

Stewardship of Service

The Grace of Stewardship

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Bible Text: 1 Peter 4:1-11

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We're coming up on another important milestone in the life of our church. In the Old Testament, the Lord often instructed his people to establish monuments so that the generations to follow would praise him for what he had accomplished through his people. One of those monuments, one of those anniversaries is this is the 25th anniversary of the Lafayette Living Nativity. The idea started when we were down doing some counseling training in Slidell, Louisiana and over lunch, the church family there started telling us about their Living Nativity and how well it had been received by their community, what a wonderful way it was for them to creatively proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ at Christmastime and one of the things I loved about our senior pastor at the time, Pastor Goode, was that he never shied away from trying new things. That was true even later in his ministry so it was not long after we heard that at lunch when we were planning to fly down to Slidell that next Christmastime and just see their nativity in action. It was also providential that the Lord had given our church family Arvid Olsen who had a degree in theatrical design and so we asked Arvid if he would take off work and join us on that trip.

It's funny what you remember 25 years later. For example, they had a pastoral staff member there in Slidell who reminded me a lot of our current youth pastor, Pastor Johnny, and that particular Friday afternoon, we flew down and the flight was delayed so we had to go directly from the airport to the church. We weren't able to stop and eat. We couldn't check into our hotel. We got there just as they were doing the final setup with the animals and so this particular staff member was trying to lead one of the donkeys out to the set and the donkey just absolutely would not budge, in fact, this donkey just sat down on the pavement. So this pastoral staff member is trying to pull this donkey with all of his might and he looked over and saw that we, his friends from Lafayette, had just arrived and he shouted out, "We call this one," speaking of the donkey, "we call this one Deacon," he said. And I probably should not have laughed at that. I probably should not have told you that today, but every Living Nativity since when I see our guys bringing the donkeys out on the set, that's just one of the things that I remember. I'm sure no one was ever tempted to call that one Pastor. But the reason I bring that up is it illustrates the important point of the great fun it is for the church family to use our gifts and our abilities to serve the Lord together.

Later that night, if you ever traveled with Pastor Goode you knew he loved eating at Outback Steakhouse. Loved it. I'm not sure that was on his wife Mildred's approved list of restaurants here locally but I know when we traveled you were going to get to Outback for sure. But as I mentioned, our flight was delayed and so we went right to Slidell and we began looking around at how they were putting the sets together and all that sort of thing and then we watched their nativity in action and we talked to people in the church and we talked to people in the community. We were getting more excited by the minute. I'm not sure how much thought we put in, by the way, to the fact that the weather in Louisiana was a bit warmer in December than the weather in Indiana. This is our later version of it, by the way. Maybe we're the donkeys after all.

But when the event was over, I mean, it's now 9-9:30 at night. We still had to eat and Pastor Goode still wanted to go to Outback. So we hauled ourselves over there famished, absolutely famished, so we ordered up one of those blooming onions and downed that thing. Then when they brought us our meal, we ate every last thing they put before us and immediately went back to the hotel and tried to go to sleep. Let's just say there were three very uncomfortable Baptists in that room that night. I mean, it was just terrible.

Then we came back to the church and we presented the idea and, as I recall, it was going to require an investment of \$20,000 to build all those sets and construct a storage facility to house all of those sets. That's a lot of money now, but back when our church was a fraction of the size, that was a big number, but that proposal passed unanimously and then we just set off to the work. We built a brown metal barn. Some of you remember that. Now that's where our Faith East concession building is and that became Living Nativity Central. Some people look a little bit younger in these pictures. There's Arvid giving direction. But we started organizing. There is Nancy Johnson, our longtime church secretary who was serving in that way. All kinds of work days. People from every walk of life. Every conceivable skill set coming together and constructing and then painting and assembling the scenes and the costumes, everything required to make that program a reality. That is a very young Jonathan Smith playing Jesus, so it didn't matter if he was a teenager. If he could wear that robe, you're in, buddy. That's just the way it worked back in those days. I could tell you all kinds of funny things that happened. I could tell you a few things that weren't so funny, ways God protected us.

