

Stewards of Grace

The Grace of Stewardship

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Bible Text: 1 Corinthians 4:1-2
Preached On: Sunday, November 1, 2015

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Last week I was asked to shoot a short video that was going to be used as part of a retirement celebration for Dr. Ted Martins at Faith Baptist Church in Trenton, NJ. When I was a student at Baptist Bible College up in Clark Summit, PA way back in the late 70s and the early 80s, part of our training at that school involved having some sort of a Christian service assignment so my freshman year I served at a little extension Sunday school up in northeastern Pennsylvania called Island Plains but then my sophomore year, my speech professor, Dr. Martins, became the interim pastor at Faith in Trenton on the weekends. It was really a labor of love for he and his wife and their four small children because that church had fallen on very hard times. They had actually started work on a new auditorium and when the shell was up and somewhat completed on the outside, the former pastor had a massive heart attack and that void apparently allowed some internal problems in the church to surface and things went downhill rapidly. So work just halted on that project and then a significant amount of time went by so weeds are growing up around the building; they had a parsonage that was in severe disrepair; they also had a Christian school that was bleeding money.

So in that condition, their church contacted BBC which was 2 ½ hours away and they asked if one of the professors could come and help them and Doc Martins answered that call. His wife, Ruth, had an education background and so the decision was made that she and the children would immediately move into that dilapidated parsonage in Trenton just to try to provide some kind of immediate stability for the school during the week and Doc Martins would stay up in Clark Summit and finish out his teaching contract and then every Friday afternoon drive down to Trenton and try to do everything he could to stabilize the church on Friday evening through Sunday.

Well, we were having a conversation just a few weeks after he made that decision and I asked him if there was any way I could help out. To say the least, there was in practically any direction you looked but he told me, "Listen, we don't have anybody leading our youth group and I certainly don't have time to do it, would you start driving down with me on Friday afternoons and we'll find a place for you to stay at the parsonage. You can become our weekend youth pastor and we can't pay you, but you're welcome to eat with our family while you're there and then we'll drive back to campus late Sunday night." So that's what we did. Weekend after weekend after weekend, my sophomore year, even

found some time on Saturday afternoons, along with other dear men and women in that church, to start slowly completing the building.

Well, at the end of my sophomore year in May, Doc Martins as planned, retired or resigned his position from BBC and became the full-time pastor down at Faith in Trenton. I went home to my summer job building, can we all say it together? It's kind of sad when I've told so many of those stories that you just know. But then they asked me when I came back my junior year for school, they asked me if I would consider driving my own car down on the weekends for my junior and my senior year. They were still desperately needing help. They said, "Look, we can't pay you, mileage or anything, but will try to pay you \$50 a week to at least cover some of your gas expense." Well, I loved being in the ministry at that young age, and God gave me two jobs during the week: one stocking at a local grocery store for 22 hours a week and the other 2 nine hour shifts all night at a local junior college where I was the switchboard operator where the policy was you could sleep on the switchboard as long as you woke up if the phone rang. So I had that. That was my job. As far as I know, by the way, it never rang, and I'm sorry if you called, okay. I'm really, really sorry.

So that was my life my junior and senior years in college. I'm taking 16 credit hours, working 40 hours a week trying to find time to study when I could and then jumping in my car Friday afternoon to work with the youth group all weekend and then coming back late Sunday night after our youth meeting. What I loved about that was watching this faithful family make such a huge difference in the church. The Lord was using them and these faithful laypersons who had remained to revitalize this ministry right before my eyes and I was able to live with the family all weekend and watch mom and watch dad and watch these four small kids just pour their lives into what the Lord was doing.

Well, I was reminded of all that this past week when I was asked to shoot a video celebrating now Doctor Martin's retirement and I thought in my mind, "How is it even possible that he is retiring?" I don't know if you're like this but I have trouble advancing somebody else's life in my mind if I knew them in the past and it's like, "He can't be retiring. He just took that job as a college professor, in his 30s." Yeah, 35 years ago now. But now the ministry, by God's grace, is very solid and they have even been able to plant a new urban congregation in downtown Trenton. Their school is strong, and now one of their longtime associates is becoming their new senior pastor. It was a great reminder of the beauty and the efficacy of long-term faithfulness. That's what I want to talk to you about this morning under the heading of "Stewards of Grace."

