

Every Member Commitment Sunday  
“Discovering the Gift of Giving – Getting Started”  
I Corinthians 4:1-2  
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This is the Word of God, which is inspired, infallible, in errant and eternal. I Corinthians 4:1-2 says [1] *This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.* [2] *Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful.*

The grass withers, the flower fades, the Word of our God abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

I want to speak in a personal and pastoral way as we go into our every member commitment season. One of the great joys when you are called into the ministry as a pastor is the great privilege of the rhythm and the regularity; first of all, the Lord’s Day morning and evening worship. Secondly, the calling and place in that worship of the regular pastoral commitment to consecutive expository preaching. That is preaching through consecutively texts of Scripture, knowing that everything is inspired, profitable and knowing that God has built a balance into His Word itself, instead of kind of going off on the hobbyhorse for that is what builds the whole Bible to make whole Christians.

I’ve been here for now, 24 years and I have come to love that other little piece which is that in certain seasons in the life of the church where the leadership has brought a particular focus. At that moment a pastor then does a topical while still doing expositional preaching, but it’s topical or thematic focused upon that season. We’re about to enter into the advent season. We do so during Holy Week. We do so in the National Missions Conference, which we always do leading into our every member commitment season. Then we have a world missions conference and, and I have come to deeply appreciate those.

The church’s mission is to make disciples that are able to go into all the world as salt and light and in evangelism and disciple making the pastors role from the pulpit ministry, certainly to be involved in his own personal life, but from the pulpit ministry, it is to teach people to observe all that day that God has commanded. Then expositional pastoral preaching is like the waterfall that starts the process, where it begins to focus into greater power in a Sunday school community. Then it focuses more into the small group discipleship as lives get own lives where discipleship, informational and relationally take place.

One of the things I came to realize about these seasons, where we’re able to focus on a particular topic in these special seasons during the year, it’s almost like I get the opportunity to do almost a one on one, although I realize this is not one on one. But I get to go to an issue with you personally from the foundational features of God’s Word that address that issue and I have come to love that. One of the challenging things when I came to Briarwood was this Every Member Commitment (EMC) for we didn’t have this at Christ Covenant. I’ve actually come to love it very much because I know I have experienced how important stewardship is in my life, how it’s built into and actually a vital subset of discipleship, and the reality is, discipleship leads to stewardship of all of life under the direction of God’s Word. So this has become just a delight to be able to take moments like this Lord’s Day and look at this issue.

In this past year we have been focused upon the stewardship of our spiritual gifts and we began with this text in I Corinthians 4. So I thought it would be appropriate on an EMC Stewardship Sunday to address on your commitment card not only your financial stewardship,

but also your spiritual gift and ministry stewardship with this text. This is a wonderful text in the Scripture and a rather challenging text, but also an insightful text. So let's get into this text.

I Corinthians 4:1a says [1] *This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.* This phrase is an interesting way to begin. If you have read the Pauline epistles you know that the Apostle Paul interacts with the churches he is sending them to on a very personal level and even calls out names. In this particular epistle from I Corinthians 5 on will answer seven questions that the leadership had sent to him, but from the membership and maybe some of the leadership, some other things had come to him.

I Corinthians 1 through 4 Paul is very clearly the object and subject of some highly personal directed criticism, almost slanderous and he refers to some of it in these texts of Scriptures. In I Corinthians 4:1 Paul is responding to some of the things said about him and his overall team. The Apostle Paul found out what is true by many that friendly fire is usually not very friendly and it's not just an accidental shot, it's usually a well-aimed shot. It's been directed at him from Corinth, very much different than Philippi and it's very interesting.

It is interesting to note how Paul is responding. He basically responds by saying "I know how you regard me, I've heard how you regard me and now here is how you should regard me." Paul reaches to two very common vocations in the Greco-Roman world – regard us as servants and regard us as stewards. It's also two marks of everyday Christians in general because Christians are called stewards and they are called servants. Now, Paul takes it in his particular calling to just regard him as another level of servant and steward – as a servant of Christ because He called him to this ministry and the steward of the mysteries – the things one wouldn't know if God hadn't revealed them.