Then we opened it up the first year and, of course, you're never sure if anybody is going to come. Let's just say a lot of people came. That particular picture, by the way, is of a subsequent year. When we first opened it up, we didn't have a parking lot nearly that big but that first year, those of you who were with us, you remember traffic was backed up past the I65 bridge. Chris and I at that time, my wife and I, lived over on Pineview Lane which is just northeast of the Faith East campus and we had a neighbor who lived back there who had scheduled his Christmas party for his family and his coworkers at their house that night and his friends could not get to his party and so we had a little bit of cleanup to do on that one. Some people even called the sheriff and complained about the traffic and the sheriff told them, "Look, it's no different than when Notre Dame comes to town for a football game." So the sheriff had our back for sure.

We even had, these signs were up until recently out in our storage barn but some of you remember these signs we had to have painted that said that the wait time beyond this point is 1 ½ hours. We'd set those out just to be sure people knew what they were getting themselves into and they would still wait.

I learned a lot of lessons over the years about how to serve people better. We built a road on the north part of our property. Remember that? So that people could come off of 550 more safely and the guy who worked out at that point, we used to say he worked out at the North Pole and so we had all this kind of terminology that went with this.

We eventually hired city buses, remember this? To form a shuttle and they actually started back in those days from Sam's because if I recall correctly, this was before Myer was built and so the editorial cartoon that particular year, "26 East Faith Baptist Nativity Ahead. Heavy Traffic. Wisemen use the free shuttle from Sam's." So it was certainly the talk of the town for sure.

Well, the important news is we worked very hard to be sure the Gospel was proclaimed, didn't we? If you follow carefully in that script, it was actually proclaimed for in three different ways so that every visitor would hear God's word. Do you realize now in our 25th anniversary we expect to welcome our 200,000th guest? It's been a delightful way for our church family to serve Christ together. A great picture of the stewardship of service.

With that in mind, open your Bible now to 1 Peter 4. That's on page 182 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you if you need that this morning.

This morning, we're wrapping up our annual Stewardship Month. I hope you're planning to join us tonight at 5 o'clock for our Stewardship Celebration over at the Faith East Community Center. If you haven't gotten your tickets, this has already been mentioned, please be sure to do that. We want to be sure we have the correct number of seats and the right amount of food ready. I'm going to especially this morning encourage anyone who is not yet a member of Faith to plan to come with us tonight. That will help you feel more connected to what God is doing around here. So I want to be sure that you know you are absolutely welcome to just celebrate with us what God has done.

I also need to give you a couple of homework assignments in preparation for tonight. Are you read for this? Thank you for saying yes. Here's one of them: you need to remember when you come which campus you're from, okay? So if you need to write that down on a little cheat sheet in your pocket, because we're going to introduce the Faith East people to the Faith West people tonight and so you need to know that. Now, here's where it even gets more tricky, are you ready? Sit back because at some point tonight, you need to remember approximately how long you've been a member at Faith. Again, if you're not a member yet, we're glad you're here and we will honor you as well, but I also want to honor those who have been members of our church in five year increments. Okay? So you just need to remember about when you became a member and I thought if I didn't warn folks about that in advance, that could be some sort of a train wreck. "When did we

join here, Ethel? Was it 1908? 1909?" I just don't want any of that tonight so you and Ethel get that all figured out this afternoon, okay? Alright, alright, alright.

Now, one other administrative issue and that has to do with the preaching schedule for the remainder of the year. Your bulletin tells you which Sunday we're going to be having our Christmas musical at each particular campus but on the other Sundays between now and including our Christmas Eve Candlelight services at both campuses, we're going to be studying grace in the genealogy of Christ. You say, "Ho, that sounds exciting." Oh, it is. It is. Grace in the genealogy of Christ. You may know that in the Gospel of Matthew, there are actually four ladies mentioned in Christ's lineage. Did you know that? And that, in and of itself, is unusual but what's especially stunning is who those four ladies were. In dramatically different ways, each one of them is a beautiful picture of grace and we thought that would just be an appropriate way for us to end this year where all year long we've been talking about finding grace and so at Christmastime we want to study the lives of those four ladies. Grace in the genealogy of Christ.

