

Stewardship Month #1: Taking the Next Step in your Financial Earning

Today is the beginning of stewardship month. **Stewardship is simply God given responsibility with accountability.**

Over the years our church has found it extremely helpful to dedicate one month to the issue of stewardship. We have also encouraged everyone who attends our church to know four statements related to stewardship:

- 1. God owns everything, you own nothing.**
- 2. God entrusts you with everything you have.**
- 3. You can either increase or diminish what God has given you; God wants you to increase it.**
- 4. You can be called into account at any time, and it may be today.**

It is important to note that these four stewardship principles relate to every area of life. At Faith we have worked to show that stewardship is not simply a financial thing, it is a who you are thing.

Part of your identity in Christ (if you know him as your personal savior) is he has made you a steward ... you are his steward.

- Your mind and intellect belongs to him
- The possessions in your home belong to him
- The financial resources you have belong to him
- The physical strength that you possess and your body belongs to him.

[develop ... how 1-4 relate to each of these areas]

You can exercise that charge/stewardship well or not so well. So this month is about equipping all of us to be a good steward.

- In addition to the testimonies like the one you heard this morning,
- We are doing a 4 part sermon series [dedicated to finances **Taking the Next Step in Financial earning, spending, giving, and saving**] (please include same ppt slides as Steve had last week). It is our hope that as a result of focusing on what God has to say about we will be better financial stewards.
- Stewardship month also involves our ABFs as they are focusing particularly on our stewardship of compassion
- Our month concludes and even culminates in our stewardship celebration on Nov. 21.
 - o A church family evening dedicated to celebrating all that God has done this last year.
 - o We will have some light refreshments as we celebrate and thank the Lord as a family.
 - o Please put it on your calendar ... it will be a great night together.

Let's turn our focus now to our primary task this morning "Taking the Next Step in our Financial Earning." Please consider with me three work related challenges.

Scenario #1: Your annual review just occurred.

- Your supervisor explains that you have done a good job this year and you will receive a 3% raise beginning in January.
- Three weeks after your review you hear some rumbling about the fact that your place of business has decided to renig on the raises and offer a one-time bonus prior to the holiday season instead.
- So there is some disappointment, but at least it is not crushing news .. until you see the email. In the email you discover that your bonus will be a whopping \$0 (no raise, no bonus)... apparently you did not make the list.

Scenario #2: You spent a ton of time and effort on a project at work.

- Your project has been successful. It has resulted in company sales and company improvements. Despite the fact that you worked like 1500 hours on the project your part of the “thank you” was zero, zilch.
- The person who took the credit, who did next to nothing, did not even bother to thank you.

Scenario #3: The company has been a bit slower during this economic downturn.

- The company has explained that bonuses, raises, and the like need to be postponed so that everyone can remain employed.
- This seems reasonable to you – after all who wants to see people lose their job.
- However, things get much more challenging when you learn the “rest of the story.” It is true that the rank and file will not get raises, but the senior level executives, who seem to take the least amount of responsibility for the failures, are actually taking both bonus and raises.

Here is my question: How does a person function in a godly manner in these scenarios?

- How can a person move forward without succumbing to the bitterness, anger, and frustration that will be part of the lives of many of his/her coworkers?
- How can they continue to wake up each morning ready to go to work and excited about the prospect of putting in a solid day’s work?

With these questions in mind please turn in your Bibles to Col 3:22-25. That is found on page 158 in the back section of the Bible in the chair in front of you. [Read the text]

Here is the main point of Col 3:22-25:

Taking the Next Step in Financial Earning is about working wholeheartedly for the Lord.

- If you get nothing else this morning than at least get that!
- After all it is repeated 3 times in this text ... v. 22, 23, and 24.

You see friends, this is not about earning more necessarily (although those who do what God says in this passage will be in the best possible position to earn more), it is about working and earning as a proper steward of the Lord Jesus.

Earlier in Col 1:18 God told us that Jesus was to have first place in everything. Just two chapters later we find that part of what is included in “everything” is the way in which I do my work.

- In other words, one of the financial principles found in the Word of God is that your earning is part of how you should give Christ first place in your life.

Please notice what the text did not say ... It did not say you execute your stewardship best if you earn the most or earn more money than someone else.

