

February 20, 2016 Florida Hospital Seventh-day Adventist Church
Philippians 4:10-20 The Results of Stewardship, by Andy McDonald

Today we conclude our series of looking for Stewardship Principles in Paul's letter to the Philippians.

Here's a quick review of where we've been.

We began by recognizing that we can be good stewards because God is the ultimate steward. He began a good work in us and he will bring it to completion.

We often think of stewardship and money together but we learned that we are to be good stewards of the truth of the gospel, the wonderful reality that God saves us. That to steward or care for the gospel isn't just to have it and enjoy it and relish it but good stewards share it with all.

We were challenged by the concept of self stewardship that we grow to be able to consider others better than ourselves! A real stretch for us selfish humans.

A couple of weeks ago we recognized that stewardship calls us to come to the place where we steward our lists of achievements as being worthless, that we must come to the place where we put no confidence in human effort, but all our confidence is in Christ.

Last week Richard called us to be stewards of our heart and mind as we live full of joy, let our gentleness be evident to all, and not worry about anything but pray about everything, and we will experience God's peace.

Today we come to the results of being good stewards. It is contentment because we know who really takes care of us.

Every week God provides a check point. We say he is Lord, we call him our God. We state that we believe he is above all others. And every week he provides the opportunity for us to demonstrate that we really believe this. Not so much demonstrate it to God as to ourselves. Each week we concretize our belief.

Each Friday as the sun sinks and disappears we are invited to make choices to demonstrate to ourselves our belief. We willingly unplug, stop self-sufficient living, cease from self-advancement and rest in Jesus completed work! We have the opportunity to demonstrate with the use of our very lives a switch of focus from managing, and leading, and driving things forward, and accomplishing to just spending 24 hours absorbing God! The God of the universe wants to spend time with us in a very personal way, he wants to "hang out" together for a weekly day of vacation from all the struggle and hard work of life. Each week we get this chance for personally experiencing a 24 hour current life of salvation. For 24 hours we are saved from the do it yourself world and we stop trying to advance ourselves and we enter and live in the experience of it all being completed in Jesus. We rest for these 24 glorious hours in anticipation of our assured eternal rest and to build our appetite for leaning on Jesus and trusting him and just enjoying him.

In many ways like the seemingly arbitrary 24 hours of Sabbath, God provides another opportunity, in a very concrete real way, for us to demonstrate, again, primarily to ourselves, that our trust is not in us but in our God. This opportunity comes with every pay period. What will we do with that pay check we receive for services rendered?

It is a touchy question.

I've seen families who seemed to be healthy and strong really get pulled apart over money.

People say that to avoid conflict don't talk about religion or politics.

I find those rather easy compared to challenging us about what we do with our money. After all we work hard and we are pretty sure we earned it, it is "ours!"

But in Deuteronomy 8:17& 18 we find these words: "You may say to yourself, 'My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.' But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth,"

There are some basic needs we have and we want to make sure those needs are met and this money we earn is for that purpose.

And then there are the endless, and I really mean endless wants we have, and we imagine that this paycheck can supply our wants. But let me tell you there's no end to this.

Those of you whose paycheck barely stretches to meet your needs (no less any of your wants), chances are when you get a raise and can meet a want beyond your needs, once that want is satisfied, a new one or several take its place. Our wanters are like an addict, we always want more.

So God, wanting us to have our focus on the right stuff,
the God who Paul says will supply our every need according to his riches in Jesus Christ, wants to grow our faith.

He knows that our faith and trust easily slip from the divine to dollars.

Jesus talked much about money. Sixteen of the thirty-eight parables were concerned with how to handle money and possessions. In the Gospels, an amazing one out of ten verses deal directly with the subject of money. The Bible offers around 500 verse on prayer, less than 500 verses on faith, but more than 2,000 verses on money and possessions.—Howard L. Dayton, Jr., Leadership, Vol 2, no. 2.

Jesus talks so much about money and wealth, because he knows the subtle and not so subtle temptation to put our trust in the wealth we have and hold and hoard.

How easy it is to trust our own resources that we control, miniscule as they may be compared with God's limitless resources.