With that in mind, open your Bible if you would now, to 1 Corinthians 4. That's on page 131 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you.

As it has already been mentioned, we're starting this morning our annual stewardship month. That has been a great, great blessing to our church family over the years, so each Sunday, we'll have testimonies just like the marvelous one you heard earlier from Ross and Jeannie Andrews. What a great example of what we were hoping would happen in our senior living community. I knew several weeks ago when I just happened to drive by

there on a Saturday afternoon even before the clubhouse was done and the residents were all together on one person's porch just having a great time together. I knew that project was going to be a winner. Already we're seeing all sorts of synergies developed by having some of our seniors live at our eastside campus and serving and being served in all sorts of ways. So you'll hear during stewardship month testimonies from various men and women who are growing and exemplifying stewardship.

Then we're going to be considering our stewardship commitments together and you have a brochure in your program that you received this morning. I'm going to be referencing that a little bit later, and I would encourage you along with your family to spend some time completing that about what you think God wants you to do regarding stewardship in the days ahead.

Then there is also this annual stewardship celebration. We'll have tickets available next week. But that's the Sunday night before Thanksgiving. I hope every person, even if you're not a member yet, but I hope you'll want to be with us as we just celebrate together God's blessing and God's great faithfulness to us over this past year.

Well, we'll also focus all of our messages on Sunday morning around some aspect of stewardship. This morning we want to look at one of the foundational passages. We refer to it a lot, it's a memory verse that many of us know. I'm not sure we always think about this passage in its context. That's what I want to try to help us do this morning. So to that end, let's actually begin reading at 1 Corinthians 3:1.

1 And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. 2 I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, 3 for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? 4 For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not mere men?

Please keep that in mind. That's going to fit into our passage this morning.

5 What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. 6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. 7 So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, [do you see that?] but God who causes the growth. 8 Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. 9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. 10 According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. 11 For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay,

straw, 13 each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. 14 If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. 15 If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. 16 Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? 17 If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are. 18 Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you thinks that he is wise in this age, he must become foolish, so that he may become wise. 19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God. For it is written, "He is the one who catches the wise in their craftiness"; 20 and again, "The Lord knows the reasonings of the wise, that they are useless." 21 So then let no one boast in men. For all things belong to you, 22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come; all things belong to you, 23 and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God.

Now the key verses we're going to look at, these next two. "Let a man regard us in this manner," in that context, "Let a man regard us in this manner as," 1. you'll see the outline clearly, "servants of Christ, 2. "stewards," there's our word, "of the mysteries of God." 3. "In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy."

So we're talking this morning about stewards of grace. We want to concentrate on three ways to think about God's stewards. Three ways that we ought to be thinking about stewards. Now, this is probably one of those passages where we need a few opening salvos before we get into the main outline, just to be sure that we're thinking about all this carefully. One is this passage, the key passage, was given in the context of wrongly elevating certain pastors and teachers in the church. So when Paul says at the beginning of chapter 4, "Let a man regard us in this manner," he was talking first and foremost about the way that people through the church think about their pastors and speak about their pastors and other teachers and leaders, and how those teachers and leaders speak about themselves. It's in the context of all of this, "I am of Paul. I am of Apollos," business.

Also, contextually, Paul knew that whatever he did, he did it by and through the grace of God. He said that in chapter 3, "According to the grace of God which was given to me." That would have been especially pertinent to people who were running around saying, "Well, I'm of Paul. He's my favorite guy." Paul would not have wanted anybody to do that. Why? Because he simply viewed all of his gifts and all of his opportunities as having been given by the Lord. His story was completely by God's grace, not by his accomplishments. There was also this warning at the end of chapter 3, "Beware of using worldly wisdom and elevating self or others. Let no man deceive himself." You see, in all sorts of ways, including how he thinks about himself, allowing others to evaluate him, there is a lot of potential self-deception in all of this.