- While slavery in the first century had some very different elements than the slavery of the 17-1800's in America it is not like slavery was a wonderful thing. In the hands of a kind and compassionate master it could have been very good, but in the hands of a cruel master it would have been absolutely horrible and terrifying.
- In either case, the slave has no bargaining power. He or she's earning had absolutely nothing to do with what he or she thought was a fair wage.
- There are some people who have wronging developed a level of pride because their job “earns” more money than other jobs. Culture has dictated that – not the inherent value of the job itself.

Please notice what else the text did not say ... It did not say you execute your stewardship best if you earn the least.

- So if you are in the lower pay grades it is not like you can stick your noses up at the higher ups with a “holier than thou attitude.”

The point of the text is that your financial earning ... which is certainly premised on the reality of work (according to 2 Thess 3:10 - if you do not work, neither shall you eat!) ... is to be done for the Lord.

- This is part of what it means to worship the Lord with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength.
- This is part of what it means to carry out your stewardship responsibilities.
- Whatever amount is deposited into your account, or cashed at the bank must be earned while honoring the Lord.

I think if we were being honest we would need to come to the conclusion that earning while honoring the Lord is not necessarily an easy task. Thankfully the Colossians passage offer further explanation. Let's use the rest of our time to unpack 7 truths that can help us be God's faithful servant.

I. Seek to obey your boss and resist the temptation to say “I know better how I should use my time” (v. 22a)

The text is simply, “Obey your human masters in all things.” The text does not say in some things, in the things that we already agree about, but all things.

A. Even when your plans have to change

Before I entered the ministry I had the privilege of working at four different places.

- The first, during my high school and early college years was a laborer on a landscape crew.
- The second was a help desk rep for a computer system.

- The third was as a technical business consultant.
- My final position, during my seminary time, was a buyer and inventory controller for a business.

During those 15 years I had countless times when I was given the responsibility to do something that did not fit the original plan I had for the day. I can hear myself saying, “But I did not plan for that?”

- The text speaks to that situation “obey in all things” But... but... but .. but don’t you understand that you have given me another task to do?

It is incredibly frustrating, right? Today, this is the priority so I get all fired up about that just in time for you to change the priority.

- Friends, this is where our Christianity meets the streets.
- This is where we find out whether or not Jesus is really our Lord and our King. Whether we worship him in name only or whether we do in the challenges of our everyday lives.

The passage does not say, “obey in the things you already had scheduled.”

B. Even when your ideas are better

Let’s throw Just to make this a bit more complicated...in reality, you might know better how to use your day than the boss does in a given instance.

- I once had a boss that well to put it nicely was a moron.
 - o He just liked telling people what to do and then took the credit for it
- I later learned that he had been dismissed. I was not surprised.

However, at that point of God’s Word is simply this ... you are responsible to “obey in all things.” Quite frankly it does not matter how much of a moron he is ... before God you are responsible to do what you have been told.

It is true of course, that we are not slaves in the same sense as many of the original readers of the book of Colossians.

- Most of them were trapped, but here is the deal: as long as you are employed that is a responsibility.
- If you don’t want the responsibility of being obedient that human master anymore you can resign or find a new place.
- Until you do you may not simply ignore what your boss is asking of you.

The text adds...

II. Seek to give God Glory and Praise rather than seek to get it for yourself (v. 22b)

The text says that we are not to obey only in external service as those who merely please men including ...

A. Even if you think you deserve it

Praise and glory are addictive aren't they? It sure does feel good to be praised publically. My 3 year old daughter has a shirt (I am not even sure how we got it ... gift... hand me down...whatever) and the saying on the shirt is wonderful.

- It does not say "I love my daddy" although that would be nice
- It does not say "I am daddy's girl" although that would be nice too
- It says something far more addictive. It says "My daddy is king of his castle"

That feeds every ounce of pride I have. "Yea, that's right, Daddy is king of his castle." It praises me, it gives me glory and those are things that I long for.

In your work place, don't you want praise and glory? Don't you want to be known as the top of the top, the cream of the crop, and the 5 star prospect?

This text makes it very clear that you cannot take the next step in your financial earning if you seek your glory and praise – regardless of the amount of money you make.

Friends, that praise and glory can come in many different forms

- a. The office that we get
- b. The size of our raise / paycheck
- c. The recognition as a key player on the team
- d. The credit when the project that you worked on actually worked

Even if you are sitting here this morning thinking man alive my boss needs a sermon on how to give thanks because you deserve it ... I want you to see that this passage says to us that if we want this praise and this glory then we are not good stewards before God in our earning.

