Scriptures, we need to use wisdom regarding the manner in which we use our time. It's important that we realize our life is short, our time is limited, that we only have so much and what we do with it shapes our lives. In my time here as your pastor, it's been amazing for me to be able to step back and see so much love for Jesus being shown in the way you give of your time. Keep up the good work even now in the midst of this crisis and especially when we get back together again. The truth is, without you giving of your time Highlands could never be the church it is today or even what God will have it become.

Second, we're to be faithful with our talents. The Apostle Peter tells us, *“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen” (1 Peter 4:10, 11 ESV)*. God has gifted many fine people here at Highlands and it has been such a pleasure to watch and experience each of you serving. Some of these gifts are those of a spiritual nature, gifts that are given us at our salvation and energized by the Holy Spirit. We call them spiritual gifts because they're the result of the Spirit's work in and through us in which He ministers to those around us. However, we've also, by God's grace, been uniquely suited for life in our world by the giving and developing of natural gifts. I suppose, in a very real way, we're each uniquely suited for service as the spiritual gifts from God and the natural gifts of God blend together for the good of all. Some of you use your gifts in service in the church itself and others use your gifts in ministry throughout the community. Highlands couldn't function without all the people who so generously use both their spiritual and natural gifts in all the many areas of ministry to which God has called each and every one of us.

Third, we're to be faithful with our tithe. The Apostle Paul tells us, *"The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver"* (2 Corinthians 9:6,7 ESV). God expects His people, those who've received the salvation purchased by our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, to support the financial needs of the Christian Church and to do so cheerfully and not grudgingly or under any compulsion. In other words, because of our experience of God's great love for us we now love Him and through that love for Him strive to give freely as He has given to us. He expects us to tithe, which many pastors and theologians believe to be ten percent of our income. Jesus tells us, *"give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you"* (Luke 6:38 ESV). I don't know if you've noticed, but there's a correlation between what God gives to us as blessings in this life and what we give to Him in regard to our offerings. Perhaps that's why the Apostle Paul talks about the reality of sowing and reaping and how what we sow will come back to us in blessing. Listen, giving is an issue of the heart as it reveals the level of our love for the Lord and the gratitude we have for His gift of life to us. Jesus has given His very life for us as He paid the price of our sins on the cross so we could be forgiven and brought into God's family, united together as His beloved. We who are the unlovable rebels have been given so much from the Lord and that's why we, so lovingly, give back to Him. I want you to know that I have been quite impressed with what so many of you have given in response to the needs at Highlands. God continues to work in and through so many of you as you generously give of the treasures the Lord has given to you. And I especially thank you for continuing your financial support in this current crisis even though we're not able to come together physically for worship and fellowship.

Finally, we're to be faithful with our telling. Now, I know that may seem a bit forced by I wanted all the words to begin with the same letter which makes it easier for us to remember. Scripture is very clear about our calling to share the good news of salvation. When Jesus was at the moment of His ascension into heaven, we're told this, *"And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation"* (Mark 16:15 ESV). The primary mission of the church in this world is that of promoting and proclaiming the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul tells us, *"Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God"* (2 Corinthians 5:20 ESV). Even though we might not be Apostles we are still those who've been commissioned to be those who work for the reconciliation of people to God. We're to stand in the gap between sinners and the Lord, being those who tell others of the wondrous good news that sin can be forgiven, restoration with God achieved, and eternal life secured. The Apostle Peter reminds us that this is the natural outcome of a life lived in hope when he writes, *"but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame."* (1 Peter 3:15, 16 ESV). You see, we should be living such godly lives before those with whom we interact that they will see something of the hope we have in Jesus, ask us about it, so we can tell them of all that God has done for us and it's especially true as we move through this current crisis.

In a nutshell, that's what it means to be a faithful steward of God's Kingdom. The Apostle Paul tells us, *"And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him"* (Colossians 3:17 ESV). Everything about us, all we do, say, think, and feel is to be such as would honor and glorify our God. Our time, our talents, our tithes, our telling, should always have that purpose. So, keep up the good work and let's watch what God will do in and through us as we strive to be faithful to Him.

***Pastor Mark***