

STEWARDSHIP AND FAITH PROMISE GIVING

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Preface

Stewardship and Faith Promise Giving is a ten day devotional on the stewardship of possessions with a narrowing focus on money. This provides the basis for 'Faith Promise Giving' specifically.

This material has been supplemented from a Mission to the World devotional written by Dr Paul Kooistra called 'Faith Promise'. Each of his devotionals came from 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. Please read these two chapters as you begin this devotion.

We hope and pray that this resource would start you on a journey or help you on your way toward a deeper understanding of stewardship and giving to mission through Faith Promise Giving.

All Scripture quotations are from the New International Version 1984 (NIV) unless otherwise noted.

Day 1 – God’s Call to Stewardship

“And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God’s will.” 2 Corinthians 8:5

What is stewardship?

Our approach to stewardship needs to start with the question, *“Who owns me?”* The next question would then be, *“Who owns all I have?”* which includes time, body, relationships, possessions and money.

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth...Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness...So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them...God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.’”

Genesis 1:1,26,27,31

God made me and owns me and all that I have.

This truth is foundational to our understanding of stewardship – the fact that I am a steward holding all that I have, including myself, in trust for God; the God of the Bible, the Creator of the universe and of me. It was this single revelation that sparked the giving of the Macedonian Christians (2 Corinthians 8:5). They first gave themselves to God. They didn’t give only a part of their lives and possessions; they gave everything. They belonged entirely to God; therefore, they gladly gave everything to God.

Until we realise that we belong to God and all that we have belongs to Him, we will never get the rest of stewardship right. God does not want 10% or even 50%. He wants 100%. He wants our lives, “lock, stock, and barrel.” The old gospel song has it right: “Jesus paid it all, all to Him I owe.” What we do

with the portion we don't put into the offering plate is as important as what we give. It's all God's money. – Paul Kooistra

It is possible to give gifts to people and to God and yet keep yourself at a distance. Money, which ought to be an expression of personal commitment, can actually be a substitute for personal commitment. Paul does not want that kind of money. Of first importance is to give ourselves to God and to God's people. – John Piper

Questions for Reflection:

I belong to God and all that I have is His. I only hold my possessions in trust for a period of time. How will God's ownership of all things (Ps 24:1) develop my view of stewardship?

Have I been giving gifts to God and/or to others as a substitute for personal commitment? Remember to confess, repent and turn back to God, depending on His grace to change your heart.

Day 2 – The Foundations of Stewardship

Understanding who owns me and all I have is foundational to answering the central question of stewardship: “What should I do with me and all I have?” However, there is further background work to do before jumping straight in to answer that question. We need to undergird our lives with truths about being disciples of Jesus Christ.

We must start by considering what we were by nature before God:

“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.” Ephesians 2:1-3

But then we must consider what we are by grace before God:

“But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved.” Ephesians 2:4-5

This Ephesians passage speaks of our natural state – spiritually dead and separate from God – and what we followed – the ways of this world, the ruler of the kingdom of the air (Satan) and the cravings, desires and thoughts of our sinful nature. But, God has mercifully saved us by grace because of His love and we are a new creation in Christ! (2 Cor 5:17)!

Let's look at another passage that contrasts the former way of life and the new way of life we are to live in Christ:

"Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness. When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Romans 6:19b-23

The whole of Romans 6 deals with what it means when we came to Christ and how this relates to who we live for and therefore how we live. Toward the end (v19-22) Paul defines the benefits/outcome of this new way of life – righteousness leading to holiness resulting in eternal life. This radically changes how we should then approach the central question of stewardship – What should I do with me and all I have?

Questions for Reflection:

Reflect on the spiritual state, the motivations and the results of life outside of Christ. How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!

How should Romans 6 affect how we approach stewardship?

Day 3 – What Does Jesus Say?

We have seen that we are by nature slaves to sin and our decisions were motivated by the desires of our sinful flesh, the ways of the world and by Satan. The result would be death. But God has saved us by His grace that we would live for Christ and be slaves to righteousness, leading to holiness, resulting in eternal life.

The central question of stewardship for the Christian is, “What does He say to me, in His Word, about what I should do with me and all I have?”

Let’s have a look first at what Jesus said whilst on this earth:

“Then [Jesus] called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: ‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?’” Mark 8:34-38

This same idea is repeated in each Gospel, sometimes more than once (Matt 10:38-39, 16:24-27; Luke 14:25-27, 17:30-36; John 12:24-26).