B. Even if you think you have great abilities in your own mind

Another component of seeking praise or giving glory has to do with our own minds. We know that just as some people are more athletic than others, some are more likely to be on the cover of magazines and advertisements than others, some are more likely to have an ability to speak publically than other, that some have the abilities to earn more than others.

One of the challenges in our own pride and in our own desire for praise and glory is to fail to heed the warnings given to Israel.

Deuteronomy 8:6-18 ⁶ "Therefore, you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him. ⁷ "For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing forth in valleys and hills; ⁸ a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey; ⁹ a land where you will eat food without scarcity, in which you will not lack anything; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper. ¹⁰ "When you have eaten and are satisfied, you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land which He has given you. ¹¹ ¶ "Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances and His statutes which I am commanding you today; ¹² otherwise, when you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built good houses and lived *in them*, ¹³ and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold multiply, and all that you have multiplies, ¹⁴ then your heart

will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. ¹⁵ "He led you through the great and terrible wilderness, *with its* fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water; He brought water for you out of the rock of flint. ¹⁶ "In the wilderness He fed you manna which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do good for you in the end. ¹⁷ "Otherwise, you may say in your heart, 'My power and the strength of my hand made me this wealth.' ¹⁸ "But you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who is giving you power to make wealth, that He may confirm His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as *it is* this day.

The point is that everything we have, everything we are is based on the gracious purposes of God. Stewardship is recognizing that God could change our level of stewardship at any point ...
Joni Erickson Tada.

Taking the Next Step in your Financial earning involves a willingness to give God praise and glory for everything he accomplishes through you and to seek none of the praise and glory yourself.

III. Seek to earn with a commitment to the Lord rather than merely because “I said so” (v. 22c)

The text says “With sincerity fearing the Lord.” In other words there is a willingness to own your responsibilities.

- Sometimes people do something with a “whatever” kind of mentality because they don’t own their responsibilities they are just doing something because the boss “said so.”

Friends, this kind of attitude may get you through on some occasions, but it will never work as true motivation.

After all, at work bad days come. Check out this dudes very bad day.

- Video

The reason this is so funny is that we have all had those days! We totally get it.

If our attitude is not firmly based on a commitment to earn what we can for the Lord , that is to own our responsibilities, then days like this become very difficult to handle in a godly way. I think it is fair to say that this dude just lost it.

If the text stopped there God would have given up plenty of instruction but the text continues

IV. Seek to do your best in earning for the Lord rather than be lazy (v. 23)

The text simply says that we are work heartily for the Lord. This point may sound a bit like the prior point but there is a careful nuance in the text that we should not miss.

- It is not only that our work is to be done sincerely but now the focus is on heartily.
- To put it another way it is to our work with all we are: The opposite of laziness.

A. An hour’s pay should be earned with an hour’s worth of work

One commentator put it this way:

“The implication is that one of the chief dangers of the slave status was a lack of personal motivation which made all work a drudgery provided grudgingly, with lack of effort and always with a view to doing as little as one could get away with.”

This concept of laziness can be found in every type of workplace.

- You see it in sports. Where someone decides to take a play off or not actually hustle to the base ... after all they will be out anyway.
- You see it in labor world. Where someone decides that today is “extra break day” - a self declared double break day. Anyone who tries to buck that system will be met with some level of ridicule “Quit working, you are making us look bad.”
- You see it in state and government work where one state had to remove solitaire from their worker’s computers. During march madness some places have just “given up” now that practically all the games are streamed online.
- Some video games were produced with a “boss key” so that the person could hit just one key to make the game disappear anytime the boss neared them.
- I am not a fan of the office, but Monday night I saw a one minute clip of an old Office show and all the computers had solitaire running.
- It is found in the professional world where the “white collar” folks have found slightly more sophisticated ways of wasting time at work.

The point given in the text is that an hour’s worth of pay should be matched by an honest hour worth of work.

B. Avoid the mindset that you are “worth more”

One of the challenges that we can face in fulfilling this task is that we slip into the mindset that we are worth more than whatever we get. So we justify in our minds our shotty work by saying “Well, they got what they paid for.”

From God’s perspective, an honest hour of work needs to be done for the Lord whether you think you are being fairly compensated or not. Your pay cannot be the criteria to determine how hard you will work. The amount of focus and energy given to your tasks must be determined by your relationship with the Lord not your relationship with the bank.

