



STEWARDSHIP: GOD GIVES

Part 1 of Doctrine

Pastor Mark Driscoll | June 22, 2008

STEWARDSHIP: GOD GIVES

Stewardship, our twelfth lecture, is the doctrine that God gives. I put it following the worship discussion because stewardship is ultimately about worship. Now, in particular, stewardship includes our finances and our possessions. Jesus taught on money, finances, possessions, and wealth in roughly 25 percent of his teaching. If you take the Old and New Testament together, you'll find about eight hundred sections of your Bible that talk about money, finances, wealth, saving, tithing, investing, and spending.

When it comes to stewardship, Jesus makes a great point, where your money is—your treasure—that's where your heart is. Money is an indicator of whether we're worshippers or idolaters. It's not the singular indicator, but it is a significant indicator of worship and idolatry.

The doctrine of stewardship begins this way. Our God is a generous giver, do you know that? He is. James says that every gift we have comes from where? Comes from God. Everything you have, shoes on your feet, bed to sleep in, food in the fridge, all gifts. If you get this, it changes everything. Our God is generous. Our God is a generous giver.

Now what stewardship means is ultimately we're not owners, we're stewards. God is ultimate owner. I'll give you a couple verses on this. Deuteronomy 8:17–18, "Beware lest you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me my wealth.'" I went to college, I got good grades, I worked hard. I did a good job, that's why I have good stuff. "You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth." God made me alive. God gave me a mind. God gave me a body. God gave me a job. God gave me an opportunity. It's not just me.

Psalms 50:10, "For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills." God looks out and says, "It's mine." You say, "No, but I got a fence and within the fence, that's mine." God says, "It's all mine." You say, "Well, but I got a mortgage on this." God says, "And I spoke it into existence, it's mine. I'll share it with you, but don't steal from me."

Haggai 2:8, "The silver is mine, and the gold is mine." What he's saying is "The cash is mine and the credit cards are mine," "declares the Lord of hosts." You say, "No, no, no, it's not God's, it has my name on it. It says right there. My photo's even on it." God says, "No, that's mine. I'm lending it to you, be a good steward." Would you spend differently if Jesus' name was on your credit card? I hear chuckle, chuckle, chuckle. Perhaps, yes. That's what I thought.

James 1:16–17, "Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers." See, not everybody knows this. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change." Here's the big idea: God owns it all. Those are not your shoes. That's not your car. That's not your cereal. That's not your cell phone. That's not your laptop, that's his. Okay, why does this matter? All of this comes from God and he's very generous. Look at all that he's given us.

Not only that, he comes as the Lord Jesus Christ. Second Corinthians 8:9 says, "though he was rich in heaven, for our sake he became poor on earth so that in him we might be rich." That God—and it's not talking there about financial wealth. What it's talking about is the lavish grace of God. God gives us the Holy Spirit, salvation, priceless gifts, reconciliation with God, the Scriptures. He gives us the gift of repentance. He gives us the church, brothers and sisters, spiritual gifts to serve, the ability to worship him. Joy and gladness in the Holy Spirit. God's a great, amazing, generous giver. Everything belongs to God. He gives it to us to enjoy and to share and to steward.

A steward is one who says, "It's not mine, it's his." You ever seen the executor of a will? The executor of a will sits down with the parties involved and what he doesn't say is "Well, it's mine. I don't know what I should do with it." What he says is "It's not mine. Someone who died is giving it, and I'm the executor of the estate. It's my job to make sure that all of this wealth collectively goes where they want it to go." See, it all belongs to God and it's to be distributed and we're the executors. We're the stewards. We're the distributors.

How evil would it be, how angry would you be if someone you love dies, they wrote you into their will, and you knew you were going to get a large sum of wealth, money, home, possessions. You met with the attorney. The attorney read the will and said, "They declared that you get half of everything." That's amazing. And they said, "But I took it. I took it, so you lose."

Would you say, "Well, I understand 'cause that's how I treat God and I'm okay with this"? No, you'd get another attorney, a bigger, meaner attorney, scarier attorney, and you would try and crush that attorney, and you would say, "You've stolen." Do you know that people steal from God all the time? That God owns everything? That he's entrusted it to us to be stewards? And when we don't distribute as he intends, we're thieves? We're thieves.

And the reason we don't distribute as he intends is we're idolaters. We knew God wanted to use us to steward for this cause, but we had another cause that was more important to us. Jesus says, Matthew 6:21, "Where your treasure is, that's where your heart is." I've heard people say, "I totally love God, I just don't believe in giving." What? That's like "I totally love my kids, I just don't believe in feeding them." What? If you love, you're generous. That's how we know you love. Generosity indicates love.

Jesus says, Matthew 6:24, "You can't love God and money." Paul says the love of money, not money, but the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Do you know that if you

love money, you'll use people? If you love money, you use people. If you love people, you'll use money. You'll be generous. Christians are to be marked by generosity. That's one of the marks of a Christian. We're generous, why? 'Cause God's generous.

Jesus says it this way, "If I can trust you with a little, then I can give you much." In context that's finances. We don't believe in prosperity theology, that all the people who really love God should be really, really rich. We do believe that if you're a good steward and you spend well and save well and tithe well and invest well and you're a good steward and generous, that God would want to give you more money. Why? Because you're not gonna steal it.

How many of you, if you got your first job, you had, let's say, an investment banker and you gave them your little bit of money and they made great investments. And as your portfolio increased and your vocation increased and as you grew older, your collective wealth increased and every year that money manager that you hired, they kept making good, smart, sound investments, they charged you minimal fees, they did a good job with your finances, they got a good return on investment. Would you keep giving them your money? Yeah, you'd say, "Well, I trust them with a little and they were good stewards. I trusted them with more and they were good stewards and they've been really good stewards, so I'm gonna keep trusting them."