Then, 4:1 to 2, are first and foremost speaking about pastors and their stewardship and so you say, "Then why would we even use this passage ever during stewardship month?" Because the same metaphor is often used of every follower of Jesus. In fact, in a couple of weeks, Lord willing, we are looking forward to looking at this passage, 1 Peter 4:10, "As each one," now speaking of believers, "As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." So what we're reading here, the point is, you said, "I didn't get all that." Here's the point: what we're reading in 1 Corinthians 4:1-2 about pastors, it's true of all of God's people by implication, because Scripture uses the same metaphor to describe all of us.

So with the time we have remaining, think back now to this key passage, 1 Corinthians 4:1-2, three ways to think about God's stewards. One is your position is that of a servant of Christ. Paul says, "Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ." That's the Greek word, *huperetes*, and it literally means "a helper; a servant or an attendant." Nobody ought to be strutting around the church house as if he's all that and a bag of chips, or comparing one person or another as if they are. No, no, no. "Let a man regard us as servants," as *huperetes*.

One of the examples in the Bible of that particular word, you may remember, is when Jesus stands up and reads from a scroll in the book of Isaiah. Remember this right at the beginning of Christ's public ministry? Then he closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Well, what word do you think in that verse is *huperetes*? Yeah, it's the word "attendant." Nobody thought he was the most important person in the room. He had a role to play, but he was a helper. He was a servant. He was an attendant. And Paul's point here is, why would you argue about which pastor or which apostle or teacher is the greatest and, by the way, by implication, why you're better than others because your preferred teacher is the one who is the best? We're all just *hupereteses*. We're all just helpers. We're all just servants. We're all just attendants. Who would ever argue over who the best attendant was? You see, your position is that of a servant of Christ instead of using your gifts and your resources to promote yourself and your agenda.

Why is that even in the text? Consider us as servants of Christ? It's because servants recognize the privilege and the responsibility of using what they have to love God and minister to others. What an incredible confusion of identity to take what God has entrusted to you and advance your own name, or your own agenda. Can you imagine a pastor doing that in a church? Or an apostle doing that in a church? Or a teacher doing that? Being entrusted by gifts to be used to glorify God and love others and instead to promote himself? Or to allow others to promote him? No, not at all.

My wife, Chris, worked for a man while she was putting me through seminary, where they had a tradition in their office and you probably do where you work too, where on somebody's birthday, they would buy the person a cake and then at some point during the day, everybody would sit down and enjoy that gift together, right? So they got one for this particular man. Everybody is kind of waiting around until they could sing him happy birthday and then especially have a piece of cake. So the boss walks out to the outer

office, sees the cake with his name on it, closes the lid on the box and takes it home. That would be called selfishly using one's gifts. Is that any different than a pastor promoting himself? Or allowing others to do it? Or other followers of Jesus Christ, that's where you fit into this, thinking about themselves or their abilities through any other prism than that of a servant? By the way, that's one of the things I love about Ross Andrews, the gentleman who gave his testimony earlier this morning. Oftentimes, the first time I see him in a typical morning, I see him with his 5 gallon bucket and he's walking around our campus pulling weeds or picking up trash and just trying to help this place look as good as it possibly can. How do you get there? Well, he's thinking about himself and the resource of his time and his abilities through the lens of being a servant. You can't have stewardship without that.