Here's why I'm telling you that now: I really want to encourage you to invite friends and loved ones and coworkers and neighbors to church. I always have that in the back of my mind or other pastors who are speaking here, we have it in the back of our minds as we plan our services, but if our Sunday services for the rest of the year and our Christmas Eve services are especially appropriate for you to invite your friends and loved ones, I want to be sure you know that now. You know, we've had a very strong year of seeing men and women place their faith and trust in Christ, did you know that? Are you excited about that? We have a mission and should we be asking ourselves if that mission is being accomplished? This has been a very good year on that particular front. We're praising God for that, thanking the Lord for his grace, but we want to end the year strong, don't we? Please tell me the answer to that is yes, but by using Christmastime to proclaim the Gospel in as many ways as possible. You know there's a difference between attending an evangelist in church and being an evangelistic person? Did you know that? That would have been a good time to go, "Hmm. My pastor loves me so much that he pointed that out." And I want to encourage you right now to be thinking about it and praying about moving further out of your comfort zone and doing whatever is necessary to bring someone that you know to hear about and celebrate and embrace the message of God's great and gracious love gift of his Son at Christmastime. So please be thinking about that.

Let's jump now into this marvelous passage in 1 Peter 4 which explains how and why our church family would have jumped into this Living Nativity opportunity and why we do many things that we do around here for the Lord. 1 Peter 4, beginning in verse 1, "Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God." Is that right? "For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries. In all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign you; but they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead." Do you believe that? And

do you care about how your friends and loved ones will stand on that day? Verse 6, "For the gospel has for this purpose been preached even to those who are dead," those that are spiritually dead, "that though they are judged in the flesh as men, they may live in the spirit according to the will of God. The end of all things is near." Do you believe that? Should we live in the light of the imminency of the return of Christ? "Therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer. Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because," interesting, "love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaint." There are some undercurrents there. Now our key passage, verse 10, "As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as," what? "As good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."

What a great passage. We're talking this morning about the stewardship of service and with the time we have remaining, let's think about three principles to help us steward our gifts well. The first is this: recognize that if you know Christ you have received at least one spiritual gift. Did you know that? Verse 1 makes it very, very clear. Let me say that one more time and I'll get it right, verse 10 makes that very, very clear. "As each one," there it is, "As each one has received a special gift." And by the way, aren't you glad that God has designed his church to function in that fashion where God gives every person who knows Christ as Savior and Lord spiritual gifts? That's why we're a family, people who have been given spiritual gifts by our Lord.

Now, what does that word mean? A gift? It's the Greek word "charisma" which is from the Greek word for "grace." Now, hold on to that for a minute. The word "gift" itself comes from a root that means "grace," how God has given us abilities and talents by the power of his grace; by the power of his good hands. So what you see when you think about this verse, it's actually book ended by grace. You have gifts, something that is of God's gracious hand, and we are told at the end of the verse we are to be stewards of that gift of his manifold grace. It's all about grace.

Now, it's important to know that there are other parallel passages in the New Testament that can help us understand this topic. If you want to study this further, these would be the texts to go to: Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:7-11; later in that same passage, verses 28 and 30; Ephesians 4:11; then the text that we're in this morning. Now, time does not allow us to do a complete comparison of these passages. We could do that. There are plenty of examples out there on the internet of how do we look at these various gifts and compare what is said in each one of the passages and all that sort of thing. Let me just read from the first one just so that we get a flavor of this. This is Romans 12:6, "Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace," there's our theme again, "given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness."

Now, you can already see that some of these are sign gifts which were necessary at the beginning of the church as the Scripture was being completed. We don't need that anymore. We don't need anymore apostles because, for one thing, you do not meet the qualification of an apostle. Did you know that? Neither do I. Nobody does and now that the Bible is completed, we don't need them. But you also saw in that passage in Romans 12 things like the gift of serving. Did you know that was a spiritual gift? The gift of teaching. The gift of giving. The gift of leading. The gift of mercy.

Now, you might say, "Wait a minute, those aren't exactly the same gifts that were listed in 1 Peter 4. It's different." There is overlap. Peter did organize his gifts around the ideas of teaching and the gifts of serving, but if you look at the list in each of those five passages, the lists are different. Now, one of the takeaways for that is God was never intending to give us some sort of a comprehensive list of the gifts in the word of God. This is just direction but it's not intended to be comprehensive. So what then are we talking about? Well, we're talking about abilities. Do you have any of those? We're talking about abilities that the Lord has graciously given you that can be used for his service in the accomplishment of his plan.

