

SERMONSECOND
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH

460 East Main Street

Lexington, Kentucky 40507

Caring For One Another (Part 3)

1 Peter 4:4-7

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Rev. Dr. Thomas P. Groome III

Have you heard of Eliezer of Damascus? He is not one of the most prominent of Bible characters. However, he played a major role in the life of Abraham. He is identified as the steward of Abraham (Genesis 15:2).

A steward is a person that is responsible for managing the property and affairs of others. In the case of Eliezer, he had a lot to manage for Abraham because Abraham was a blessed and wealthy man. Eliezer was responsible to oversee Abraham's flocks and herds, money, all the other servants plus the camels and donkeys. Eliezer's job was to make sure that Abraham's household and business ran smoothly and profitably. As steward, Eliezer always had the task of making sure that he was promoting Abraham's best interests.

Through the years, Abraham found Eliezer to be faithful and dependable....so much so that Abraham chose him to carry-out a most important errand. Abraham sent Eliezer hundreds of miles to find a wife that was spiritually suitable for Isaac. Eliezer had to find a woman who believed in the one true God. Of course, Eliezer succeeded in this task, with God's help, by finding Rebekah for Isaac. (see Genesis 24)

No matter what Abraham placed into Eliezer's hands, Eliezer was found to be faithful and dependable in promoting his master's best interests.

I bring Eliezer to our attention, today, because he is an ideal example for us to imitate.

In our text, we are told that we are to be "good stewards of the manifold grace of God." We also know that everything belongs to God. Even though God owns all things, God entrusts us with a portion of God's possessions. God grants to us all that we have and enjoy in this life. We are stewards of what God gives to us. Peter tells us that we are to be "good stewards" of what God gives us. We are good stewards when we use all that we are given to promote God's best interests - "so that in all things God may be glorified."

Today, I want to touch upon three areas where we need to be “good stewards.”

The first area where we need to demonstrate good stewardship is the use of our spiritual gifts. The truth be told, the primary focus of our text from 1 Peter is the use of our spiritual gifts. “As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (v.10).

Peter declares that each of us has been given a “special gift.” There is not a single person here this morning who has not received from God a gift.

These gifts enable us to ‘serve one another’ (care for one another). These gifts grant us the ability to meet the needs of our brothers and sisters. Each gift represents a ministry that God calls us to perform within the congregation.

Only as we actively “employ” our “special gift” are we “good stewards of the manifold grace of God.”

The Apostle Paul admonishes the Church in Rome and us to be faithful in the use of our gifts. *We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.* (Romans 12:6-8).

We each have different gifts given by God and each gift is important. None are more important than any other.

Are we using our gift(s)? Are we performing the ministry that God has called us to? Are we caring for one another as God has called us to do?

The second area where we need to be good stewards is in the use of the time God grants us. Even though the duration of our life seems so long when we are young, the truth is that life is short. We need to frequently ask ourselves: Am I being a good steward of the precious time that God continues to bestow on me?

Paul writes to the Church in Ephesus, *Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people, but as wise, making the most of the time . . .* (Ephesians 5:15-16).

Are we, as good stewards, investing time in activities that promote God’s interests and glory? Are we investing time now in activities that will pay dividends in eternity? Or, are we wasting valuable time God has bestowed us with engaging in activities that have absolutely no spiritual significance?

How much time do we devote to drawing closer to God? How much time do we give ourselves to prayer and studying and meditating on the Word of God? Is there really anything more vital than deepening and strengthening our relationship with God?

How much time do we devote to self-improvement? We all have weaknesses in our lives. We all have faults. The question is how much time and effort do we dedicate to changing our practices and habits? How much time do we actually think upon what changes we need to make and how we can make those changes? How much time do we use to make ourselves better people so that our light might shine brighter for God?

The third area that we will consider today is our stewardship of money. It's easy to forget that what we think of as our money is actually God's money. (Ezekiel 16:17; Haggai 2:8). The income which we have is given to us by God to meet our basic needs but, above all, to promote God's interests and glory.

In order to be good stewards of the money God has entrusted us with, we need to ask ourselves three questions:

First, do we use God's money righteously?

Realizing that the money we have belongs to God, we don't want to use our money to purchase anything or invest in anything that we know is unrighteous. We don't want to spend God's money on anything that God would not approve of. Does the use of our money promote righteousness or unrighteousness? As good stewards, we must use God's money righteously.

Second, do we use God's money prudently?

The day will come when God will hold us accountable for how prudently we used the resources that were entrusted to us. We will be held accountable as to whether or not our spending matched kingdom priorities and values. Did we waste money on things unnecessary? Did we hoard our money and enrich ourselves rather than put the money to work to benefit others who were in need?

Jesus often talked about how we use money today will directly determine the quality and quantity of treasure we will enjoy in eternity. Does our budget reflect an eye on eternity or simply one in keeping with the way of the world?

Third, do we contribute an appropriate amount to God's kingdom?

The crucial question that ought to direct our giving is not simply, "How much should I give?" but "How can I repay the Lord for all his goodness to me?" Unless our giving is motivated by gratitude and is an act of praise for what God has already done in our lives, then our giving may be motivated and accompanied by the wrong attitude. If our giving is seen primarily as another bill or obligation and the Lord is looked upon as another creditor, then our spirit of giving as well as our giving itself will be off center.

A man once explained to his pastor that he didn't tithe because he couldn't afford it—he had too many bills. The pastor told him that his first debt was to God. The man replied, "Yeah, I know; but the Lord isn't pushing me like my other creditors."¹

Because God doesn't push us, God tends to lose when we look at God as another creditor.

Paul, when writing to the Corinthians, *The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*

¹ Watley, William D. Bring the Full Tithe: Sermons on the Grace of Giving. Judson Press, Valley Forge, PA, 1995.

And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. (2 Corinthians 9:6-8).

What a privilege it is to be chosen by God to be good stewards. May we take our role seriously and glorify God.

Sources:

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David L. Bartlett, The First Letter of Peter, The New Interpreter's Bible, Volume XII, Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN 1998.

The message is from sermons that I preached over the years that I have been in the pastorate. I have compiled them from the notes I made before they were preached. I do not know where I found some of the material contained here. I may have borrowed it, as a whole or in part, from others. I simply do not remember. If this is the case, I apologize right now, and that our combined efforts will glorify God.