

“The Lifestyle of Faithful Stewards”—2 Corinthians 8:5

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “The Lifestyle of Faithful Stewards”, is 2 Corinthians 8:5 → *And this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

How would you describe your lifestyle? Some may immediately think in terms of a “class” system when considering such a question—lower, middle or upper class. Some may immediately think of living patterns, habits or traditions which make up their daily lives. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines “lifestyle” as “the typical way of life of an individual, group, or culture.” However, this question may be difficult to answer for oneself since it seems many can easily classify other peoples’ lifestyles more than their own, much of the time making false assumptions out of envy, discontentment and/or self-righteous judgments.

Think of your typical way of life. What has come into play to cause you to behave and make choices like you do? Your upbringing? Usually a person can see ways of doing things because “that’s the way my mom or dad did it.” Some activities are based upon resentments where you refuse to do it “the way my mom or dad did it” because it affected you

adversely. You may do some things because they were good skills or traditions passed on to you from your parents, grandparents or other significant people in your life. Or some typical behaviors just make sense to you. No matter what factors come to play in your lifestyle it will always involved making decisions as a steward of God's creation. This applies to both Christians and non-Christians alike since God *makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.* (cf. Matthew 5:45)

Psalm 24:1 says: *The earth is the LORD's.* While this may not be some kind of fantastic revelation to you it is a confession of faith contested by millions upon millions of people in the world. It also says that *the fullness thereof* is the LORD's. This means that all the stuff which we have created from His world's resources—the technology and toys, the machines and money, the food and fun—absolutely everything—belongs to the LORD. It also says that *those who dwell therein* are the LORD's too. Thus, everyone is a steward of the LORD whether or not you realize it. The question then becomes: What kind of steward are you?

Jesus gave much teaching about being His **faithful** stewards. The focus of His teaching was not so much on what you are doing with His stuff as it was on how His stuff serves something far more important entrusted to your care—the Gospel—the good news of your sins forgiven through faith in Jesus, the Christ.

As Paul spoke about the ministry of the Gospel entrusted to him by Jesus, he said in 1 Corinthians 4:2 → *Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful.* Even though he was specifically referring to preaching the pure Gospel of Christ, it also applies to the various ways in which the Holy Spirit gifts you to bring that grace into the lives of others. Peter says it this way: *As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To Him belong glory and dominion forever and ever.* (cf. 1 Peter 4:10-11)

Thus, the lifestyle of a faithful steward of God is humble submission to Jesus as Lord of your life. It is born out of confession of your sin and the absolution pronounced—*as far as the east is from the west, so far does the LORD remove your transgressions from you!* (cf. Psalm 103:12) It is nurtured by the Holy Spirit giving *you a new heart, and a new spirit,* removing your *heart of stone* and giving *you a heart of flesh,* causing *you to walk in His statutes,* being *careful to obey His rules.* (cf. Ezekiel 36:26-27) Thus, the steward's lifestyle is changed into a life striving to be faithful to the Lord Jesus in the daily vocations one fulfills and the stuff he uses as he fulfills those vocations.

We see this important characteristic of faithful stewardship in the

actions of *the churches of Macedonia* to whom Paul refers in our text. In response to a revelation of hardship due to an impending famine, Acts 11:29 tells us that *the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea*. As they gathered this gift to help their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ in that area more Christians around the world wanted to also help in this effort. As Paul encouraged the Christians in Corinth to follow through on their offer of help he held up the example of the Christians in the area of Macedonia. They begged *earnestly for the favor of taking part in* this collection, even in the face of *a severe test of affliction . . . and their extreme poverty, giving beyond their means, of their own accord*. (2 Corinthians 8:1-4) It is almost as if he was surprised with their behavior when he says in our text: *And this, not as we expected, **but they gave themselves first to the Lord** and then by the will of God to us.*

The lifestyle of a **faithful** steward is not characterized by doing everything perfectly. Rather, it is striving to be faithful to the Lord Jesus so that **His** perfect life of love and sacrifice for sin shine through your actions. The lifestyle of a **faithful** steward is not characterized by your well thought-out planned program. Rather, it is striving to be faithful to the Lord Jesus so that **His** perfect will would shine through your actions in the implementation of that program. The lifestyle of a **faithful** steward

is not characterized by serving on the basis of personal fulfillment, gain or results. Rather, it is striving to be faithful to the Lord Jesus with the desire for Him to produce the results He wants in our lives. It recognizes in the words of Proverbs 19:21 → *Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand.*

The lifestyle of a **faithful** steward is characterized by giving yourself *first to the Lord and then by the will of God* to others. It is actually a reflection of Jesus' words in Matthew 22:37-39 → *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.* True confession of sins recognizes that I've sinned first and foremost against God then against my neighbor. True acts of mercy for others recognizes that God has had mercy on an unlovable sinner such as I so it then shows mercy to others. True stewardship recognizes that all I have and use in daily living are undeserved gifts of love from my heavenly Father. Then they are extended to others in service to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

When you give yourself *first to the Lord and then by the will of God* to others, what makes it a lifestyle of faithful stewardship is the faithfulness of Jesus to His work of your salvation. Hebrews 3:1-2 tells us to *consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, Who was faithful to God Who appointed Him to suffer the punishment which*

our sins deserved. As the Holy Spirit empowers us to fix our eyes on *Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith*, (cf. Hebrews 12:2)—to give ourselves *first to the Lord*—He also empowers us to give ourselves to others in keeping with God’s will of bringing Christ to bear in the midst of our use of all that belongs to Him. Why? So ***that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ*** as sinners repent and trust in Him alone for forgiveness of sin and eternal life. *To Him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.* (cf. 1 Peter 4:11)

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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