

## **WEEK 3: *Stewarding Treasure***

### **Hook**

**Main Point: God is glorified through the stewardship of our possessions.**

In director Peter Jackson's three-part cinematic rendition of J.R.R. Tolkien's epic, *The Lord of the Rings*, stewardship is one of the primary themes. Frodo is entrusted with the most valuable item in the land, the one ring to rule them all. Beyond this, the safety of Frodo and his hobbit companions is entrusted to a fellowship of men, dwarves and elves. The trilogy of films (and books) is filled with elements of sacrifice and charity, giving and responsibility. Without the collective effort of the fellowship to give everything they had for the common goal, the ring would have never been destroyed.

**Transition:** The Church is a collective body with a common goal of glorifying God by taking the Gospel to the ends of the earth. Accomplishing this goal requires people to give sacrificially despite the influence of a culture that loves individualism and autonomy.

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### **Book**

**Main Point: God is glorified through the stewardship of our possessions.**

**Talking Point 1:** The Word of God has authority over our individual comfort.

**Q: What authorities does our culture look to for a sense of morality today?**

Our culture has degraded the value of truth. Facts and opinions are beginning to look indistinguishable in the daily news cycle. This phenomenon is rooted in our society's rigid individualism. The focus is no longer on the collective good, but rather the individual good, because individuals are the sole authority over their sense of morality. The Bible has a counter-cultural perspective on this however, as seen by Paul's words to Timothy.

**Read: 2 Timothy 3:16–17**

Paul emphasizes the truth that Scripture is the very Word of God. The God of creation and life itself certainly has authority over the individual. Last week, we discussed the unique but unified body of the Church. The Church must be a like-minded community, collectively subjecting itself to the authority of Scripture, which is useful for teaching, correction and training (v. 16), and makes the people of God whole (v. 17). There is no space for sinful and rebellious autonomy in our walk with Christ, or our walk with other believers. Being a follower of Christ has nothing to do with what makes us comfortable, but it has everything to do with what makes Christ glorified.

For example, when the rich young ruler comes to Jesus seeking eternal life, he believes he has done all things well, but Jesus presents him with a major challenge.

**Read: Mark 10:17–30**

The Bible is explicit that the path to eternal life is simply by faith through grace (Ephesians 2:8–9), but an essential aspect of our faith is obedience in following the Word of God. In the interaction between Jesus and the rich ruler, the faithful and obedient action for the ruler to take would have been to sell his possessions and follow Jesus. As drastic as this may sound, the sin of idolatry was exposed within the heart of the rich ruler. At the end of the passage, Peter expresses the sacrifices made by the disciples (v. 30), and Jesus commends those who are willing to uproot their lives for the sake of the Gospel (v. 29).

**Q: Does the idea of surrendering your treasure make you feel uncomfortable?**

Stewarding our treasure may look different for each person, family and circumstance, but Scripture is clear that faithful obedience may be uncomfortable, life-altering and sacrificial. It is important to remember that Jesus does not ask us for a sacrifice that He did not already make. He sacrificed Himself for the sins of humanity; therefore, obedience is the only appropriate response.

**Q: What are examples of idols that need to be sacrificed for you to live in faithful obedience?**

**Talking Point 2:** Fulfilling the Great Commission requires godly stewardship of treasure.

The story of the rich ruler may seem like a one-off example in which Jesus was making a point, but the idea of sacrificial giving is central to the institution of the Church and can be seen in the book of Acts as a foundational aspect of the earliest days of the Church's expansion.

**Read: Acts 2:42–47**

The Church was a collective community where individuals used their possessions for the advancement and betterment of the whole rather than the self. They were not concerned with personal autonomy since they had all things in common. The people were charitable with their time and possessions, not seeking personal gain, but the well-being of those in need. Luke records that the people met in homes daily, and they were filled with generous hearts (v. 46). Members of the Church were sacrificial with their time (as they met daily), their treasure (as they generously gave according to needs), and their space (as they broke bread in their houses). Even if our Church model does not look like a copy-paste version of Acts 2, the way they sacrificed comfort and autonomy is applicable for us today.