How easy it is to trust our own resources that we control, rather than trusting in God's care, his abundance, his blessing, God's infinite means of caring for us.

So each pay period we face the moment of reality. Do I hold on to it all, as if I can care for myself, or do I demonstrate to myself that my trust in God is real? Will I consistently let go of what God calls his own, so that I'm not taking for myself what isn't really mine, and then in addition to just not stealing from God, will I add a freewill offering beyond the 10% just to push that trust a little further.

I don't know about you but if you are like most Americans you find it hard to save. Whether it is for something simple as a new pair of shoes or bicycle, or something as significant as an around the world vacation. We don't like to save because it means delayed gratification.

Who wants to wait for tomorrow
 When there's so much to be had today?
 Immediate high, buy now, even borrow,
 Blind to the reality that I'll have to pay.

We aren't wild about even experiencing delayed gratification saving for something we want—Just buy it now and put it on the credit card.

But what God invites us to do is extra hard, beyond regular delayed gratification. He invites us to lay up treasure in heaven (no risk of inflation, no risk of theft, no market variations will effect it) but talk about delayed gratification, we don't experience the full "reward" the complete gratification in our whole lifetime here on earth. It is like a

savings account for our great great great grandchild's college fund or wedding or first car. We have hope but we won't live to see the smile of joy that will come.

God is the one who supplies all our needs. He is the source. He doesn't "need" anything. He is complete Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God doesn't need your money. I'd go so far as to say that this denomination doesn't need your money and this local church doesn't need your money. But listen. Here's the deal. Here is what God almighty knows about us humans, we need to let go of it, we need to give. Giving our money away keeps us from making it into our idol.

There are some here who get it. There are some of you who have figured this out and you are a pipeline for God's blessings to come to you and flow through you like a pipeline coated with Teflon, you are a little wary of too much of those blessings sticking to your life. You've recognized the risk of abundance, and you manage that risk by giving, consistently, generously, both to and through this church and undoubtedly to other causes beyond these walls.

And there are some of you who struggle right here. In your heart you want to believe what Paul writes, that God will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, but when it comes to planning your budget, this is tough stuff for you. The idea that right off the top of your increase, your profit, you hand back 10% of your income to God simply because he says it is his and to keep it would be stealing from him. Maybe you do it but it feels more like taxes than a gift. Truth is you are simply being a faithful steward of what God has entrusted into your care when you hand over 10% of your income. To do that faithfully and consistently for some of you seems a giant leap of faith.

To go beyond that is almost unimaginable. To add some gift from a fraction of a percent to some ridiculous 50 or 75% of income because of your wealth level, seems impossible.

It is different for every person. Everyone of us are in different stages of life, and different income levels. But here's the reality. No matter how much you hold onto, no matter how much you think you are meeting your needs, the reality is that it is God who enables you. And if giving is hard for you take some time to figure out why.

Is it fear of the future?

Is your security in a larger and ever larger bank account or investment portfolio?

Do you not trust the person, organization, church, to steward well your gift?

Is there doubt that God can really supply all your needs?

Are you drawn to luxury and comfort and ease?

Does your comfort trump other's needs?

When you give does it feel like a loss of control?

You've somehow convinced yourself that that whole 10% is God's and gifts in addition is works thing and you are more a faith person?

What is it that has fooled you into thinking you can supply all your needs according to your smarts and your labor? Whatever it is it isn't true? Trusting in the labors of our own hands won't work in our salvation and it leaves us vulnerable to economic downturns when it comes to our money.

So many of us have direct deposit, we never see our check. But I want to encourage you to look. To evaluate what you are holding onto, what you are returning that God says is his, and what you are giving as a free will gift.

And PLEASE remember the almighty source of everything, the one who when a need arises can speak wealth into existent, doesn't "Need" your money. So why does the Bible talk about the sacrifices of the old testament being a fragrant smelling offering to God? And Paul here in Philippians 4:18 says the gifts are a "sweet-smelling sacrifice that is acceptable to god and pleases him." It isn't because

of what the gift does for God, it is sweet smelling because God is pleased for what it does for you, the giver.

