

# Getting Personal

## About the Importance of Faithful Stewardship

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### Introduction

“Getting Personal” requires a brief introduction. I served the Lord in pastoral ministry for 33 years (dual parish pastor, campus pastor and my last congregation for 22 years), and for seven years, as an LCMS district president. During that time, the Lord gave me opportunities to make numerous presentations to congregations and pastors on the subject of stewardship. Besides being blessed with a great interest in stewardship, the Lord has given me ample opportunity to experience the practical aspects of stewardship in life, in my family and in the congregations I served. All of my duties were filled with challenges and with great joys as stewardship became a day-to-day blessing. I pray God will bless the “Getting Personal” time with the same joys for you, your family and wherever you serve.

Nothing is more personal than to know this: The pastor is the key person for teaching, equipping and training the people entrusted to him by the Lord Jesus in matters of stewardship. The pastor not only is to teach and preach stewardship but he is to model a faithful stewardship life, demonstrating the great joy and blessings God provides. To this end, we will “get personal” about the importance of stewardship, review the basics of stewardship, pay attention to the pastor’s stewardship of his divine call, and consider the preaching and teaching of God’s Word related to stewardship.

Now, let’s take time to learn about you. How broad and comprehensive is your knowledge and understanding of stewardship? To what extent are you practicing it? Is it a part of your family life and is it modeled in your home? How important do you consider stewardship for your congregation? How does it impact the mission and ministry of God for the congregation? Does it impact it at all? Would you be ready to teach it, preach it and guide the congregation in a year-round stewardship emphasis for the sake of its God-given mission and ministry? Where would you look for resources to gain knowledge, understanding and guidance for doing so?

When a number of people are asked about the importance of faithful stewardship and the need for a continuous stewardship emphasis for the life of the congregation and the life of the pastor, what kind of responses might you receive? Something like: “It is the most important aspect of preaching, teaching and practice in the congregation.” Often this is the response when finances are failing. On the other hand, the response is often: “You take care of the preaching, pastor, and we’ll take care of the money. Just stay out of it!” Pastors not only have said similar things, but they sometimes proudly say they have absolutely nothing to do with money, the budget or stewardship, as if this is a good thing.

Do you agree or disagree? Consider exactly how much of Jesus’ teachings dealt with stewardship matters (mammon, giving, managing time, talents, resources, the Word, etc.). Consider that Paul devoted two whole chapters in one of his letters (2 Cor. 8-9) to excelling in the grace of giving and the matter of stewardship. Consider that God’s first recorded words to Adam and Eve in the Garden (Gen. 1:28-31) designated them to be stewards of all creation. (See Dr. Joel Bierman’s treatment and commentary: *Stewardship: A Theological Perspective*.)<sup>1</sup>

Consider that in Gen. 2:15 Adam (and all humanity) was given the charge to “work it and keep it,” steward, if you please, all that God provided and showed Adam. God says this even before sin entered

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Joel Biermann, “Stewardship: A Theological Perspective,” *Faith Aflame Congregational Stewardship Workbook*, Second Edition — Volume I, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2012.

and affected the world and humanity. Consider how Paul uses the stewardship word (oikonomos) for himself (and pastors) when he reminds the Corinthians he is steward of the “mysteries of God” (1 Cor. 4:1-2). (See Gregory J. Lockwood’s comments on this section in the *Concordia Commentary* on 1 Corinthians).<sup>2</sup>

Consider that Paul writes to the Ephesians (1:10) about God’s stewardship (God’s plan —oikonomian) in saving the world through the atonement of Christ Jesus. With just these few references, it is clear from Scripture that stewardship is important. We must preach it, teach it and implement it.

So strongly convinced that stewardship is important and critical, numerous authors have commented on this matter. In his book, *Pastoral Theology*, John H.C. Fritz includes a whole chapter on the subject. In one section he speaks about the spiritual nature of financial affairs by linking them clearly to Scripture: “Some say that the financial affairs of the church are none of the pastor’s business; he should look only after the spiritual needs of the members and not meddle in money matters. This is not as the Lord would have it. We learn from the Holy Scriptures that money matters play a very important part in the spiritual life of God’s children.”<sup>3</sup>

## Note references:

- › Jerusalem — Acts 6:1-4
- › Moses — Ex. 35:4-29
- › Paul — Rom. 12:13; 1 Cor. 9:1-14, 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8-9; Gal. 6:6-9; 1 Thess. 2:9; 2 Thess.3:7-13, 1 Tim. 6:6-11, 17-19
- › James — 2:14-117, 5:1-4
- › John — 1 John 3:16-18
- › Peter — 1 Peter 4:9
- › Savior — Matt. 5:42, 6:19-21, 24-34, 10:9-10; Mark 10:17-27; Luke 12:16-34, 16:13, 19-31

