

Fundamentals Sermon: Stewardship

There is a good feeling associated with being put in charge of something meaningful.

I began my pastoral ministry in Idaho. One of my churches was in Hailey Idaho, 10 miles south of Sun Valley Idaho. Sun Valley is fancy. Our other church was 200 miles away, through mountains and along rugged rivers. It was all wilderness until we descended from the pass into Sun Valley.

During the summer, we took a shortcut over Trail Creeks Summit. The road was gravel. It was exposed to a steep drop off. It felt wild. But then at the bottom of the hill the gravel turned to pavement. The wild turned to luxury. Our route took us past the Sun Valley Lodge, where we could not afford to stay but we enjoyed the free, world-class outdoor symphonies in the summer.

After passing the lodge we would drive through the town of Ketchum with its fancy shops, luxury homes and accessible ski slopes. In a town of millionaires and celebrities, we were out of place but felt so privileged. We were driving in our one car. They were vacationing in their 4th home. We were there for ministry. They were there for pleasure. We felt blessed to have a job. They didn't need to work. We felt spoiled to stay in the church parsonage. They looked unimpressed with their luxury lifestyle. One time, we drove into Sun Valley and realized that we only had \$7 left in our bank account after travel expenses and the bills for the month. We didn't fit in. But we loved our time there.

It's not a big place, but it attracts some big names. Olympic gold medalist skier Picabo Street grew up there. But most of the celebrities aren't from there. They come because it is an amazing place. Here are some of the people who are reported to have owned property in the Sun Valley area: Tom Hanks and Rita Wilson, Adam West, Bruce Willis and Demi Moore, John Wayne, Warren Buffett, Oprah Winfrey, Steve Miller, Clint Eastwood, Ashton Kutcher, Richard Dreyfuss, Jamie Lee Curtis, Steve Wynn, Justin Timberlake, and Bill Gates.ⁱ

To get a better picture of Sun Valley, do a search for Schwarzeneggers vacation home there. It's a decent size for a vacation home, 18,000 square feet. It has a private pine forest and easy access to the slopes. But you know, Schwarzenegger's a busy guy. He can't be there all the time. His main mansion is in LA. This is just one of the vacation homes.

Sun Valley has great trails. I used them a lot. A time or two I let myself imagine what it might be like to run into one of these celebrities on a trail and maybe make a good impression. Who knows what might come of it. I imagined if I met Arnold on the trail. First, I would try to put him at ease. If we were to meet in the wilderness he might be intimidated by my muscles. I didn't really imagine that. But I did imagine an equally unlikely scenario. What if we met and he liked me and felt impressed to help me out. What if he wanted to support my ministry work and offered his 18,000 square foot home for my use. After all, he doesn't use it most of the time. What could I do with that place if he handed me the key and told me to put it to good use for

ministry while he was gone. I can imagine youth conferences, spiritual growth retreats, fundraising banquets...

It was all in the wondering imagination of a 25-year-old pastor who had \$7 to his name in a community of abundance. But what if it did happen? How would you feel to be given an opportunity like that? A responsibility like that? If there is any positive emotion that you can imagine here, any excitement, gratitude, or honor, multiply that emotion as you try to understand a reality that is far greater.

God has appointed us to be his stewards!

Let it sink in. He owns everything. He lets us enjoy it and calls us to look after it. We get to use God's stuff for God's glory.

There is a privilege and responsibility here that I am still struggling to understand.

Read the words of the SDA Fundamental belief on Stewardship. Try to read it through the appropriate lens of awe and privilege.

Fundamental Belief #21: Stewardship

We are God's stewards, entrusted by Him with time and opportunities, abilities and possessions, and the blessings of the earth and its resources. We are responsible to Him for their proper use. We acknowledge God's ownership by faithful service to Him and our fellow human beings, and by returning tithe and giving offerings for the proclamation of His gospel and the support and growth of His church. Stewardship is a privilege given to us by God for nurture in love and the victory over selfishness and covetousness. Stewards rejoice in the blessings that come to others as a result of their faithfulness. (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:15; 1 Chron. 29:14; Haggai 1:3-11; Mal. 3:8-12; Matt. 23:23; Rom. 15:26, 27; 1 Cor. 9:9-14; 2 Cor. 8:1-15; 9:7.)