Please don't forget this also: it's servants of Christ. I hope every last one of us would say our Messiah is worthy of our service. You see, that's where this metaphor breaks down because I understand slavery is such a terribly demeaning institution. I understand that. It's hard to get our brains around anything positive regarding the subject. Well it's true unless the person to whom we have chosen to enslave ourselves is the perfectly wise and just and gracious King. And that's one of the things I love about coming around to stewardship month. We've been doing this a long, long time and we have a lot of men and women who are just this: faithful stewards. Faithful stewards in part because the way they think about themselves is, "I have the privilege and the honor of being a servant of Christ." For example, when I go over to Faith West, one of the things I love about going over there is, because it's a young church plant, but how well organized they are already and that place screams the message from detail after detail after detail, "We want to love you. We want to serve you. We want to minister to you anyway we possibly can." Well, to get that way already on that campus tells you this: there there are lot of men and women who wake up on the Lord's day viewing themselves just like Paul says we should, simply as servants of Christ.

I'm so thankful for our sound crews. Some of the first people I see on a typical morning are the sound guys and they're already here, they're already checking everything. We believe in using our buildings a lot, is that true? We believe in that and so it's not like our auditoriums sit around all week long. No, we have all sorts of groups. We share it in all sorts of ways. That too is a matter of stewardship. That kind of jams up the sound guys because you never know who plugged what into where and so they are already here, working everything out and they're kind of like the lineman on the football team, their name is never called unless they committed a penalty, but I'm so glad for people who are here very, very early in order to, what? Serve. Serve. Serve.

Often I see Pastor Garner. Many times he and I come here early at about the same time. Our would children's ministries are such a crucial aspect of everything that we're trying to get done as a church family and the more we think about community ministry and the more we think about outreach in urban areas, we've been having a lot of conversations with a lot of people and it has reminded me afresh of how important children's ministries are. I'm glad for him and other staff members who want to get here and get at the work to be sure that we're doing that with excellence. I often in the copy room run into various

people who serve in our children's ministries and they're making some copies just to be sure that their lessons are A+, etc. etc. All of those people servants, servants, servants.

I hear the people in our worship team. When I'm doing my final prep on a Sunday morning and what am I hearing in the background? Our worship team preparing for the Lord's day. And I'm just so very, very thankful for the many, many, many men and women in our church who do exactly what Paul is calling us to do in this text, "Let a man regard us, all of us in this manner, as servants of Christ."

And I would encourage you to start today, and I would encourage you to work through with each one of your families on this stewardship brochure that you got in your bulletin when you came in today and on the back panel it lists a number of different ways to serve and what I would encourage you to do is to think about this: am I regarding myself in that way? God has entrusted me with all sorts of gifts. He has entrusted me with all sorts of abilities, all sorts of resources, all sorts of passions and am I using them? You wouldn't want to be like my wife's boss, would you? The guy who put the lid on the cake and went home and used it for himself? And I don't want to be snarky, but it looked like he used it a lot. He just enjoyed it all himself. I shouldn't have said that, but you wouldn't want to be like that guy, would you? Do you realize it's possible to be like that guy spiritually? To take the gifts, the ability that God has given and use them selfishly to promote one's own agenda instead of functioning and viewing oneself as a servant of Christ.

Now, Paul, what does he say next? Not just your position, but also your trust, the truth of God's word. You see, "Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ," and what else? "As stewards of the mysteries of God." Now, this is the first of two uses of the word "steward" in this short passage, so let's just camp out there for a few minutes to be sure we're all on the same page. I know that a number of men and women have just come to Christ in the last year who will hear this message. That's some good news, huh? We'll have a number of men and women who are new to our church. This is going to be their first stewardship month. That's the way it ought to be, so let's just be sure we're on the same page here. What do we mean by a steward? Well, everything we have that's potentially of eternal value has been given to us by our Master. That's what it means to be a steward. The original word in both verses is *oikonomos* which is from the word "house." That's what a steward is, a housing one, a house manager. And the picture is back in Bible times when a person who owned a home, or who owned a farm or who owned an orchard had to travel, that operation had to be left in the hands of someone, in the hands of his steward, often a trusted person who was able to handle the affairs just as if his master was present. What a beautiful picture of our relationship with our risen Christ who has given us that same kind of trust.

So we like to organize stewardship around these four principles, and I would encourage you to memorize these four principles. They'll help you make decisions on a day-to-day basis for sure. Some people who are here, you would be able to give these in your sleep. Here you go: God owns everything. You own nothing. God has entrusted you with everything that you have. You can either increase or diminish what God has given. He

wants you to increase it, and someday you'll give an account of your stewardship, and it may even be today.