In his book, *Stewardship: A Theological Perspective*, Biermann writes: “One cannot claim fidelity to Christian truth in other respects while ignoring the practice and inculcation of faithful stewardship. Proclamation of the Gospel, a focus on forgiveness, or a rigorous commitment to orthodox doctrine, are all worthy practices and defensible paradigms for the Christian life and ministry; but none of them obviate the practice of good stewardship. The doctrine of justification cannot be the camouflage beneath which one hopes to hide from the expectations of a call to serious stewardship. The Gospel does not negate or displace stewardship; it restores the

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creature to a life of responsible stewardship. Good theology yields good stewardship; more than that, good theology demands good stewardship.”<sup>4</sup>

J.E. Hermann, author of the classic treatment on stewardship, *The Chief Steward*, says the pastor is critical to modeling the stewardship life: “Stewardship is caught as well as taught. The preacher’s life should be a continuous motion picture on Christian stewardship. You cannot expect a good stewardship church without a good stewardship pastor. The example of the pastor is invariably reflected in the lives of his people.”<sup>5</sup>

It has been amazing to see how many congregations requesting stewardship presentations often ask why their own pastor is not actively supporting the Lord’s work in their own congregations. They wonder if it is normal for all pastors and their families. The members do see, do observe and do reflect the example of their pastor all too often.

Look again at how J.E. Hermann makes it clear to the pastor: “It is the privilege and responsibility of the pastor to teach the broad spiritual conceptions of Christian stewardship to his people. He is also to lead them to practical and fuller expression of the principles as individual Christian and as member of a Christian congregation. Stewardship belongs to the whole counsel of God. The levels of Christian stewardship in a Christian congregation are set in the main by the pastor ... The principles and practice of Christian stewardship must become the absorbing passion in his life. He should endeavor to become the number one steward in his congregation. His entire activities as pastor, his personal life, must be convincing proof that he practices what he preaches.”<sup>6</sup>

Is that what people see in you, “The No. 1 steward”? Do you really believe it matters? It does!

There are other stewardship authors and practitioners who make this point in various ways: “To help each member be a good manager of what God has entrusted to Him is one of the functions of the Christian Church. Pastors are God’s gifts to the Church to perform this service ...”<sup>7</sup>

2 Gregory J. Lockwood, *Concordia Commentary, 1 Corinthians*, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 2000, pp. 128-136.

3 John H.C. Fritz, D.D., *Pastoral Theology*, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 1945, p. 258.

4 Dr. Joel Biermann, *ibid*, p. 13.

5 J.E. Hermann, *The Chief Steward*, Stewardship Ministry, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, St. Louis, 1951, p. 20.

6 *Ibid*, p. 19.

7 Bleick, p. 26.

All have the same concern, that the pastor sees the importance of his own stewardship, not only preaching and teaching it, but also practicing it, modeling it, faithfully living the stewardship life as an example to the flock of God who has been entrusted to his care. What are you willing to study, learn and begin doing to make that a reality? I hope, whatever it takes. Nothing will be as challenging or as rewarding for you and for your congregation.

Synod congregations have long recognized the importance of stewardship for the mission and ministry of the Church. How do we know this? Just take a look at the Constitution and Bylaws of Synod. There you will find that its Bylaws encourage every congregation “to include in its organizational structure an elected or appointed board or committee for stewardship.” (Bylaw 2.2, “Eligibility of Congregations,” Page 57) So important is stewardship considered, that Bylaw 4.6.1 (Page 195) requires election or appointment of a committee or board for stewardship in LCMS districts. Furthermore, in his official visits to congregations and pastors, the district president is to include “fraternal discussion in regard to ... its cultivation of sound stewardship principles” (Page 194).<sup>8</sup>

For the circuit counselors who assist the district president in these official visitations, the 2012 *Circuit Counselors Manual* provides a whole section on visiting with the pastor about stewardship (of Gospel, of leaders, of ministry, etc.).<sup>9</sup>

No question, stewardship is important for congregations, districts and official visitations. But the question right now is: “How important is stewardship to you?” As pastor of a congregation? In your personal life? As you live in a parsonage and steward the place provided for you? Do you consider an offering to the Lord in your own congregation? What about your health, use of time, family relationships and all the blessings of God? Are these matters for consideration, management and good stewardship? In other words, is it important to practice the stewardship life, to simply teach it or ignore it completely?

I hope you will see great value in becoming knowledgeable about stewardship. I hope you become committed to practicing stewardship yourself and in your family. I hope you become better equipped to preach, teach and lead stewardship in your ministry, your congregation and to the glory of God, Who invites you to be His steward.

From some of these quotes it is quite evident that your role as a pastor in the congregation depends on modeling the stewardship life and teaching stewardship from God’s Word in such a way that others will see it in its completeness (“larger stewardship”) and in its joyfulness as a child of God blessed to be a blessing!

8 2010 *Handbook*, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, St. Louis, 2010.

9 *Circuit Counselors Manual*, Council of Presidents, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2012.