What is Jesus calling us to in this life when He calls us to Himself? What should we use our lives to pursue on this earth? Jesus taught what we ought to treasure and relates it to our earthly possessions:

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also...No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”

Matthew 6:19-21,24

Jesus calls us to a radical re-ordering of our lives. But He also provides reassurance with an overarching command:

“So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first His kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

Matthew 6:31-33

Paul teaches the Romans similarly about what I should do with me:

“Therefore, I urge you brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer you bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship.”

Romans 12:1

Jesus makes it clear that we must be laying down all that we have at His disposal as we follow Him. We are not to store up for ourselves

treasure on earth, but rather in heaven, seeking first His Kingdom and His righteousness. He provides us with reassurance that our heavenly Father knows our needs and will meet them.

Questions for Reflection:

How have you considered these radical commands of Jesus in the past? Reflect on how your life is ordered and the decisions you make. Do they reflect the radical commands of Jesus?

What barriers exist in your heart, mind or lifestyle to considering or reconsidering how you order your life and decisions?

Day 4 – What do we have in Christ?

Jesus commands us to deny ourselves, to not store up for ourselves treasure on earth. We are to take up our cross and follow Him.

In Luke 16:15, Jesus tells the Pharisees that what is highly valued among men, like wealth and reputation, is detestable in God's sight. And Paul urges the Church at Rome, in light of God's mercy, to offer our bodies as living sacrifices as a spiritual act of worship.

Often we hear a voice, which can at times be quiet and deceptive – the voice of the world, the flesh and the Devil – telling us that we need to profit and become wealthy to be happy. Can you survive if you're not? Our defence must come from the Scripture. We are rich in Christ and we may be confident that we have all we need in following Him.

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?... But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

Matthew 6:25,33

"And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work."

2 Corinthians 9:8

"His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness. Through these He has given us His very great and precious

promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and may escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”

2 Peter 1:3-4

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.”

Ephesians 1:3

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.” 1 Peter 1:3-5

“Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

Questions for Reflection:

What lies have you believed regarding worldly possessions?

How do these truths set you free to follow Christ?

If we would pursue holiness we must have faith to obey the will of God revealed in the Scripture and faith to believe that the promises of God will then be ours. – Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness*

Day 5 – Why has God given me so much?

All that we have in Christ liberates us to think rightly about our stewardship of ourselves and worldly possession. We are freed from the lies of self-profit, wealth and worldly comfort, to seek to be obedient to His will, trusting He will come through with His promises.

Have you ever stopped to ask, “Why has God given me so much?”
We have been blessed by God in order to be a blessing to others.

“The Lord had said to Abram, “Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing...and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

Genesis 12:1-3

“May God be gracious to us and bless us and make His face shine upon us, that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations.”

Psalm 67:1,2

*“But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, **so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.** For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body.” 2 Corinthians 4: 7-11*

“God is not a man that He should lie, nor a son of man that He should change His mind. Does He speak and not act? Does He promise and not fulfil? I have received a command to bless; He has blessed, and I cannot change it.”

Numbers 23:19-20

“Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.”

2 Corinthians 9:10-11

It is a clear theme of the Bible that God doesn't give to His people to have them hoard His blessing. He would have us pass on His blessing that others too would enjoy His provision and worship Him.

Questions for reflection:

Meditate on these Scriptures. How would God want to change or develop your view of why He has given you so much?

How does this apply to the spiritual blessings you have in Christ? How does this apply to the material blessings you have been provided with?

“From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.”

Luke 12:48b

Day 6 – Turning Now to Financial Stewardship

We are lovers of money. Even before we have any money, we love money. Remember your life as a young man or woman, before you had your first job. Wasn't simply having more money the one thing that might have made your life easier?

Being comfortable is the prime pursuit of many Australians. We love our present life to the point that we are fixated on making it as comfortable as possible. We make as much money as possible in order to spend it on ourselves. We want better homes and gardens, better speed and coverage, more leisure and less work. It's our default as fallen humans.

But to Christians, Jesus says, "Not so with you."

"Do not deceive yourselves. If any of you think you are wise by the standards of this age, you should become "fools" so that you may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written: "He catches the wise in their craftiness"; and again, "The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile."

2 Corinthians 3:18-20

We have been radically called to lay down our lives and to put all that we have at God's disposal, knowing that He has provided and will provide for us in every way. In and through our lives we can bring glory to God by passing on the great blessings that come through Jesus, and from Him. Jesus talked about money a lot – eleven of His thirty-nine parables talk about money. Jesus saw our money, and what we do with it, as a major point of temptation for us all.

In a sermon on the parable of the shrewd manager, John Wesley (1703- 1791) summarised the Christian's view of money.