Now, think about that in this broader context for a minute: Paul says we're just stewards, so anything that we have of any value in light of eternity, it was given to us by someone else. It's part of the Master's trust. Why would we argue about who is superior? Did you notice how many times that was emphasized in chapter 3? "What then is Apollos? What is Paul? We're simply servants through whom you believe as the Lord gave. Don't elevate us. We're simply stewards. Or I planted, sure, Apollos watered, yes he did, but it was God who was giving the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything." That's pretty clear. Everybody on the team needs to understand his or her role. Whatever I have that is of any value or benefit from the perspective of eternity, that was given to me. I'm just a steward. Yes, I want to be faithful with what I have been given, but I certainly don't want any credit for the gift, and I don't want any credit for what I do with it because the entire relationship is based solely on God's grace. We have so many people who live their lives through that grid. "I just want to be a faithful steward. I just want to be a faithful steward."

Do you know this young man in our church? We affectionately refer to him as Big Al. That's the way he wants to be called. That is Big Al. He serves at the Faith East Community Center. Let me tell you some things that Chad F, the director of that center told me about Al. He said, "Big Al is a volunteer. He comes in each day between 10 and noon and stays until 6, 8 or 10, some days even later. He is very faithful in helping. Without even asking, Al will check the paper towels, the toilet paper, soap, and sanitizer levels in the bathrooms and the fitness room. Empties the trash in all the rooms twice a day. Goes around and cleans up rooms and halls. He walks both inside and outside to pick up trash to make sure the community center is an inviting facility for our guests. He is faithful to us help setup and tear down for any and all events at the community center." He said, "Big Al is a vital member of our sports ministries team. On any given week, Al will volunteer between 20 to 40 hours solely to sports ministries. When I have asked Al why he helped so much in these ways, he is quick to say he wants to serve God, and provide a special environment for both kids and adults in our community." Then Chad said, "Many times Al's work is behind the scenes, not noticed by many people. However, he comes back day after day, tired and hurting, to continue to serve our great God. I can go on and on," Chad said, "about how helpful Al is in the overall mission of sports ministries, Faith East Community Center and Faith Church." Then he said this, I love how he close to this, he said, "Honestly, Al is so important to us, it would take a small army of people if we ever had to replace him." You see, that's a guy who understands stewardship. That's a guy who wants to increase. It would take a small army to replace him. Not that we want to, but what would it take to replace you? If for some reason your stewardship was lost?

Now, the text goes on to tell us this: this is especially true of God's truth. Now, would you please focus with me on this phrase, "Let a man regarded us in this manner," as 1. "servants of Christ," we talked about that, but "stewards of the mysteries of God." What does that mean? And how does that impact the way that we're functioning together? The

mysteries of God. Not that the Bible is a complicated mystery novel that has to be figured out only by a select group of people, but mystery in the sense that these principles of the Gospel had not been previously and fully revealed to the people of God. What that means is, friend, if you know Christ as Savior and Lord, and you have his word on your lap, do you meet those two requirements, by the way? If you don't know Christ as Savior and Lord, then we would want to talk to you, first of all, about being a steward of the Gospel, the good news of Christ's death, burial and resurrection, and placing your faith and trust in him while you have the opportunity to do so because, listen, someday you'll give an account for your stewardship of everything that was entrusted to you, and it may be today. It may be today.

