

SLIDE 1. ANCHORED: A Study of What We Believe and Why Teaching: Article 15: Stewardship

Sunday April 21, 2023

THANK YOU to Rick Faw @ AROCHA for his teaching on Sunday April 7 about creation care from a biblical perspective – and then Steven and Laura Esau (as interviewed by Ingrid Baerg and her son, Kristof) for their personal application on April 14 of Rick’s teaching as workers @ AROCHA and as members of our church family :)

I would encourage you to follow up with any of them if you have felt a seed-planted in you (pun intended) to think and pray about how we might – as a church – focus some of our energy and time and resources towards creation care.

We are – after all – called to be good *stewards* of creation – or to paraphrase Gen. 2:15 – *to work it and take care of it.*

But – that is not all. We are also called to be good stewards of the lives God has given us, our time, our abilities and spiritual gifts, our opportunities, and our material wealth. So, stewardship is broader than just “earth-keeping.”

APPETIZER

SLIDE 2. How would you define “stewardship?”

MAIN COURSE

SLIDE 3. It is this bigger idea that *stewards* are persons who hold something of value in trust for another – through care and management – and who give an account to an owner.

But – we could say – it started with then (in Genesis) and maybe even starts with now (given changes in climate) – God’s call on us as Christians to care for and to manage the planet He created. So, we’ll start there this morning – with a short recap on creation care in lieu of this calling, in lieu of this being creation care month in our culture, and in lieu of tomorrow being *Earth Day 2024*.

To be a good steward of creation means to work and care for such natural resources as land and water and plants and forests and animals – with the same kind of heart and posture as God has for His good creation. And what is that?!

God tells us to give the land time to rest – like us – a sabbath to refresh and replenish its ability to produce good things (Lev. 25:2-4).

God tends to the trees with tenderness.

The bible says: *And all the trees of the field shall know that I am the Lord; I bring low the high tree, and make high the low tree, dry up the green tree, and make the dry tree flourish. I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it* (Ezekiel 17:24 ESV).

God clothes the grass and lilies of the fields (Mt. 6:26-30).
He feeds the birds of the air (Mt. 26:26).

He has entrusted us with something **He values** – to work it and to care for it.

To learn about the earth. To conserve energy and water. To reduce, reuse, and recycle.
This younger generation is teaching us about this again.

They are less materialistic.

They happily shop at Bibles for Missions and MCC and Value Village – or as my children like to call it Valoo – Village – with the intonation of a boogie shopper.

They tote reusable water bottles and coffee cups in place of single-use plastics.
They bike and walk and carpool (and not just because they're younger!).
They are concerned about the sustainability of the planet.

In fact, Forbes magazine described Gen Z (20 somethings) as the "emerging sustainability generation."

We are called to be good stewards of creation.

We are also called to be good stewards of the lives God has given us, our time, our abilities and spiritual gifts, our opportunities, and our material wealth.

To care for and manage what is of value to God – to the end of giving Him an account of how we have done so. Because...

SLIDE 4. God is the source and rightful owner of all things.

The bible says: *The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it* (Ps. 24:1).

Nothing of what I have is mine. It's all on loan. Entrusted to me by the Giver.

As the apostle Paul wrote: *We brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it* (1 Ti. 6:7).

Even I am not my own. I am because God gave me life. He is the origin of human life (Gen. 2:7; 21-23) and gives us the gift of procreation whereby human beings come to life.

The bible says: *Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife. When he made love to her, the Lord **enabled** her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son* (Ruth 4:13).

Hannah prayed for a son. The bible says: *I (Hannah) prayed for this child, and the Lord has granted me what I asked of him* (1 Sam. 1:27).

So, she became the mother of the renowned prophet named - Samuel.

SLIDE 4. God gives us the abilities to produce wealth.

God gives us life – and He installs in us certain abilities and gifts.

I did not go to a local Abilities Shop to purchase administrative ability or leadership ability or teaching ability. God gave them to me. It's my job to steward them.

To use them in service of others – which is to glorify Him – and to produce wealth – which is to care for me and my family.

We should not forget this.

The bible says: *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 (Deut. 8:17-18).*

SLIDE 4. God gives us everything that is good.

The bible says: *Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows (Jas. 1:17).*

Just before saying this – James warned his readers not to be deceived – that emotions (like - discontent) and sinful thinking (like – God is holding out on me) can trick us into turning away from God (to find our own satisfaction).

This verse turns that latter notion on its head and invites us to make a list of all that is good in our lives – both material and spiritual – and to remind ourselves that they *all* come from God.

My stuff. My life. My abilities. My opportunities.

My wife. My children. My family. My friends.

The Scriptures. Salvation. The church. Prayer. The Spirit of God in me.

Pizza!

SLIDE 5. And how should we respond to God's generosity?

By *enjoying* what God has given us.

By *thanking* God for what He has given us.

By *stewarding* well what God has given us.

Including – and especially - our material wealth.

A third of Jesus' parables are about money and stuff – a summary of which might be – that we are (as stewards of what He has given us) accountable to Him for how we spend our money – that materialism (the desire to have and to keep lots of money and stuff) is both foolish and sinful (Lk. 12:13-24) – that it is super unwise to utilize our abilities and money only for ourselves – to the exclusion of others.

Paul warns against the *love* of money – as a root of all kinds of evil (1 Tim. 6:6-10). And so, he urges us to learn to be content – whatever our circumstances – whether in need or having plenty (Phil. 4:11).

And he urges us to be *generous* (2 Cor. 8-9).

In this context: To build what God values. And how do we do that? By investing in what is important to Him – which is the kingdom of God – embodied by the church – to bless the world.

Here's WHY... or put differently – here are some reasons for generosity...