In his wisdom, trying to manage his children in a world of sin on a journey to heaven, God knows you need to give, if nothing else as a concrete expression that you believe what Paul wrote to the Philippians. Your giving demonstrates that you believe, "The same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus. Now glory be to God our Father forever and ever. Amen."

To be a steward is to be one who cares for something. And as we end this series on Stewardship from Philippians, we've finally come to what most people limit stewardship to be in the Christian church, talk about money.

Our text and all of scripture seems to be telling us, a good steward returns to God what is his, and then gives an offering, not so much to bless the church or God or someone in need, but as a concrete means for us to demonstrate to ourselves what we truly believe. That God the good shepherd will supply our needs and the result of stewardship will be our contentment in God.

(This is something we did as a church prior to the sermon. I've included it here because if you are a regular viewer of our services it will affect your schedule. Also I hope that it might encourage you to gather a group of friends to watch and then discuss the service so your life might be woven together with others who can "be church" with one another.)

Here's what I wish, what I dream of coming true, for FHC.

For us to spend time together for shared life; that beyond this vital corporate worship experience, that we would practice the "one another" verses of the NT.

Be devoted to one another—Romans 12:10
 Live in harmony with one another—Rom 12:16
 Love one another—Rom 13:8
 Accept one another—Rom 15:7
 Instruct one another—Rom 15:14
 Greet one another—Rom 16:16
 Agree with one another—1 Cor 1:10
 Serve one another—Gal 5:13
 Be patient with one another—Eph 4:2
 Be kind and compassionate to one another—Eph 4:32
 Forgive one another—Eph 4:32
 Submit to one another—Eph 5:21
 Admonish one another—Col 3:16
 Encourage one another—1 Thes 5:11

I wish for a shared life experience so we can know one another and care for one another.

Passing in the hall on Sabbath morning, and sitting in corporate worship, while we all are united in worship and identify with the same message and music and scripture—important as that is, and I believe it is of primary importance—that it is way different than sharing our stories, sympathizing with one another, and meeting one another's needs, and encouraging each other in our life of following Jesus.

I don't know how to get this wish fulfilled because we are pretty much a Sabbath morning church family. We come and worship and we go. We don't return in great numbers for concerts or lectures or programming on Sabbath afternoon or during the week.

There are exceptions like the bi-weekly Adventurers and Pathfinders and the special big things like Retreat and Barn Party, and there may

be 10% , just a handful of you involved in home groups during the week.

If my wish is to come true what can we do? Looking around, thinking about what has worked here and what has worked in other places maybe even more successfully, I asked myself what can we do to foster and create venues where we can engage with Informal Discussions, Personal Sharing, and Praying for One Another?

Ideally it would be a place or group where we learn the Bible, find encouragement to live out what we've learned in our families and in the world. It would be a place where we get acquainted with our fellow FHC family members and have that sense of belonging, where it's noticed when we aren't there, and where we care for one another in Christ, a place where everybody knows our name.

It is really sort of a practice place for mingling and hanging out with each other so we can do that with the people of our world.

A brief hello in the lobby or during the "Meet and Greet" just doesn't build the intimacy where I know that you desire my good and you know I desire you best. When we talk, discuss, argue, we can learn to sympathize with each other. We get to hear about needs we can help to meet those needs. Spending time really being with each other builds confidence in one another so we feel okay encouraging each other in our spiritual walk.

And so I realized a couple of things. First by running our service during class time we are competing for time and attention. I've seen a trend increasing where kids get dropped at their classes, Mom and Dad catch church, and then they all leave, but the kids didn't get the group congregational worship experience, and we lose the benefit of lives being influenced cross generationally.

There's one class to attend if you worship at our first service, so the 235 or so who don't attend that class after being at First Service, have no class. And all those involved with First Service are not able to help with classes. And all those in classes are not able to help with ushering, or technical support, or music, or drama, or or or in the worship because they are committed to their class or their child's class.

On our staff for several years we've had discussions about doubling up class. So all children's classes are offered during both worship services so everyone could attend class some before and some after worship. Of course this still eliminates them from serving on one of the worship teams because they are committed to class.