Now, it's also important for us to celebrate the uniqueness and the variety of gifts among our church family. I mentioned again from verse 10, "each one." Every person in this church family has a unique gift set. It ought to be recognized. It ought to be celebrated. In verse 10, the word "manifold." The point here is each person's gift set is going to be unique to the way God designed them and their abilities among the church family are going to be greatly diverse; manifold gifts because of his manifold grace. John MacArthur summarized all this in a helpful way in his commentary. He said, "Each believer's spiritual giftedness is unique." Now, think about yourself. Put yourself in that statement. "Each believer's spiritual giftedness is unique as if each were a spiritual snowflake." What a great day to have that, huh? "Or fingerprint. It's as if God dips his paintbrush into different colors or categories of gifts on his spiritual palette and paints each Christian a unique blend of colors. Not only does God grant spiritual gifts and arranges them in different ways, but he also gives believers the necessary faith to exercise them." There's some good news, huh? "As he did Paul. Paul summarizes the power of their operation as follows, now, these are variety of gifts but the same Spirit." There's some good news. "There are varieties of ministries in the same Lord. There are varieties of effects but the same God who works all things in all persons."

Now, I assume that many would have the question, "Well, how do I know my spiritual gift?" You can't go any further in this text without an answer to that question and I would encourage you not to make that harder than it is. Think about what's needed for a local church to accomplish the mission that God has given us here and around the world and then think about the way God has made you and how and where you were designed to fit into his plan. Some who will hear this message today, they fall more into the key teaching gifts. Even within that category, there is going to be variety. Some are very comfortable leading small children and teaching them. Are you glad for them? And they will be exercising their God-given gifts even today. Praise the Lord for that. Others would say,

"No, I think God wants me to teach adults," and we're glad for them as well. Some gravitate toward teaching Bible content and theology. Others gravitate toward teaching God's word about practical topics. But everybody would recognize this about you: God made you to be a teacher and you probably have people tell you that. God made you to be a teacher. Not because you're exactly like the teacher down the hall, but God made you that way. He gifted you in that fashion.

Now, some of you are giving me the, "Ha ha ha, don't put me with those. I wouldn't know how to do that. I don't want to be with those. No, no, no, no, no." If you're giving me the no, no, no, that probably means that God has not gifted you in that way. Probably then, God has given you serving type gifts. It's so very important in the church. So maybe you're really good at hospitality or maybe you're really good at organization or you're good at doing things behind the scenes. But, friend, part of your responsibility this morning and privilege, is to identify your spiritual giftedness.

Now, if you say, "I just don't know." Well, here's what I would encourage you to do: ask those who know you best. If you're married, this afternoon, if you don't know, ask your honey, "Gertrude, what do you think my spiritual gifts are?" Just ask her. Ask him. Or just jump into a serving opportunity. Honestly, what you're gifted at, that's going to show up really quickly while you're serving. So don't wait. Just jump in and what you're really good at, that will be evident and do you know what? What you're not so good at probably will come to the fore as well. You could always sit down with one of the deacons or pastors and shame on me, shame on me, shame on me. Yeah, we would be happy to talk with you about this whole thing. Don't make it harder than it is. Don't make it harder than it is.

Now, it doesn't stop there. This isn't just an investigation issue, it's also clearly: find ways to employ your gifts in serving others in and through Christ's church. Right? That is the bottom line of this text and that's one of the things I love about this passage, it's not hard to understand. "As each one has received a special gift," here's what you do, "employ it in serving one another." So cherish the privilege of using your gifts for the reason your Master gave them.

The verb here for "serving" is "diakonointes." "Diakon" from which we obviously get our English word "deacon." We're talking about servant and a couple of takeaways from that. 1. It would be a terrible thing if any of us became proud of our gifts, especially in a year where we're talking about finding grace. Whatever we have that's of any value to the Lord was given to us by God's good and his gracious hand. True? But it would also be terrible if we failed to use the gift to serve him. Is that right? It would be disobedient to this passage of Scripture to fail to use our gifts to serve him. What that means is God gave you the gifts he gave you for a reason, to do something with them, and the pastoral question that comes to the surface pretty quickly is: what is the evidence that you're serving your King with your gifts?

