

## The Stewards Identity Shapes Giving 1 Corinthians 16:1

Today is the first week on the theme Living each Day as A Steward. Our text for today is taken from 1 Corinthians 16:1 *“Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches in Galatia, so you also are to do.”*

Unfortunately, some people feel uncomfortable during stewardship sermons. Many Christians have misconceptions and misunderstandings and have been misdirected about what stewardship is, so they often react negatively when it is talked about. One of the major misconceptions is that it deals strictly with money; or more precisely, the church’s lack of money and how t can get more. As I speak to you today, it is my hope and prayer that I can help you disconnect stewardship from the idea that it is only about “paying the bills.” At the heart of stewardship is a personal, intimate relationship with Jesus.

I am convinced that there is little in life that can help us grow in our relationship with Jesus than good, solid, intentional Biblical stewardship. The goal of the stewardship ministry at the Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd is to help us grow in our relationship with Jesus using the time, Talents, and treasures that God has entrusted to us.

For this morning let's put all our notions and ideas about stewardship aside. Let's start all over with our understanding of stewardship by getting back to the basic, back to god's Word.

First of all, God has called and chosen us to be his stewards. God has placed us in the role and has given us our identity as his stewards. It is first being a steward before it is doing stewardship. Who we are determines what we do. Everything we do, everything we say, and everywhere we go emanates from our sense of identity. Understanding whose we are and our identity as God's stewards, we seek to please him by faithfully doing God's will.

As stewards, we oversee or manage everything that the Lord Has given us, which is everything that we are and have. Then we are to see to it, that it's used in the most useful and efficient manner possible according to God's will to help build up God's kingdom. Stewardship, then, is service to God from the perspective of being a manager or steward of what God has given us. In the words of Dr. Walton Greever: "Christian stewardship is what I do after I have once said, 'I believe.' It is the response of my entire life to Christ out of gratitude for amazing love that meant death on a cross. It is giving of everything I am and everything I have to God, as God directs us. It's total commitment. It is the fruit of my life. It's faith in action." You can see from that definition that what you give to the church monetarily speaking is only a small portion of the overall stewardship picture.

Second, by our text we note that St. Paul gave instruction to the churches of Galatia concerning stewardship, specifically the stewardship of that portion of money to be used for the Lord's work and that here in our text he is extending those instructions to the Corinthians, and in a very real way, to us.

How do you determine how much of your time, abilities, and resources you will give back to the Lord for work in God's kingdom? We look at the guidance we get from God's Word. Paul gives us some information in a very precise way in the verse following our text. *"On the first day of the week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collection when I come."* Then in chapters 8 & 9 of his second letter to the Corinthians he expands on that verse starting at the very beginning, with the reason why we give, with what our motivation should be.

St. Paul spends almost the entire chapter before our text sharing what Christ's death and resurrection means to us: the fact that all Christians, you and I, will one day rise from death to new life. This is what motivates us to be concerned about the spiritual and physical well-being of others which will result in generous offerings of all that we have. We love because God first loved us. Responding to God's love and sacrifice, we live each day as God's stewards. With changed hearts, our identity changes from being self-centered people to being God-centered. Our lives are lived out in a graceful response to Jesus' sacrifice.

The following story is an illustration of what Christ has done for us. You may have heard it, but it's worth repeating. There was a boy who lived on a bay of the Atlantic Ocean. As such he had a lot of contact with sailors and boats, especially sail boats which were his favorites. One day he decided to make his own model sailboat. He got together all the things he needed and was ready to begin. It was already getting toward the end of summer so the boy planned to work on his boat during the cold winter months when he couldn't go outside, and he did just that.

Every spare moment he had that winter he spent working on his sailboat: after school, on Saturdays, and on holidays. Finally, spring came and after literally hundreds of hours of work, the sailboat was finished. It was the most perfect model you've ever seen of a three-masted schooner, and it was ready to sail. The boy was so excited he couldn't contain himself. He picked up his three-foot model in both arms and headed for the bay. He put the sails in place, and there was a perfect wind blowing. Out to sea and away sailed the boat. Oh no! in his excitement the boy hadn't thought of a way to bring the boat back. As it sailed out of sight, out of his reach, the boy swallowed hard trying to hold back the tears. What he had worked so hard to make and what had given him so much joy was now making him sadder than he had ever been before. He loved that boat, like it was a part of himself.

Well, one day about mid-summer of that year the boy was walking in town when what should he see in the window of the hobby store but a boat. From the distance it looked something like the one he had built. He went to take a closer look.

There it was! It was a little weather-beaten and needed a few minor repairs, but it was his boat. The merchant had bought it from a sailor, and, for the boy to have it back, he would have to pay for it.

The boy worked hard all summer to earn enough money to buy his sailboat back. Finally, he had enough. He ran to the store, paid the merchant, picked up his boat in both arms and said, “Now, you’re twice mine. First, I made you, and now I’ve bought you back again.”

Brothers and sisters, we are twice God’s. First, he made us, and then, by the holy precious blood of his only Son, Jesus, who shed his blood and life on the cross of Calvary, he bought us back again. The price has been paid and God has forgiven us all our sins. He’s forgiven us for all the wrongs we’ve repented of and as well as those for which we haven’t repented – even when we are unforgiving. God has given us a new identity: He calls us his children! (John 1:21)

That love of God which we see in that forgiveness is where Christian stewardship begins.

With God's love is connected the first of four basic principles of Christian stewardship – that we, with God's help, give ourselves to the Lord. That we give Jesus the first and foremost place in our lives, that we make Jesus the focal point of our lives. Everything we are and do we do with eyes fixed on Jesus.

We do that because of the second principle of Christian stewardship which is that we know the grace of Christ. In 2 Corinthians 8:9 Paul says we know *“that though he was rich, yet for our sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.”*

We know the great love our heavenly Father has for us by the very fact of our salvation brought about by his Son Jesus. So, if we give ourselves to the Lord because we know the grace of Christ, then we will recognize the third principle of Christian stewardship – the needs of ministry in extending God's church and the needs of those around us, and we will willingly and cheerfully seek to meet those needs.

That brings us to the fourth principle of Christian stewardship – the promise, the blessing that comes with it. The apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 9:7 writes: *“Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”*

Did you hear that? “God loves a cheerful giver.” When we give cheerfully, we give joy to our heavenly Father as we display his image and likeness. The prophet Malachi wrote of that blessing almost as a challenge to us.

*Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put ME to the test,’ says the Lord of hosts, ‘if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need’” (Malachi 3:10).*

For sure, I believe that’s a challenge to us. How much should you give to the Lord who has given you all things? The Old Testament law was 10%. But that was the law. Christ fulfilled the requirements of that law for us, so now we give as the Lord has given to us, as we have prospered. We are no longer bound by the Law, for the Gospel has given us a new identity. We live under grace. As new creatures, we give responding to what God has given us – our whole lives twice. And consider this. As such, we are channels through which God sends his blessings out to those around us, to meet the needs as they exist, according to God’s will. The more we give to meet those needs; the more God will bless us that we may give even more. “*Put ME to the test,*” says the Lord almighty. So that God can show us his love and faithfulness, God wants us to test him as people living each day as stewards. What are we waiting for? Amen.