We had a gentleman who worked at Alcoa and was also a lay pastor down in Oxford, a friend of mine, not much older than me, who just week before last was running outside, came into our community center, he was going to work out. He walked to the fitness area and before he even got to the fitness center, he fell down and died. You never know. You never know, and I hope I'm not going to be talking to anybody today who has the view even of the Gospel, "Well, I've not become a follower of Jesus Christ, yet, but I'll always have tomorrow. I'll always have tomorrow. I'll always have tomorrow." Listen, the lie of the devil is that you'll always have tomorrow and our adversary doesn't have to get you to say no, he just has to get you to say wait. And I'm simply saying to everybody who's here, "If you've never trusted Christ as Savior and Lord, you have heard the Gospel, it's been entrusted to you, now it's a matter of whether or not you're going to be a wise steward of it by receiving him, trusting Christ as Savior and Lord while you have the opportunity, but on the assumption that the average person who is going to hear this message this morning, 1. knows Christ as Savior and Lord and 2. has God's word on your lap." What does that mean you are? You are a steward of the mystery of God. That's what every pastor is and that's what every Christian is.

One of the takeaways this morning is thinking about how faithful you've been to that trust. A steward of the mystery of God. And I know it's challenging. You're working with your children, and you're constantly trying to ask the question: how do I bring the word of God naturally into this conversation? How do I teach my child spiritual truth while we're walking by the way? While we're sitting down? While we're rising up? It's a challenge, I know, how to do that, but are you being a faithful steward of the mystery of God or are you essentially parenting your children like a secularist? Or at work, you're out to lunch with your coworkers and they are throwing out all their opinions. Well, is it okay for you to throw yours down even if some of yours are unapologetically based on the word of God? You're a steward and you have been entrusted with the mysteries of God. And if it's okay for them to say what they want to say based on their source of truth, which is generally their own wisdom, why would it be wrong for you in a loving, tasteful but definite way to speak for the things of God during your part of the conversation at the lunch table? And I hope you pray for one another. I know that requires the wisdom of Solomon, in real time, but let's pray that the Lord would give us wisdom to know what being a good steward of the mystery of God looks like in real time. Wouldn't it be a terrible thing to go through your entire career or your entire life and rarely if ever share the mystery? Why did God trust us with it?

We're all familiar with the phrase "wasted scholarship," where someone got a scholarship and was on the team, but never really performed very well. Every one of us has been called to be a steward of the mystery of God. Let's seek to be faithful stewards. By the way, I think that's why there's so much excitement right now about this Hartford Hub project. You say, "The paint color changed from last week to this week." It did. It did. I won't tell you who to blame, but that is now the Hartford Hub, who knows what picture I'll give you next week, but actually I think that's pretty sharp and there are a lot of people who do. But there is a lot of excitement about that project right now. We received another \$25,000 commitment for that project this week. The first phone message I had on my phone on Monday was from a commercial paint contractor who said, "Hey, I heard, my wife and I heard what you had to say about that project and we went home and talked and prayed about it and we would like to provide all the painting services for that facility for free." What an incredibly generous gift.

Just so you understand, you say, "What is all that going to cost?" You have a community park, that's where the Cooler Keg was. Then you've got seminary housing for our seminary students who are going to live down there. And in that facility, you add all that up and that is \$850,000. That's where we are. \$250,000 is going to come from the seminary. That's already there. \$50,000 from our CDC. That's already there because of a generous gift last year. \$50,000 from other grants. So we're at a place where we're trying to raise \$500,000 for that project: \$250,000 of matching gifts and then \$250,000 from the rest of our church family either between now and the end of the year or commitments between now and next summer.

But here's why that is so exciting because we've had all sorts, and I cannot tell you how many meetings I've been in with all sorts of stakeholders in the north end doing all sorts of good things. But here's what we believe: what people in the north end need more than anything else is the same thing that we all needed: the transforming power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And as we move into that endeavor, let me assure you we want others to view us because of the way we function as stewards of the mysteries of God, and we'll have all sorts of community programs out of that particular facility in one of the neediest places in our community, but we'll also have plenty of opportunities to provide biblical counseling right there on that site: all sorts of opportunities for prayer meetings; all sorts of opportunities for neighborhood Bible studies; even the beginning of a small church plant.

