

The mission that has been given to me today is to tell you what stewardship means to me.

If you have attended worship the last two Sundays, you may well be thinking..” *Come on man, another stewardship sermon? “ What could you possibly tell us that we haven’t already heard?”* The answer, of course, is nothing. However, “*Repetitio est mater studiorum*”.

Translated from Latin...Repetition is the mother of learning. The hard truth is that we need good Christian stewardship principles drilled into our minds again and again, because everything in our culture keeps telling us..”*It’s all mine.. and I need more*”.

True story...Many years ago I owned a bright red ’69 VW Beetle. One day I walked into a parking lot, unlocked my car, put the key in the ignition, and drove away. Several blocks away I noticed a couple packages in the passenger seat that weren’t mine. Then I noticed that the upholstery was beige while mine was black. This was not my car! It was red, but not mine. Baffled, I drove back to the lot and saw my car parked a few spaces away. Quickly, hoping the owner was not looking, I jumped in my car and left. I went to the VW dealer and told the story. He was not terribly surprised. He told me that these bare bones little cars only had about a few dozen different lock combinations. He said, “ It happens.” I can tell you it’s embarrassing to drive away with a car that isn’t yours.

But we are not the least embarrassed to live in a house that really isn’t ours, even if we’ve paid off the mortgage, or spend from a bank account that really isn’t ours.

**The first thing that stewardship** means to me is getting it through my thick skull that “ *the earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof*”.. **It really all belongs to the Lord, and it’s my task to manage the little niche entrusted to me.** “ **“We Give thee but thine own....”** I just have responsibility for it, I’m in charge of it for a little while, and then I’m going to have to give an account...like the people in the Gospel parable...did I manage it well while the owner was away? Or did I stick it in a hole? Or even worse, did I labor under the impression that it was really all mine? And, I really need more?

Were you really listening to the wonderful story in the OT lesson from Chronicles? King David is praising the Lord because he set out to build the temple and he asked the people to give the money, and they came through, in spades. There was enough and more..He says, “ *who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have you only what comes from your hand.*” They got it! They understood..the only way they could do this, be this generous, was to remind themselves that ownership is the Lord’s. Stewardship..management..that’s our responsibility.

**Another thing that stewardship means to me is that I’ve got to work real hard to keep my motive for giving on target.** Why do I give? Why should I give generously? Why should I make this a priority, and like St. Paul tells us, and *set something aside on the first day of the week*, rather than buy everything we think we want and need and then see if there is anything left . Why should I pledge something for my future giving, thus forcing me to think about this,

make an assessment , and consciously put first things first. Why should I do all that? What's my motive?

First, I've got to make sure that I'm **not giving to assuage my guilt**. This is a very difficult and delicate thing because I have a lot to be feel guilty about. There is an awful lot bad preaching out there at this point, because encouraging guilt-giving is very effective. *You ought to give more to the Lord because, well, look at your lifestyle, look at the luxuries you enjoy, look at the suffering of the third world countries..Look at what the Savior sacrificed for you..What have you sacrificed for him? NO!*

The **Israelites made sin offerings**, guilt offerings,( Day of Atonement) but **you are a NT Christian**. You know that the only way you are relieved of your guilt is through the crucified Christ. He bore your guilt. There is no way you can purchase relief from guilt.

To say " *you can't afford it* " is the understatement of the year.

Several generations ago it was not uncommon for churches to publish a statement at the end of the year indicating how much each family had given that year. Generosity through shame. It was probably effective, but terrible theology.

Then I have **to make sure I'm not giving in order to receive**. The scripture says, " *He who sows bountifully will reap bountifully!*" TV preachers are notorious for distorting this reality into a misguided " *prosperity gospel*". You give, you get. Yes, the Lord does indeed bless his faithful people but there is nothing to suggest the blessings will be financial. What about the blessing of learning to trust? Or understanding and appreciating our utter dependence on God? Or experiencing God's faithfulness when human resources are few? Those are surely blessings, but In the phrase of the day, it's ridiculous to think you can do a financial "quid pro quo" with God.

Then I have to be **cautious that my gifts are not simply a response to perceived needs**.. Of course there are always needs, but when we approach our giving from this perspective, the whole process tends to becomes very subjective. I decide if the need is great enough for me to give.. And if I determine there is not a great need, then I can give less, or not at all. Of course, we do have to be discerning in our giving. This is part of what it means to be a good manager. We strive to give wisely, determine where our giving can provide the most benefit. But this is slippery slope. Our human nature insures that we will begin to rationalize, and find good reasons why we cannot afford generous, proportional giving. For example, it is simply a fact that when congregations pay off their mortgage, giving often begins to diminish. Why give when they don't need it? We here at Hope don't have to worry about that for a long, long time..with a \$7 million debt. But we always have to cautious about calibrating our giving only on the basis of exterior circumstances, the needs out there. The most compelling illustration of this point is the widow who put her two copper coins, all she had, in the temple treasury. Why? Not because it would make any real difference, but because she felt the need to give.

The stewardship principle that guides my life is the realization **that I need to give, generously, regularly, proportionately. It's my need**. This is the need that never goes away. I need to give my time, my talent , and especially my money. It's the most concrete, measureable, objective way we have in a dollar-driven culture to **express our gratitude to**

**the gracious God who has provided for all our needs of body and soul.** I can't possibly give enough of myself to repay my God for all his benefits to me. We sing "*Take my life, and let it be, consecrated Lord to thee. Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold...*".

Even if I could do that, it wouldn't ever be enough. **But I can gratefully strive to pass on to others some measure of God's love and generosity to me. Gratitude is the one pure motive that cannot be modified or manipulated by my naturally selfish human nature.**

**What does stewardship mean to me?** First, the realization that I am in a **management position.** I've been promoted! So have you. We are in management. Not owners, but stewards, managers. Everything we have is really his, entrusted to us to use wisely and well.

**Then gratitude.** That's the **driver, the motivating force.** Gratitude that He has given me so much to enjoy in this life, and so much to anticipate in the life to come. All undeserved, all because of His love and faithfulness revealed so powerfully in a cross and empty tomb.

Next week we will we will celebrate our national day of Thanksgiving. Stewardship is simply the way we live our thanksgiving every day, every week, in every situation we encounter.

**Now thank we all our God,** with hearts and hands and voices and everything else that we have, everything else that has been entrusted to us . Amen.