"And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations." Luke 16:9 (King James Version)

*You see then what it is to "make yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness," and by what means you may procure, "that when ye fail they may receive you into the everlasting habitations." You see the nature and extent of truly Christian prudence so far as it relates to the use of that great talent, money. **Gain all you can**, without hurting either yourself or your neighbour, in soul or body, by working with due diligence and honest industry, and with all the understanding which God has given you; -- **save all you can**, by cutting off every expense which serves only to indulge foolish desire; to gratify either the desire of flesh, the desire of the eye, or the pride of life; waste nothing, living or dying, on sin or folly, whether for yourself or your children; - - and then, **give all you can**, or, in other words, give all you have to God. Do not stint yourself, like a Jew rather than a Christian, to this or that proportion. "Render unto God," not a tenth, not a third, not half, but all that is God's, be it more or less; by employing all on yourself, your household, the household of faith, and all mankind, in such a manner, that you may give a good account of your stewardship when ye can be no longer stewards; in such a manner as the oracles of God direct, both by general and particular precepts; in such a manner, that whatever ye do may be "a sacrifice of a sweet-smelling savour to God," and that every act may be rewarded in that day when the Lord cometh with all his saints.*

– John Wesley 'The Use of Money'

Questions for Reflection:

What is your response to Wesley's three points: gain all you can; save all you can; give all you can?

Where have you become entrapped by the 'wisdom of this world'? Bring this to the Lord in prayer and ask Him for wisdom in His eyes.

Day 7 – Why give to missions?

There are three immediate reasons to give to missions.

- Glorify God (bless God = expression of praising thankfulness)
- Be a blessing to others
- In order to serve Christ

“This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord’s people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!”

2 Corinthians 9:12-15

“How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’”

Romans 10:14-15

“For it is written in the Law of Moses: ‘Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain.’ Is it about oxen that God is concerned? Surely he says this for us, doesn’t he? Yes, this was written for us, because when the ploughman ploughs and the thresher threshes, they ought to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest. If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? If others have this right of support from you, shouldn’t we have it all the more?” 1 Corinthians 9:9-12

For people around the world to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ, God's people must leave their homes and comforts and go to tell the news to them. What's more, God's people are the channel for financial and spiritual support of those who go.

Paul tells the Corinthians, without making demands, that those who labour in the harvest are entitled to their supported.

Now, it has been said of missions that 'some go, some give and all pray.' And we need to ask ourselves, "Am I prepared to go?" We need to ask, "Am I willing to stay and give as much as I can?" We need to ask, "Am I always praying for those tell the people of the world about Jesus?"

As we give to specific workers, projects, or teams, we realigning our hearts and redeploying our treasure. Each missionary needs an army of faithful prayer warriors who will daily bring his or her name and needs before God's throne of grace. And each needs friends to keep in touch, stay alert to special needs, and welcome them graciously when they return. – Paul Kooistra

As we become involved in God's global outreach, our own worlds expand and we are enriched. The 'harvest of righteousness' that comes from partnering with God's servants far exceeds the cost.

Questions for Reflection:

How are you prepared to 'go' into the mission field for God? Do you consider your everyday life as a mission field?

Does your thankfulness to God for His grace in your life overflow into a spirit of generosity? Pray about this.

He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.

– Jim Elliot

Day 8- What is Faith Promise Giving?

Your faith promise pledge for missions holds the potential to have a greater impact on your spiritual life than any other event this year. In faith promise, you will be asked to make a financial commitment, agreeing to give a specific amount as God provides, “as you are able, and even beyond your ability to give.” Faith promise is not designed to replace your normal giving, but to increase it and, in increasing your giving, to expand your faith.

– Paul Kooistra

Faith Promise Giving is my trusting God to enable me to give more than I thought I could give and, at the same time, to meet all my needs because He has promised to do so.

“And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord’s people. And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us.”

2 Corinthians 8:1-5

The immediate concern is not on the financial bottom line, but rather on faith, needs, opportunities, joy, gratitude, and the Holy Spirit. The Macedonians, even though they could have qualified for a hand-out, begged for the ‘privilege of sharing with others.’ God’s mercy and grace, not rules and obligations, were at the centre of their stewardship. – Paul Kooistra

“But just as you excel in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us – see that you also excel in this grace of giving.” 2 Corinthians 8:7

In making a Faith Promise, we are challenged to exercise our faith in the very personal and practical area of our daily needs. Faith is expanded as we trust God for our income, bank account savings and even our retirement plans. Faith can hardly become anymore real or practical than in these most personal aspects of our lives. – Paul Kooistra

As the Macedonians did and as we have been burdened to do in this study, we must first give ourselves to God in faith and then in faith give contributions ‘beyond our ability.’ You cannot do the first and not the second. The life of faith and the life of giving are the same life.

Questions for Reflection:

What is the relationship between your faith and your money?