You can't walk around the Living Nativity without seeing that principle in action so you have the gift of administration people and they're busy organizing all the details because

they want even that to glorify their King. They are servants. They're serving with their organizational gifts. And the gift of hospitality people are busy organizing the CDs and the handouts because they want to represent their King well as they welcome the guests. They are serving. Diakonointes, they're serving with their gifts. And the gift of making and distributing costumes people. You say, "I didn't see that in the Greek." That's the point, there are some people who are just especially good at that so they are patiently finding two foot costumes for the littlest ones and larger costumes for those of us who are the gift of eating pie all year people. They are working all that out. That's a beautiful thing to behold when people love to serve. It's a symphony of serving.

I had a conversation with a young couple over at our house the other night when we were having our Intro to Faith dinner and this particular wife said to me, "One of the things I love about Faith is there are constantly opportunities to serve. It just seems like I read the bulletin week after week after week and there are constantly opportunities for me to serve the Lord." And frankly, the fact that she liked that says something about how she has grasped the privilege of the diakonointes, of using our gifts to serve.

And a fair amount of that, by the way, is behind-the-scenes. A church like this would come to a screeching halt were it not for all the many, many people who serve just behind the scenes. For example, I'll just give you an example. We are looking for some couples right now who have the gift of hospitality and the gift of organization to oversee our coffee ministry. Dave and Rachelle H. are transitioning into some other serving opportunities and you might say, "You know what? I would never sing a solo. If they asked me to sing a solo, I would die right there. I would never want to teach this or that but I have hospitality gifts and I have some time and I understand why in this particular culture that a ministry like that puts people at ease when they come together in the Lord's house and if that is one of the ways that I can serve, I would be happy to be involved in a leadership way." If that's the case, I want to encourage you to email Pastor John H. John overseas that particular ministry and he would be delighted. You say, "Well, that might stretch me." Good. Good, that's the whole point. Servants are all about stretched, right? I loved what Amy G. said last week in her testimony, "Stretch me thin." Those are the words of stewardship. Do you think Heather W. said, "Boy, getting a CDL, that's going to be so comfortable for me driving a bus filled with teens." But if that's what's needed and it is, if that's what's needed, then stretch me thin. And I would just ask you if that's the position that you're in and if not, I would encourage you under the authority of the word of God to get with it right away and there's a great ministry opportunity for you.

Also, from this text, focus your life on the the one anothers. Serve one another. If you've been around Scripture for any period of time you know there's an entire subset of Bible study known as the one another passages of the Bible and this is one of them. The church is to be filled with people who absolutely love from their hearts to serve one another. So how can the way God has gifted me be a blessing to someone else in our church or our community? Let me ask you to pull out your Stewardship Commitment card one last time for this Stewardship Month. It's in your bulletin. I hope you've been working through this with your honey. I hope you're making some plans for growth in stewardship in the coming year. Bring this with you when you come tonight. But on the back sheet, there are

all sorts of opportunities to consider how you might be able to serve. And one of the core questions that this passage encourages all of us to ask is: do you really care about the one another that God has placed in your life?

For example, I mentioned earlier about inviting those in your sphere of influence to these Christmas studies. That's part of your stewardship of being an ambassador for Christ because evangelism is not far from the Apostle Peter's mind in this entire book like he said in the previous chapter, "Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence." Listen, that is only going to happen if you care about the one another in your life. We live in a very self-centered and self-absorbed culture, right? And this text is calling us to something entirely different than that. If we're truly stewards of the manifold grace of God, then we will look at our gifts and look at our opportunities as the privilege of serving one another. Do you really care about the one another in your life and do you want to employ your gifts in serving them?

Also, because of the urgency of the day. Now, time doesn't allow us to bring all the context into this discussion, but did you notice the doctrine of the imminency of Christ, the imminent return of Christ. "The end of all things is near, therefore be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer." And we're not going to start setting dates, but how long do you think it's going to be before the next terrorist attack on US soil? Think about what's happening in the Middle East and think about what's happening in Russia and think about what's happening in China right now. It takes your breath away. If you are a futurist at all, that ought to take your breath away and who knows, who knows what the future holds, but there ought to be a sense of urgency about using our gifts to make a spiritual difference in the lives of others. Could I get a, "True that," on that particular point? There ought to be a sense of urgency about the way we would use whatever has been entrusted to us to serve those that the Lord has placed around us.