And I would encourage you to pray for all of us as we move into ministry in that particular part of town because it's so challenging to know in any given situation who do we work with, who do we collaborate with, how can we be sure that we love our neighbors, that we serve our neighbors, but we would never, ever, ever compromise the Gospel. In fact, that was the promise that I made 20+ years ago now when we started getting more involved in community-based outreach ministry. We're going to love the fire out of our neighbors. We're going to love the fire out of people around the world in any way we possibly can, but never in a way that would compromise the Gospel. Why?

Because we've been entrusted with, what? We've been entrusted with the mysteries of God.

Then thirdly, your requirement and the privilege is long-term faithfulness. We're not talking about counting this in weeks or months or years, we're talking about counting this in decades. "In this case, moreover, it's required of stewards that one be found faithful." That's why we have stewardship month, friends, and if you say, "Well, I wasn't as faithful as I should have been last year," aren't you glad God is the God of forgiveness? And aren't you glad that Jesus Christ stands ready to help us do better in the days ahead? And aren't you glad if you said, "I had a great year last year," what would you say then, in your heart? "And with God's grace, I hope to be even more faithful next year." You see, it's required in stewards, that a man be found faithful. Why is that so important? Remember the verses that I read in chapter 3? Someday, if you're Christian, you're going to stand before the judgment seat of Christ. We'll all give an account someday for our stewardship.

Something else you have in your program today is the list of our men and their families, the men who have been willing to be considered as deacon for this following three years. I'm thankful for every one of them. There are a lot of older stewards in this church. There are a lot of younger stewards in this church too. In fact, I looked at that list and thought I'd like to serve with every one of them, and probably, by the way, probably will, because what often happens, even if a man isn't elected the first time around, as he becomes more known by our church family, eventually he is. And I'm very, very thankful. Very, very thankful for those men and their families, because the fact that their church family would promote them and propose them in that important office says a lot about their growing faithfulness. Praise Jesus for making all of that possible.

You might think, you know, that Pastor Martins that you mentioned at the beginning, what about his kids? In fact, you might say that's one of my concerns about this stewardship business. What effect is that going to have on my kids? Because remember what he did, his little kids went to live in a dilapidated parsonage and I know because I lived with them on the weekends and you wondered when the wind blew, is this going to be the day this baby goes down? It was bad. It was really bad. Well, you know, I'm Facebook friends with a number of them as adults. It's delightful to see them post all sorts of things speaking for the truth of the word of God, and, in God's grace, he has allowed them to become very successful in their various careers. But they're still looking for opportunities to speak for Christ where they are all around the country.

Some of you remember Dick and Marianne Hubbard, longtime members of this church. Dick worked for the city. They have now retired and they're down in South Carolina. They were back here a couple of weeks away ago and Dick came up to me and said, "You know, this is really strange. I was in my Sunday school class down in South Carolina and I love my Sunday school teacher, a fine young man. He really loves the Lord and loves his work and the young man said, my Sunday school teacher said, 'Listen, on the way out, if you want an additional resource, there is a handout back there that was prepared by my former youth pastor.'" So Dick said, "I wanted a handout so I went back

and I got the handout and it had your name on it. How in the world could you have been the youth pastor of Mark Martins?" The answer is that's one of Doc Martins' sons who now with his family lives in South Carolina and is now, yeah, he grew up in a dilapidated parsonage but he also grew up around a mom and a dad who were faithful stewards and do you know what? It stuck. It stuck and now he's a faithful Sunday school teacher, even for former members of this church.

Stewardship, my friends, is a beautiful, beautiful thing. It's required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.

Let's stand together for prayer, shall we?

Father in heaven, thank you for truth from your word that helps us to know how to think about ourselves. Lord, we know there are a lot of different voices, some even from within ourselves, that would tell us differently, so help us to evaluate our thinking in light of what this passage says, and I pray that we would, that we would think about ourselves as servants of God. Lord, I pray that we would think about ourselves as stewards of the mysteries of God, and I pray that we would think about ourselves with the important goal of being found faithful. And we understand that it's only our resurrected Christ who can make any of this possible. So, Lord, help us to trust him as we grow in this direction. We pray this in his name. Amen.