How can faith promise stretch your faith? Pray about this.

The only safe rule is to give more than one can spare. In other words, if our expenditures on comforts, luxuries and amusements, etc. are up to the standard common amount with those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little. There ought to be things we should like to do but cannot do because our charities expenditure excludes them.

– C. S. Lewis

Day 9 – Where does the money comes from for Faith Promise?

“Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.”

2 Corinthians 9:10-11

The faith promise concept, like any other blessing of God, can be vulnerable to misuse if we are not careful in our approach. We must never assume that the promise is ours rather than God’s. God promises that He will give to us so that we in turn can give generously to His kingdom. The purpose is not to exert leverage on God, but to put a lever on our stewardship. We may think we can dictate an amount to God and promise that we will give that amount if He provides it sometime during the year. Our temptation is to challenge God, when in fact the text challenges us. We need to understand that the promise is not to God, but from Him. The challenge is for us to become more deeply involved in kingdom work through the privilege of giving. – Paul

Kooistra

It has been found that God generally uses the following ways to supply a Faith Promise, but this obviously doesn’t limit God to these (!):

Reordering our priorities. By applying better principles of stewardship, managing what we already have, and adjusting our priorities to reflect our desire to see the gospel among all peoples, we can generate money. This would include living more simply and so freeing money; evaluating our lifestyle to consider ways to decrease unnecessary personal expenses.

- A person determines he really doesn't need a new car this year and frees money he would have used for car payments.
- A person determines to purchase half as many coffees as he normally would, freeing up money.

Develop a creative ways of generating extra income that can be used toward a faith promise.

- A family has a garage sale to eliminate unneeded items around the house, which generates extra money.
- Housemates decide to put on a special dinner to raise money for their Faith Promise.

Unexpected funds do come into our lives, but this is a rarity and should not be the primary expected way that we are looking for God to act.

- The ATO sends an unexpected refund.
- A letter comes with a special financial gift.

The faith promise commitment is a time for us to reaffirm our faith in the promises of God. God's resources are never limited. He gives us all we need and all He wants us to have, but we must give it away in order to gain it. "Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously" (2 Cor 9:6).

– Paul Kooistra

Questions for Reflection:

What are some simple ways you could reorder your priorities to better manage your finances?

Are there some creative ways you could generate some extra income to give to the Lord?

Pray for God to increase your faith that you might be generous and adventurous in your Faith Promise this year.

Let me stress that God is not promising to make generous Christians wealthy. He is promising to make generous Christians capable of even greater generosity.

– John Piper

Day 10- The Attitude and an amount

How's your attitude to giving? *Duty or privilege?*

Faith promise is not faith in what God will give me, but faith that God will enable me to give...requires a changed heart toward giving.

When we fall down in our stewardship, some say we are stealing from God. God, however, doesn't need our money. Others indicate that Christian work will be handicapped, but God cannot and does not fail. When we fail in our giving, we rob ourselves of the privilege, the joy and the blessing that come to those who "excel in the grace of giving" (2 Cor 8:7c). – Paul Kooistra

"Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously." 2 Corinthians 9:6

"I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant will be also. My Father will honour the one who serves me."
John 12:24-26

I encourage you not to ask 'How much should I give?' Rather, ask, 'How much does God want me to give?' There may seem to be very little difference between these two viewpoints, but the divergence is immense. The first question is a self-centred question. It focuses on bank accounts, bills, obligations, and regulations. The later, 'How much does God want me to give?' places the focus on Him. He is the centre. – Paul Kooistra

There is no fixed formula for how much we give. In the Old Testament God's people often gave 10% of their wealth to God (Gen 28:22, Neh 10:38,

Heb 7:5). This 10%, which is commonly called a tithe, may be a very good place to begin, but it cannot be an inflexible standard by which we measure our giving. Christians in an affluent environment may quickly come to view the tithe as a minimum.

If 2 Corinthians teaches us anything, it is that we must get beyond the confines of the tithe. God teaches us this in other places as well.

When the prostitute anointed Jesus' feet with costly oil and the Pharisees protested, He commended her faith and declared her sins forgiven (Luke 7:36-50).

When the widow gave only two pennies to the offering, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth...this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on" (Luke 21:3-4).

How much does God want you to give? Let me suggest that He wants you to give more than you think. This is because giving has so much more to do with our faith in God and so much less to do with simply existing. God wants you to give more than you think, because He wants to stretch your faith far more than you can imagine.

– Paul Kooistra

Questions for Reflection:

Do you consider giving as a duty or a privilege?

After prayer and reflection, write down a preliminary faith promise.

Men who expect a good return at harvest are not wont to pinch and spare at sowing their seed.

– Matthew Henry