Also this, I am so convinced about this: serving together helps you overlook the small things. Did you know that? Did you notice I tried to point it out as we were reading? There is an undercurrent running through this passage, "Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another because love covers a multitude of sins." I'm convinced serving will help you do that. "Be hospitable to one another without complaining." You say, "How does that fit into this?" Here's how: when you're busy serving and seeing the spiritual fruit of that service together, the little stuff doesn't matter. Do you realize that? You don't have time for grumbling when you're busy serving one another and seeing the fruit of that. One thing I've learned as a pastor is often those who serve the least complain the most. Yeah, that's right. That's right. And that might've been true of you and if so, take a lesson from the word of God.

By the way, that's not to say that I don't want people to talk with me about ways our church needs to get better or that I need to get better so it's not like that's an anti-grumbling statement, but it is a balanced statement and it goes back to this issue of centered thinking or fringe thinking. Centered thinking meaning all the things we agree on, all the things we are focused on; it's the core mission. Fringe thinking are the few

things out there on the side about which we might disagree or not like and some people don't seem to value the center very much and they're always out on the fringe and their brain, thinking about what they don't like or fussing about what they don't like as if we share no common ground and we have nothing to be excited about together. Did you know there are a few things about this place I don't like? Did you know that? Do you want a list? But I don't have time to think about that. I don't have time to worry about that. I don't have time to fuss about that. Do you know why? Because I'm enjoying the center. That's why. I'm enjoying the mission and I'm enjoying the privilege and the opportunity of accomplishing the mission together so I haven't got time to fuss about the fringes. Do you have time to fuss about the fringes? Or are you too busy employing your gifts in serving others because you're a steward of the manifold grace of our God?

Lastly, remember that God's gracious gifts to you are a matter of stewardship. They are. We've talk about these four principles. Let me remind you of them but think about them in the context of your giftedness. God owns everything including your gifts. God entrusts you with everything that you have. You can either increase or diminish what God has given you, friends. That is so true of so much, especially what we're talking about this morning and you can be called into account at any time and it may be today. It's a stewardship. Stewards of the manifold grace of God. Aren't you glad, by the way, that God trusted you? Those gifts, he trusted you to use them for his purpose and for his glory.

You know, before I started building pools, I worked at a health club. Did you know that? When I was in high school, the way I was able to work my way through Christian school tuition as a high schooler was working at a health club. I was just a kid, 16, 17 years old, and I distinctly remember the night that my manager came to me, the place was open until 9 o'clock at night and he gave me the keys to the place and he said, "We're going to have you start locking up." I look back at that now and say, "What was he thinking?" I think he was thinking he wanted to get home and so they're giving me, a kid, wasn't even 18 years old, wasn't even out of high school, they're giving me the keys to the entire place. But I'll tell you something: that motivated my heart. I'm going to work hard. This place is going to be clean. It's going to be ready so that when they come in in the morning it's ready to go the following day. If they're going to trust me with these keys, I'm going to give it all my might to be worthy of that trust. God didn't just entrust you with the keys to the health club, God entrusted you with spiritual gifts and all sorts of opportunities all around to employ them as stewards, the text says, of the manifold grace of our God.

All this means is there is no place in the discussion for stubbornness. There is no place in the discussion for apathy. There is no place in the discussion for pride. No place in the discussion for selfishness. By the way, all of this assumes that there has been a definite time in your life where you have trusted Christ as Savior and Lord. If you have not yet done that, don't think yet about employing anything in serving. I want to encourage you to think about receiving the free gift of salvation through trusting Christ. But if you have done that, we're going to give an account for these gifts as individuals and as a church and listen, think about that last phrase, "manifold grace of God." Can we just face this as Faith Church? God has entrusted us with a lot, has he not? God has entrusted this church

family with a lion's share of giftedness, right? And a lion's share of resources. And a lion's share of opportunities. You see it in practically any direction you look. The manifold grace of our God.