When one reads the word mystery in the New Testament don't it's a mystery that has to be solved. No, mystery means something we wouldn't know if God didn't reveal it. That is what is being said here, meaning that Paul is an agent of revelation, as he is in 13 epistles in the New Testament, revealing things to us about our God, who He is, and what He has done in and through His Son, Jesus. So instead of going into the heights of defending himself in what's coming to him from Corinth, Paul decides to just be very matter of fact.

Paul gives two descriptive words (servant and steward) that is being used throughout society as marks of every single believer but Paul is about to tell us what it means in his case as a servant of Christ and a steward of the mysteries of God that have been entrusted to him to reveal to us. I want to take a closer look at these two words – servant and steward used here in these two verses.

The first word servant is the Greek word *doulos* used here in the Bible. About 60 plus percent in the Greco-Roman world would have been some kind of slave or servant. Now, some of them would have been captured servants and slaves from military conquest. Some of it would have been chattel slavery, some ethnic slavery, and some indentured servitude, but this is a very particular kind of *doulos* mentioned here. This particular servanthood is sometimes translated in your Bible bond servant. The reason why is because they continue to be in servitude by their own act of bondage, their own bonding of themselves. In other words, a *doulos* is someone who has been in some form of servitude, but the master has delivered/emancipated them from it, but they out of three things – allegiance, affection and appreciation – have placed themselves as servants freely to that same master whom they had served and who had emancipated them.

Then we see that it says in I Corinthians 4:2 [2] *Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful.* So the next word Paul uses is steward. There are two famous stewardship parables in the Bible – one is found in Luke 16 and the other in Matthew 25. I'll start with the

word used in Luke 16. The word steward in I Corinthians 4 is the same in Luke 16 but it's translated manager, executive or executor of a task and steward. The reason for this is because it's looking at the issue of stewardship.

The Greek word for steward in Luke 16 is *oikonomos* and we translate that stewardship. It's actually two different words that are made into one word, known as a compound word. It's *oiko*, which means house and *nomos*, means rules so put together it's house rules. My mother had a lot of house rules. We were utterly responsible to obey to the letter. I'm convinced if there is a picture in the dictionary beside OCD, it's my mother's. She had a tight ship on our house.

When *oikonomos* is transliterated where you put the Greek letters into English letters we get the word economics – the business of life. That's the word for stewardship. So when we're looking at stewardship, we're looking at a life discipline to be managed and by certain rules from the master, we are the executors, as stewards of the resources that He has given to us. In the Greco-Roman world, interestingly, if families had means they would always have a steward and by the estimates of one historian, over 90% of the time, that steward would be a *doulos*, a bond servant. It's easy to see why they would tend to do that, because a bond servant will have a relationship with the master built upon appreciation, allegiance and affection. That's why it is called a servant or slave of love and devotion.

So it's interesting that Paul puts these two together, given what you would have encountered in that first century to talk about not only himself, but Christians. We who have been emancipated from our sins, now coming to Christ as Lord in allegiance, out of affection – if you love Me, keep My commandments – now give our lives as worship, gratitude, and appreciation for all that we are, all that we have that we don't deserve, but was freely given at a great cost to God. It's just amazing to me how those things are so first century clear to those who would have read this and what would be abundantly obvious as soon as you looked at it, is what is it that guided the steward/servant who had been appointed as a steward?

I want you to think of two things as a steward. Number one, the steward of the house had a comprehensive task. They were entrusted for the care and investment of everything. It wasn't just one element. That's why when we come to an EMC season, we don't just look at finances. Stewardship is life, and all of the issues of life in the home were under the steward by the appointment of the master whom had emancipated him, whom he loved, whom he appreciated, and to whom he owed complete allegiance.

Secondly, it was not only comprehensive, but it was focused with a singular focus and that this; to be faithful. The steward owned nothing, though, responsible for everything entrusted that when the time for evaluation came, the steward was to be found faithful. The three categories that we talk about in terms of Christian stewardship is stewardship of time, stewardship of talents and stewardship of our treasures. I think it's an excellent way to do it in terms of discipling and developing us over time. What a resource! It's nonrenewable. You're appointed so many sunrises and sunsets by the sovereign hand of God. He has numbered our days. Perhaps is the most valuable resource and it's the one resource we have that's nonrenewable. Once a day's gone, it's gone.