Matthew 25:14-30 shares a parable that helps us to understand how a good steward lives. This is where we are going in this study. For more content focused on the tithes and offerings aspect of stewardship go back and check out the series It's Not About the Money.

<https://pastorryanrogers.com/2021/05/>

This parable is found in an alarming place. It ends with weeping and gnashing of teeth (v 30). It appears right between the parable of the 10 virgins (vv1-13) and the scenes of judgment (vv 31-46). We go back a bit further and find that Jesus had just entered Jerusalem for his final time ((21:10-11). He shared the signs of the end (Matthew 24). When we move up to the next chapter, we find that Jesus said all of these things within the final few days before his crucifixion (26:1-2). He is about to die. He is sharing only the most meaningful of messages. Why would he tell a story about money management? Money isn't worth anything in the judgment.

It appears that Jesus talked about this more than once in his final week of life. Luke 19:11-27 tells a very similar parable with some of the same repeated words and the exact same point. But Luke says he told this parable before the Triumphal entry. Luke says Jesus talked about minas not talents. Luke includes references to cities and handkerchiefs. It is possible that these two parables refer to just one occasion that Jesus spoke, and the gospel writers just remembered the details very differently. It appears more likely that Jesus shared this message more than once in his final week of life. So, it is not out of place or a mistake that we find this message in this alarming context. Rather, Jesus wants us to consider stewardship in the context of warnings and judgment because being a good steward is part of living faithful in an end time context.

Being a good steward is an example of what it means to keep watch. The faithful followers aren't just going to have oil in their lamps they are going to be using the resources that God has entrusted to them to build the kingdom.

Let's go through this parable.

Verse 14 For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property.

When Jesus says "it" he is referring to the kingdom of heaven (v 1). When Jesus refers to a man going on a journey, he is talking about himself. Luke 19 adds that the man went to receive a kingdom and then return. He was the one about to leave and entrust his property to his followers. When Jesus refers to "servants" he uses the word that is most commonly translated "slave". A faithful steward knows that all they have belongs to God. But they know something more than this. They also know that they themselves belong to God. There are good reasons that our conferences have a Stewardship Department and not Slavery Departments. But we must remember, he is our Master! He is a perfect master. One that we should delight in following. But our stewardship is not just an act of generosity, it is owed to him.

Verse 15 To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away.

Recognize that God entrusts us with big things. A talent was valuable. It was 687.5 troy ounces of silver. It was equal to about 6000 days wages of the laborer. If you take a day off each week that is about 20 years of work. In today's money that is roughly \$1 million. You might feel like the servant who only got one talent. Even those servants who get the least have been given something of great value to steward.

In the rest of the parable, I want to notice 4 main aspects:

1. The mindset and actions of a faithful steward
2. God's response to a faithful steward
3. The mindset and actions of an unfaithful steward
4. God's response to an unfaithful steward

The Mindset and Actions of a Faithful Steward

Verses 16-17 He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. So also, he who had the two talents made two talents more.

The two faithful servants are included in the parable to show that it is not about the amount given but about what we do with it.

The faithful stewards lived with a bias for action rather than inaction. They used what they were given for the greatest increase of the Kingdom.

I want to celebrate the behavior of faithful stewards in our community.

We have a beautiful gym at our school because of faithful stewards. Many of you have been good stewards with the money God has entrusted to you. Many of you have been good stewards with skills in leadership, planning, and construction that God has entrusted to you. And I see even more faithful stewardship in the way that people are talking about the use of the gym. Our facilities are God's possessions that he has entrusted to us. I believe that he is honored when we dream about using our facilities as a blessing to our community.

Our church is currently going through the process of nominating leaders for ministry in 2023. We have beautiful ministries in our church because of faithful stewards. You have given time, effort and talent. I look back over the year and I see a strong disaster response, beautifully welcoming fellowship meals, a well-organized and high impact fair booth, I see mission trip participants using our field for fair parking, a rich week of camp meeting, summer camps, including an emergency response week of camp that involved many people in this church, this is faithful stewardship!

I see an excellent VBS program, I see 700 people gathering on our lawn for Valley2Village, I see an overwhelmingly supportive response to a flood in our school. This is faithful stewardship. And all of this has happened here within the past year.