V. Seek to do your best at all you do even if it is not your favorite thing to do (v.23)

In verse 23 we find that the text says “whatever you do, do it heartily”. Here is yet again another challenge for our lives.

There are some things that I really like to do. Do you have some of those? There are others things that I like to do far less. Do you have any of those?

- I will be frank ... Tuesday was the day I put this message together and I was fired up to get here, get both my computers going, have my research computer pull up all the stuff I wanted to see while my other computer was on Word so that I could use both simultaneously to get this sermon pulled together.
- But other times there are tasks that I would rather not do. They don’t seem to be in my wheelhouse.
 - o Here is where my Christianity meets the streets.

Am I willing to serve the Lord by doing ALL of my tasks with a level of focus, determination, and excellence that would honor the Lord? Or would that level of focus, determination and excellence only apply to the things that I like to do?

Let me say a word to students here.

- I understand that some things interest you more than others do.
- I understand that there are times you take a class and you cannot wait until it is over.
- But please listen here. If your task right now is a student (maybe your parents are even making that possible for you) then you, before God, have the obligation to do your best at all you do not simply the tasks or classes that you like to do.

For those who are a bit younger.

- The issue of your chores is equally important. If you parents have asked you to do certain chores around the house do you do them grudgingly just well enough to get by or do you do them as if Jesus were going to inspect your work?

Pastor Dutton has often shared the story that when he went to serve at the Wilds Camp part of his “other” duties involved cleaning the bathrooms. One of his supervisors said to him, “Mark, I want you to clean this bathroom as if Jesus were going to use it.”

- That was Col 3 in action. It is where their Christianity met the streets.

It is easy to say that we love the Lord, want to live for him, and do what he says, but sometimes those desires are not carried out in the little moments of your life.

This is such a huge issue that I think it would be wise for you to write down in your notes two tasks that you really don’t like to do and tasks that you want to work at making a significant improvement at doing them for the Lord.

VI. Seek the Lord in your earning looking for the reward to come rather than the present one (v. 24)

The text says, “knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance.”

Receiving an inheritance would not have been normal for a slave. A slave would have first had to be freed before that was even possible. So they would not have missed the significance of this statement.

Some of us may have work situations that are so wonderful that we cannot believe we get paid to do this. Others however may be in a different situation where they believe they are under paid or under appreciated and they, like the slave of old, feel trapped in a dead end situation.

What v. 24 reminds us of is that there is an inheritance awaiting that lasts a whole lot longer than this life. That is why God often directs our attention to the eternity to come.

- With our work, where maybe we are under paid or under appreciated
- With our suffering, where our trouble is compared to the glories of heaven

- With our blessings, where even our best days on earth are not better than our days with the Lord Jesus

In all cases, the Lord has encouraged us to look not at the size of our paycheck but at the size of our eternal reward for being a good steward.

- In Christian circles we often hear the comment that folks want to hear “well done, thou good and faithful servant.” Sometimes these words are uttered at funerals either publically or in private conversations.
- However, one of the things that we often forget (or choose not to discuss) is the reality that not everyone hears that. One person in each of the gospel accounts does not steward what he has been given.

That is why it is so important, using the language of 1 Cor, to “run so that you may win.” Our financial earning is not simply about the benefits that come in this life, if any, but more importantly what about the rewards that come later.

VII. Whether Boss or Employee understand that one reaps what one sows (v. 25)

Text: the one who does wrong will receive appropriate consequences

Our economy has been such that some very good people – some people who have been motivated by their stewardship before the Lord – have lost their jobs.

But other times, part of the reason people or businesses struggle is that some folks are not properly carrying their load. They have allowed the desire for more money, more praise, more glory, or more privileges to corrupt their thinking resulting in poor job performance.

- As a result, God has decided to remove some of that stewardship from them (something God has the right to do at any moment).

Summary:

We come back to our scenarios, it is possible after the disappointments of raise/no raise, of doing the hard work that you don't seem to be recognized for doing, and seeing what you think are the wrong people being rewarded that one can avoid anger, frustration, and bitterness? Absolutely.

But just like the slave of old, we will need to remind ourselves (as this passage does 3 times ... read again with emphasis) that **it is the Lord whom we ultimately serve.**

Taking the Next Step in our Financial Earning is first and foremost about living worthy of the Gospel ... and that is working wholeheartedly for the Lord and not for men (including us).