It's also a resource that Satan loves to rob us of and he does this in various ways – by apathy in life, by distracting us, by stealing days, moments and hours from us. But our Savior calls us to redeem the time! Don't lose it even in a fallen world. Don't be distracted. Make the time profitable. Manage it. I like this term spend better – how do you spend your time knowing once you've spent that day, you don't get it back. It's done. Time is a very precious issue of

stewardship that our Master has allotted to us, that we spend it rightly, redeem it, and manage it under His direction.

Secondly, is being a faithful steward of your talents. I like to divide talent into two categories. You have physical talents that God has endowed you with that include your mental abilities, your skills, your inclinations, your reflexes, and coordination. Two, you have spiritual talents/gifts. Every one of you have a spiritual gift. It's not static, it's dynamic, it's developing and God tells us to use it, employ it, or you lose it. Use it for the Kingdom of God. Use it for the One who gave you that gift. Christ is the One who poured out the gifts upon you from the throne by the work of the Spirit of God in your life. Sometimes you have the great blessing of working the two types of talents together. Your body is something to steward. Your mind is something to steward. Your spiritual gifts that He has given to you are something to steward. In I Corinthians 12 and in Romans 12, He warns us that the two enemies of the stewardship of spiritual gifts are clear – pride in the gift you have or envy in the gifts and ministries of others. Those are the two that rob us of the stewardship of our gifts.

Thirdly, what about the stewardship of our treasure? Certainly, money falls underneath this area of stewardship, but what about the material things that have value in this world like your home, your finances, your resources, your business, the possessions that God has entrusted to you in life? Perhaps for many of us in Christ, our greatest treasures is our spouse, our parents, our children. Satan loves to take these resources and turn them into idols and therefore, we don't steward them, we worship them – children, spouse, money etc. In fact, Satan uses money so much that Jesus drew attention to it in Matthew 6:24 when He said [24] *“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.”* Satan loves to use money as a false god in this world that he says promises everything but actually delivers nothing and that's why He gives the antidote.

I remember when I was a new Christian and I was challenged to get a life verse and I came to Matthew 6, in the Sermon on the Mount, and this verse just resonated with me; Matthew 6:33 which says <sup>33</sup> *But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.* Seek you first – what's the governing pursuit in my life? Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness. The context is warning us against the idolatry of things in general and money in particular. Then His antidote is to seek first His kingdom and His righteousness. Things will get added. What many of us tried to do, is seek things and add Christ and the Kingdom.

That's what I love about moments like this and stewardship where we get to take an audit and an evaluation. Here is the takeaway which is pretty simple. Christ Himself instructs us that while lifestyle stewardship is God exalting, worship in this life, it brings Christ given rewards in the life to come. My discipling effort for you is to get started. I want to share something with you that's so meaningful to me that helped me get started and continues to help me to this day.

When I was coming out the first grade, there was a sale on a J.C. Riggins bike from Sears and Roebuck that my dad had bought me. It was a 26 inch bike that was red and white. I mention 26 inch because in the first grade I couldn't reach the pedals. I said, “Dad, why didn't you get a smaller bike?” He said, ‘You'll grow into it, son.’ I said, “I can't reach the pedals.” He said, ‘You don't have to sit down, stand up, and you can reach the pedals. You'll learn to ride this way and then you'll grow into it.’ I said, “Dad, can we get a smaller one and then get a bigger one later?” He said, ‘No, it costs too much money. You will grow into this one.’ I did grow into it and kept it all the way to the ninth grade until I got a driver's license in the 10th grade.

I remember trying to learn to ride it. I remember the bruises. I remember the falls I had. I remember the cement parking lot where I fell and got my bruises. That was back before we completely covered people with armor when they rode a bike. I remember all of the scrapes and everything that happened with that bike. My sister came along four years later. She also got a bike. She didn't get any scrapes because by that time they'd come up with something called training wheels. Those helped kids learn how and develop their skill on the bike.