What God is looking for is good stewards, people that, if he gives you something, you'll steward it well. If God gives it to you and you steal it, then to look at God and say, "Hey, how come you're not generous with me?" God would say, "Because you're not generous. I was generous with you and you stole. How do you expect me to be generous with a thief?"

Once you understand that it doesn't belong to you, it belongs to God, it changes the way you view possessions. It makes you really grateful, really grateful. God, thank you for the bed I sleep in. Thank you for the food I eat. Thank you for the clothes I wear. Thank you for the shelter I dwell in. Thank you for the water that I drink. Thank you for the air that I breathe. Thank you for the job that I have. Thank you for the money that I spend. God, thank you.

You ever seen a kid who's totally ungrateful, just a spoiled snotty little kid? Never says please, never says thank you. If at any point they're told no, they throw a fit. Don't be like that. Your Dad's a great Dad. Your heavenly Father, he's a generous giver. Idolatry is what makes us covetous. Paul says godliness with contentment is of great gain. Contentment is being content in who God is and what God gives, being glad.

You know what I deserve? Hell. So you know what? A used car is still a really amazing gift. Compared to hell, it's a great place to be. You and I, we deserve hell. Once we get that—what do you deserve? Nothing. What should you have? Hell. What did you get? A used car. That's a great deal for a guy who deserves hell. Some of you say, "I got a bus pass." Still better than hell. "I walk." Better than hell. It's all better than hell. It's all gifts from God.

So what we do, we are to give our firstfruits. That's what the Bible says. Firstfruits. First and best. It's not, again, how much of my money should I give God? It's how much of God's money should I keep? Get the difference? Some say, "Why should I give God my money?" Oh, man, we have so many theological problems now. First of all, it's not your money. Second of all, you're not giving it to God. It's God's money. He's giving it to you so that you can be a good steward.

So the question is not, "Well, how much of my money do I have to give God?" The question is, how much of God's money will he be kind enough to allow me to keep so I can pay my bills and buy my food and do my stuff? The rest tithe, give, generous, help people, love people, serve people.

Now some of you raise the question, What does this mean? Should we tithe? The Old Testament uses the word tithe that literally means a tenth. But if you take the gleanings, the offerings, the Levites, the poor, the year of Jubilee, you add it all up, more than 25 percent of their gross income went to the tithe, more than 25 percent. We don't teach a tithe.

Second Corinthians 8–9 teaches New Testament grace giving. What he says in 2 Corinthians 8–9 is you give according to what you have, not according to what you don't have. You lose your job, you're not tithing 'cause you don't have any income. You're a broke single mom, you're gonna give a totally different amount of money than the guy who's very affluent.

What he says is that it should be sacrificial. Well, for the single mom who's got three kids and is working a job that's difficult, two percent might be really sacrificial and generous for her. The person who makes a certain amount of money, two percent wouldn't be sacrificial and generous at all. They wouldn't even feel that. It's according to—Paul says—what you have, not what you don't have, that it should be proportionate.

So we don't teach across-the-board, 10 percent tithe. What we do teach is generous, sacrificial, and Paul uses the word cheerful giving. You love God, you pray about it, you think about it. You set aside your firstfruits, first and best. You give first to God, whatever that is, good steward for the cause of the Gospel, allowing the work to go forward through your church and in addition to that, doing special gifts to help those in need, missionaries, and organizations. It's between you and God.

Now in saying this, some of you say, "I knew this was coming. We're gonna hit the money part. The church always wants your money and they always hit you on the money and all they care about is the money, and I'm not gonna give them my money." And what I would say is . . . you're an idolater. Most Christians are takers, not givers. They take more from their church than they give to their church.

In every church there is a hardcore, committed, small percentage of people who are generous, and they give generously. And then those Christians that are not generous, they're takers, not givers. They suck up all those resources and then the church can't reach lost people because between the generous givers and the lost people are the takers, taking up seats and time and energy and resources. And what they would say is, "I love God." And what they're doing is robbing God and they're getting in the way of evangelism. They're just getting in the way. It's sad when generous people give, takers steal, and lost people lose. That's unbelievable.

It's not about the money, it's about the worship. That's what it's about. At Mars Hill, you need to know there is always a very high percentage of non-Christians. Every Sunday there are a huge number—thousands—of non-Christians. There are a small number of generous givers, and there is a majority of takers. And if we don't solve that problem, we're always gonna be dying. We're always gonna be struggling. It's not about the amount. It's about the worshipful heart of the person who gives generously.

And Jesus says where your treasure is, there your heart is. And you know what? If you get your giving sorted out, you'll start serving. Why? The money's the hardest to give, friends. Some of you will give time and not money. It's 'cause time is easier to give than money. Talent is easier to give than money. My opinion is you give your money first, all of a sudden then you're like "Hey, I'm giving money. I'm invested. I need to serve. I need to work. I need to make sure this gets done."

In that way you start treating your church like a home instead of a hotel. Hotel, as cheap as you can find one and you treat it horribly and you make a mess and you leave and you're never coming back, and it's somebody else's job to pick up your mess. Our hope is that Mars Hill would be for you home and not hotel. Not "How little can I give? How much can I take? And what kind of mess can I leave? I'm sure there's a faithful Christian somewhere that will fix this."

If you want to be a member of the church, what we're asking is generous giver, good steward, time, talent, treasure. Treasure usually goes first and sets up the others so that Mars Hill becomes home and not hotel. Why? Because there are non-Christians. They need Jesus and they need you. They need you to make Mars Hill a place where there's time and energy and resources left for them, that's what we want.

Note: This transcript has been edited for readability.