So after much prayer and thought and desire to see our lives more intertwined I'm presenting you a survey to hear your opinion about the idea of starting First service 30 min earlier and getting out of Second Service 30 min later so we could but classes between in its own 'Non-compete' time. Really it is sort of going back to the old schedule of first then classes then second.

I really appreciate a preliminary survey that Tami, our worship director, did with some of you who are vital to the operation of our worship services each week. She found that while it may increase the length of service the weeks that you are fulfilling duties, that by in large you recognized the benefit to overall church health of creating greater access to classes or group activities.

In 2015 our average worship attendance was 774 and our best guess is that about 250 are involved in classes. This means that over 500 are not in class and have the potential of being in, starting, creating, a class or group where lives become more NT in their connections.

I believe to be the church God wants for us to be demands greater connections to one another, and this may be one of the means to that

end, one of the tools to see the wish fulfilled that we practice the one another texts of the NT.

So, right after the offering is received you will be handed a survey. It is really important to me and to our staff to get your input on this potential service time change. I think I can speak for our whole staff we want to move things forward at FHC and we don't wish to do any harm to FHC. My wish is simply that by spending time with a group of people each week in a class, a traditional class, a special interest class, more of a small group that gets together on Saturday morning, that our lives become more connected and we practice with each other skills we can use to love people into a lifelong friendship with God.

Now let me call for today's offering. Each month my giving is automatically sent from my bank to FHC. Vicki and I are committed to returning to God the 10% of our increase that he says is his, and we have selected another percentage figure that we give as our gift to God and his work. Why do we do that? It isn't because we have too much money and just need to get rid of some of it! It isn't because of some denominational rule or mandate. Really there are two reasons. First and primarily it is a response to God's amazing love and grace towards us. His love and grace are so amazing and we just want to say thank you in a tangible way. The second reason is that we know it's good for us, we believe we are better, happier, more fulfilled and enriched people because we don't get too attached to the blessings we receive—giving is good for our hearts.

To the vast majority of you, as your pastor, I say thank you for your regular support of the ministries of this church. And for some of you I simply want to invite you step up and give and experience the joy of giving. Whether you use online giving or bill pay at your bank, or you write a check or put cash in an giving envelop, or go to the kiosk in the lobby and swipe a credit card, but whatever the method giving is a concrete way you remind yourself that you believe and you have faith that it is God who will supply all your needs.

Now the ushers will come to receive today's offering.

Right now let's do the survey.

If the services at FHC change to these times what would you do?

9:30-10:30 First, 10:45-11:45 Classes, 12:00-1:00 Second Service

1. I Would

Attend First Worship Service (9:30-10:30)

Attend Second Worship Service (12:00-1:00)

Not be able to attend church services at FHC due to time changes

2. My child or children would

Attend church and not attend their class

Attend their class from 10:45-11:45

Not be able to attend church at FHC

3. Regarding classes/group life, I would (Please check all that apply)

Attend my class at its new time 10:45-11:45

Attend some new class of a new style or focus from 10:45-11:45

Attend class at a different church because of the time change

Help in one of the class areas from 10:45-11:45 Name

I don't attend now and don't intend to regardless of time or style of class

Occasionally worship and then go serve or serve and then come and worship

Start a class for a group who wish to discuss spiritual life, share personal joys and sorrows, socialize, and pray for one another. Name

Lead or participate in a class/group at times other than Sabbath morning.

If you have other comments or counsel please write that on the back of your survey and pass those to the center isle to be collected by our ushers.

TAKE away →

What is the best gift someone has given to you? How did you feel receiving it?

How or in what ways is the Sabbath a great gift to you?

When it comes to money do you find it hard or easy to give?

Why do you think God decided on a plan where he says that 10% of your increase or profit is his?

If you return something that isn't yours that doesn't make you a hero. Why do we think we've done something noble when we don't steal but give God his 10%?

What's the benefit of giving beyond the 10%?

How easily do you trust in your money vs. God?

How are you going to demonstrate to yourself that you believe God will supply all your needs from his glorious riches ?

How content are you?

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