I want to give you two training wheels in this area of stewardship that have helped me. How can I be a good steward of my time? Number one, honor the Sabbath. The promise in Scripture is if you honor the Lord's Day, the other six days you will ride the heights of the earth like an eagle. This is not just any other day that you squeeze in a worship service. Learn the blessing of the Lord's Day for you will find an unbelievable impact upon the other six days.

The second training wheel is learn to prioritize your life putting what's important in your calendar first and start with the Lord's Day, then what's important? You may be thinking, 'how do I determine what's important?' I would love to spend a day with you on this, but I only have a few minutes left so my suggestion is to take every vow that you make before God and make it a priority in your life. You took a vow at your marriage. Make your relationship your spouse a priority. You took a vow in your baptism and the baptism of your covenant children so make the priority of raising your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. You took a vow in the vow of the membership of the one institution that's headed to eternity, Christ's church and it's not our playground. It's the body of Christ. You take a vow of integrity in your business. So ask yourself 'What were my vows? Am I living them out before the Lord?' Wherever you've taken vows under the eye of God is a good place to start your priorities in your calendar.

Secondly, talents. Take advantage of not only nurturing your body and your mind but learn and study your body. Paul said in I Corinthians 9:27, *[27] But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.* Buffet your body. Make it the slave of Christ that you're ready to serve Him so that when the Spirit is willing, the flesh won't be weak.

Thirdly, spiritual gifts, get started. Where has God given you a passion? Get started in ministry. He's given you a gift. He's given you a heart for something. Get started developing your spiritual gifts as you deploy them.

Fourthly, your treasure. What are my training wheels in this area? That's simple. It's the tithe. There's where you get started. On top of that there are the offerings. There's the love offerings. We do those and we call those our Faith Promise. There's alms offerings. We do those but those are at communion for Mercy Ministry. In fact, it's not even given yet because it's God's tithe that we refuse to rob God of, that we want to give Him and we want to bestow in worship. On the first day of the week, bring that which you have purposed to give so that that glorious moment we participate in the worship and praise of our God.

Abel brought the first of the flock and the fat portion. He brought the first and the best. He brought the first which is the tithe and he brought the best which were the offerings. Cain just brought some of the fruit of the ground. Bring before the Lord, that which is pleasing to Him. There's the beginning of treasure and one more thing that's a treasure is your home. How can I say 'no' to the culture of living in a castle and say 'yes' to hospitality? Open and use your home for the Kingdom of God.

May the Lord find us faithful not only in stewardship of our time, talents and treasure but in that which is a statement of worship in the praise of God – we love You where our allegiance, our affection, our appreciation and praise is to You, but it's also in that which is to come.

Matthew 25 was the other parable about stewardship and our Lord says the man with five was faithful and the man with two was faithful. There are two things strike me in this parable. Both of them heard the same thing – ‘Well done, good and faithful servant.’ It is the heart of a servant that makes a good steward and then He says, “I will appoint you in the new heavens, in the new earth. I will appoint you over these cities.” I want to tell you what that servant will do on that Day – he will do on that day in the new heavens and the new earth with his reward what he does this day with his resources. This was practice for that and on that day we'll take that and praise His holy Name. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Take a few moments in prayer to consecrate what you feel the Lord wants you to give and remember whether it seems to be much or little, the whole point is that God is in it. God takes the much and manifests much more. God takes the little and the little becomes much when God is in it. Consecrate it your time, your talents and your resources. This is to the Lord. His church is responsible of its stewardship of it. There are so many ways that God is going to use this. How are you going to use your natural talents and spiritual talents for Jesus consecrated in His title? There will be opportunities for offerings and alms offering. Jesus, thank You so much that You've saved us and emancipated us so we're Yours. We're servants and thank You with the heart of a servant, we can engage in stewardship, and with anticipation, we will see what You do with this act of worship of our stewardship this coming year. Father, we will anticipate of what we will do with the rewards attached to this stewardship on the day of stewardship judgment for us, we will take them and praise You. But on that Day, we want to be found faithful because of what happens this day. On that Day we want to hear, “Well done good and faithful servants” in Jesus' Name, Amen.