That explains this Hartford Hub project. I mean, we're glad for the suburban ministry opportunities that God has given us. We're committed to fulfilling them with excellence, but our hearts are being drawn more and more to the north end. I'll tell you one of the reasons why: it's because of the needs that exist in that part of town. Think about this: in that area of town right around the East Central site, 59% of the households there earn less than \$25,000 a year. Think about that stat for a minute. It's the lowest median income, \$20,000. 53% of single moms with children under five years old are under the poverty line. By the way, now listen, I love you but if in your brain right now you're saying, "Well, they shouldn't have, they shouldn't have, they shouldn't have, and we're just better than them," where is the grace in that? Where is the grace in that?

Lowest percentage of households with retirement income. Think about our seniors who live around us. Highest housing vacancy, oldest housing stock, most rent burdened. 83% of the owner occupied units below \$100,000. Stat after stat after stat. You might say, "Boy, they need us." Maybe we need them and maybe our church family would be helped by greater economic diversity that such individuals would bring to the table. And how about a stewardship celebration where we're asking people to stand if they're from Faith East and we're asking people to stand if they're from Faith West and we're asking people to stand if they're from Faith Northside?

Now, here's another great part of the opportunity: it's not just economic diversity but it's ethnic diversity. When you start drilling into the stats right there around East Central, the highest percentage and total number of persons self identified as African American in our city, the highest percentage of those identified as Hispanic. 7% are foreign-born. 9% speak English at home. Again, if you look at any of those stats and say some snarky thing in that brain of yours, I hope you'll repent quickly. We are stewards of what? Of snarkiness? We're stewards of the manifold grace of God.

Think about what's being said in some of the political debates about government mandated economic redistribution. I hope that concerns us greatly. Think about the racial tension simmering all over this country including the campus of Purdue University. What I'm suggesting to our church family is we have an opportunity to model how the Gospel results in fervent love for one another, resulting in economic diversity and racial diversity, one body whereas, "each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." That's worth making a stewardship commitment to. That's worth being stretched thin.

You know, one Monday night, I was coming out of the counseling center. It was about 8, 8:30 at night and it was one of those Monday night snowstorms we had last winter. We had a bunch of those and it was one of those and the snow was going cross ways kind of nights, you know, and I'm just hoping I'm going to get out to my Jeep. I happened to look out through that blowing snow and I saw an African-American young boy walking kind

of hunched down walking through our parking lot. I thought, "What in the world?" It's terrible weather to be walking and it's even dangerous to be walking in a parking lot in the snow so I called him over and I asked him what was going on. He told me that he lived in the north end but he came out to our church's basketball, community basketball program on Monday nights so he took the bus from where he lived out to Myer. That bus obviously stops there and then he walked from Myer down here to our community center.

So I said to him, I said, "Hey, would you call your mama and ask her if I could just take you home tonight? It's dangerous. I'm concerned about you in this kind of weather." So he called his mom. His mom was at work and, by the way, we're glad for folks working, huh? She was at work and he told her the situation and his mom was willing to let me take him home. So on the way down home, I was saying to him, "What the world are you doing all the way out on the east side this time of night?" He said, "I come here every Monday night. We don't have any kind of resource like this downtown where I live. I like coming out here and playing basketball because it's a fun thing to do and it's safe and people treat you well." Here's what I said in my heart, "By God's grace, if we can, we're going to find a way to make those resources available closer to where a young man like that lives."

Now, we have a lot, do we not? We have an abundance of the manifold grace of our God and I hope as we look around our community we'll be saying we want everybody in this town to have access to the same kind of resources that we did in order to come to know the Lord and to make good choices.

Let's stand together for prayer, shall we?

Father in heaven, Lord, thank you that you have entrusted us with gifts and thank you for the many who are here. They are great stewards of their gifts. We praise you for that. Lord, some have some work to do and, Lord, that's how Stewardship Month can help us so I pray that you would help us not just to be upset about something or to be emotionally moved, Lord, I pray that we would make commitments even as we conclude this Stewardship Month, so that we can have as individuals and as a church family a lifestyle that is more in line with this text and we pray this in Christ's name. Amen.