SLIDE 6. Reasons for Generosity:

1. To grow in maturity of faith (2 Cor. 8:1-8).

Paul commended a group of churches in Macedonia who generously supported him and his companions - out of their extreme poverty mind you – and challenged the church in Corinth to be like those churches – to excel in the *grace of giving* – as much as they had been doing in faith, in speech, in knowledge, and in love.

2. To be like Jesus (2 Cor. 8:9).

The bible says: *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich* (2 Cor. 8:9).

3. To achieve equality (2 Cor. 8: 13-15).

By supplying when there is plenty and by receiving when there is need.

4. To benefit personally (2 Cor. 9:6).

The whole – you reap what you sow idea.

5. To help others and to bring glory to God (2 Cor. 9:12).

The bible says: *This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God* (2 Cor. 9:12).

I've had this experience!

Have you ever been blessed by someone who you'd never think would be the kind of person through whom God would bless you?

It's happened to me - lots of times.

Not so long ago – for instance - Jackie had a need to go back to Ontario to care for her mother. I inadvertently mentioned this in a conversation with that someone who – let's just say – I found a little prickly :)

He phoned me the next day and told me that he and his wife had thought and prayed about it and would like to give Jackie and I \$1000 to get both of us back and forth from Ontario.

After I picked my jaw up off the ground – and after I did the polite thing by saying, “Are you sure?” 2 X – and after I thanked him – I humbly thanked God and praised Him for helping us through this man – for seeing us and supplying our need.

So, those are some of the reasons Paul gives as to why we should be generous.

Here’s HOW... or put differently – here’s how to be generous – starting with 1 Cor. 16.

SLIDE 7. The bible says: ***Now about the collection for God’s people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I (Paul) come no collections will have to be made (1 Cor. 16:1-2).***

SLIDE 8. How to be Generous:

There are several principles for generosity here in this tiny text:

1. Make giving a systematic practice. Here – Paul says, “Set aside a sum of money on the first day of every week...”

That’s not a bad idea! To commit to giving to the church every first day of the week – which – in our case – is on Sundays. You can do so in person at the WELCOME CTR. – in cash or by cheque or debit card. Or you can do so online – using your credit card or e-transfer or pre-authorized debit.

You could even do so NOW. I’ll wait :)

This said – perhaps the point is not specific to a day in the week but to systematically give – weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly, for instance.

2. Be thoughtful.

“Set aside a sum of money” implies some forethought – about what to give out of what you have – so that you will be ready to give it when you can.

3. Give what you can.

“In keeping with his income” suggests proportionate giving, doesn’t it?

Which reminds me of the widow’s offering in Lk. 21: *As he looked up, Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. “I tell you the truth,” he said, “this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All those people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put all she had to live on” (Lk. 21:1-4).*

4. Give sacrificially.

Like this widow.

Like the Macedonians.

Because giving sacrificially is an antidote to discontentedness. Because giving sacrificially means more to the giver and the receiver. Because giving sacrificially is a tangible expression of dependence upon the generosity of God.

5. Give cheerfully.

The bible says: *Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously* (so, give generously). *Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give* (so, give thoughtfully), *not reluctantly or under compulsion, for **God loves a cheerful giver*** (2 Cor. 9:6-7).

God loves a cheerful giver?!

Why? Why do *you* think God loves a *cheerful* giver?

Could it be that a cheerful giver has a heart that understands the joy of the giving?

Could it be that a cheerful giver recognizes that everything they have comes from God and belongs to Him?

Could it be that a cheerful giver strengthens his bond through the shared experience of imitating God's generosity?

Let me end by suggesting a few practical ideas.

SLIDE 9. Practical Ideas for Effective Stewardship:

1. Craft a \$ MISSION statement.

Think about goals, income level, standard of living, investments, savings, and retirement funds – and how they align with God's mission to seek and save the lost.

2. Establish a purchase criterion.

Maybe acquire things on the basis of usefulness rather than status – like buying at Value Village vs. Lululemon or buying a Kia vs. a Tesla.

3. Cultivate the practice of generosity.

Give some stuff away – or sell it to give the money away! We have been able to do this as we have purged our home of stuffs that won't fit into our new home in Langley City. We were able to support Kailyn and Olivia on their missions trip from the proceeds of some stuff we sold. So cool!

4. Don't buy in to buying in.

Be wary of the seduction of endless sales ads and pitches that promise happiness and fulfillment by buying more stuff! Reject the culture of advertising and consumerism.

Stewardship Liturgy / Corporate Reading

SLIDE 10. Me: In the beginning, God placed man and woman in the garden to tend to it and guard it. Today, God still entrusts us with the care and responsible use of our world and its resources.

SLIDE 11. You: We receive this task as a sacred trust, and will manage our lives in ways that honour God. As stewards of God's gifts, we commit ourselves to using the earth's abundance to meet human need.

SLIDE 12. You: O Lord, save us from self-destruction fueled by greed, protect us from unjust exploitation of the land, keep us from destroying the beauty of Eden!

SLIDE 13. Me: All that we have is God's, time, talents, and possessions; and without God we are nothing. We worship and follow the One who, though He was rich, for our sakes became poor, that we might become rich in Him.

SLIDE 14. You: Our lasting treasure is in heaven, O Lord. Teach us to live lightly with our earthly treasure. Forgive our preoccupation with comfort and luxury, forgive our divided loyalty between God and Wealth. Free us from anxiety over food and drink and clothing.

SLIDE 15. You: Empower us to live simply, content in every circumstance: well-fed or hungry, having plenty or being in need. We commit ourselves to a life of cheerful, regular, and sacrificial giving, managing all that we have and are for the glory of God