I see the elders of this church give hours of difficult work that few people will ever know about. I see Sabbath School leaders coming in day after day to paint classroom walls with careful detail. I see staff and students with shaved heads representing the \$17,000 recently given to support extra curriculums that make our school program better. I see a young adult giving a year to serve as a missionary in Palmer Alaska. I see members opening their home and donating funds to support the missionary program. I see plans for two mission trips in the next year. I see the Palmer Adventist Community Care group getting their hands dirty to meet needs. I see people working on church logo and websites. I see people showing up on Friday nights to prepare for the worship service. I see the people back in the audio visual booth every time I stand on this stage. This is faithful stewardship. We are blessed to be in a community where so many people are living the lifestyle of a faithful steward.

These are just the things on the top of my head. Thank you for giving us an example of faithful stewardship. Everything you have is a gift from God to be used to build the Kingdom! He has not called us just to hold on until he comes but to be active as good stewards.

God's Response to a Faithful Steward

Verses 19-23 Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here, I have made five talents more.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents; here, I have made two talents more.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'

God affirms the faithful servant with a "well done". Hear the "well done" you faithful servants. Crave the well done. Seek the affirmation of the master.

God increases the faithful servant's responsibility and privilege by giving the servant more to use for the Kingdom. God has so much more to give. The 5 talents are significant at their approximate value of \$5 million. Notice, Jesus calls them "a little". Not because they are not important but because compared to how much more he has to entrust to us it is very small. God trains us on the job. Small responsibilities are not disappointments. They are training opportunities.

God welcome the faithful servant into his joy. This is the reward. No amount of greed and self-indulgence can compare to the joy of building the Kingdom.

The Mindset and Actions of an Unfaithful Steward

Verse 18 But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money.

Verse 24-25 He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours.'

"Hoarded wealth is not only useless. It is a curse" Christ's Object Lessons, p. 379

"However small your talent, God has a place for it. That one talent, wisely used, will accomplish its appointed work. By faithfulness in little duties, we are to work on the plan of addition, and

God will work for us on the plan of multiplication. These littles will become the most precious influences in His work.” Christ’s Object Lessons, p. 389

The unfaithful servant has a bias for inaction. They didn’t want to risk loss so they did nothing. Maintaining is not faithfulness. Standing still is not faithfulness. God has called us to growth, and he has employed us in growing the Kingdom. We accomplish little because we attempt little. William Carey said, “Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God.” Let our mistake come in the efforts of faith filled action rather than faithless inaction. Do not think that because your talent is smaller than another that you are justified in doing nothing with it. Let us be ambitious for God’s glory.

The risk of not contributing to the Kingdom is not that God’s will is not accomplished but that his will will be accomplished and we will not have the privilege of being a part of it.

Notice, the unfaithful servant operated out of fear. We will not be faithful stewards if we are controlled by fear. Fear will not reach out to the hurting. Fear will not give sacrificially. Fear will not have the hard conversation. Fear will not believe that God is enough. Fear will not take our school where God wants to take it. Fear will not neighbor well. Fear will not grow the Kingdom.

Now notice the major error in the mindset of the unfaithful servant. The root of their unfaithfulness is a wrong view of the character of God, “Master, I knew you to be a hard man...”

At the center of the vision of this church is the character of God. A right view of our God is the source of the best life and a wrong view is the source of a destructive and broken life.

This man saw the master mainly as “hard” and demanding. And he could not feel safe to grow the kingdom for such a master. Perfect love casts out fear. This servant never saw the love and he was controlled by fear.

If you have not heard, or you need a reminder, I will testify that the character of our God is perfect. He is love. He is beautiful. When you see him as he is you will respond with faithful stewardship.

Not only did the unfaithful servant have a wrong view of God, but the servant also blamed their unfaithfulness on God’s character. It was not his unfaithfulness that he sites for the lack of increase but God’s harshness.

Oh, if we might see God as he is! He loves you. He is tender and compassionate. He longs to dwell in you, to restore you, to bring the most wonderful, radical, and complete transformation in your life.

God's Response to an Unfaithful Steward

Verse 26-30 But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

God rebuked the servant. He then tells him what he should have done. And then, he takes away what was entrusted to him.

We call it passive. God calls it evil. We call it cautious. God calls it unfaithful.

We can't end on that note. And We don't have to. We can be faithful stewards by the grace of God and the power of the Spirit.

ⁱ <https://partyshopmaine.com/idaho/does-arnold-schwarzenegger-have-a-home-in-idaho/>