Verse 47 concludes the chapter in an eye-opening fashion. The Church was not a utopian communal compound, it was a growing institution. People did not give generously and sacrificially without purpose. They gave because God was glorified, and He continued to move. The Church is the tool God selected to execute His Great Commission – taking the Gospel to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:7). It is not a coincidence that the Church continued to grow daily (v. 47) in a period in which the people of the Church lived with everything surrendered to the Lord.

**Q: Why were the people so willing to give sacrificially in the early days of the Church? How is the example they set applicable to us?**

Stewardship is deeply interwoven with the idea of multiplication, but not in the way one might think. Being financially conscious does not guarantee financial prosperity and multiplication, but stewarding resources for the sake of the Gospel does result in spiritual prosperity and multiplication. The multiplication that took place as the early church rapidly expanded across Europe, Africa and the Middle East would not have occurred if the people of God remained financially comfortable.

**Q: Have you ever seen spiritual multiplication as a result of godly stewardship?**

**Talking Point 3:** Godly stewardship of treasure requires action.

**Read: Matthew 25:14–28**

While there are a number of different beliefs as to exactly how much a talent (a type of currency) would have been worth in the time of Jesus, even one talent may have sufficed as an appropriate wage for a couple decades. The focus of the parable, however, is not on the amount each servant was given, but simply that each servant was entrusted with something. The two servants who multiplied their gains were entrusted with even more, but the servant who hid his talent was punished. The parable's purpose is not to teach a lesson on how to get rich, nor is Jesus compelling His audience to invest in the stock market. Rather, the purpose is to show that God has entrusted each of us with something, whether it is a little or a lot, and we are called to make the most of what we have for the glory of God. While the parable may use a financial analogy, this concept is applicable to all facets of stewardship that we have discussed over the last three weeks.

**Q: Why were there consequences for the servant who did not multiply his talent, if he did not lose the talent, either?**

The parable of the talents is a call to action. The only servant that was punished was the one that did nothing. If the punishment seems unjust, consider that the talents all belong to the master, he had just entrusted what is his to his servants. This is also the case with us as servants of the Lord – nothing we own is ours, but everything is the Lord's (Psalm 24:1). How can we take what the Lord has entrusted to us and use it for His glory and the advancement of His kingdom? It requires open-handed stewardship, letting God work in and through us to use what is His, but has been entrusted to us.

We must shed the idea that financial prosperity exists for the building of our own individual kingdom. Throughout this series, we have asked the question "what are you building?" and the answer should always be that we have been entrusted with the materials for the building of God's kingdom, not our own. Giving sacrificially requires faith, because giving sacrificially will make us uncomfortable, and therefore, dependent on the Lord's provision. This was not a controversial subject for the early church, nor should it be today.

**Q: How does the reminder that everything belongs to the Lord inform your perspective on giving sacrificially?**

**Q: What is a proper response to the parable's call to action?**

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## **Took**

**Main Point: God is glorified through the stewardship of our possessions.**

God is the ultimate authority, so we must wisely steward what He has entrusted to us. Godly stewardship results in spiritual multiplication, as seen in the early church. Stewardship is a major aspect of the execution of the Great Commission, which we are still fulfilling today. As lives change and God's kingdom expands, the ambassadors of His Gospel (us) must be prepared to give sacrificially, beyond what is comfortable.

**Q: How does stewardship, as we have discussed it over the last three weeks, pertain to this season of giving here at Prestonwood?**

**Challenge:** What are you building? Spend intimate time with the Lord in prayer this week, asking for guidance and wisdom regarding your treasure. Come to Him in a state of open-handed stewardship, recognizing that what is yours is His, and should be used in service of Him.