

Practical Christianity; Eternal Investments

Some of you remember Sarah Mae Gabuyo. Sarah Mae was born in the Philippines, when she was very little her family moved to Milan, Italy where she grew up. I met Sarah Mae when she went through the Summer Intensive with Servant Community Church in our Regional Ministry. There she received her call to Pastoral Ministry. Since the Servant Community Church is not a Chartered Church, about 2 1/1 years ago, Sarah Mae joined the Community Church so she could enter the Ordination Process.

Since then, Sarah Mae finished Seminary in 2 years, graduated in May and this summer was Commissioned as a provisional Elder in the Wisconsin Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. She is now serving in Monroe.

Sarah has an amazing life filled with God's blessings! God is working in her life in many amazing ways. One of those blessings is her chocolate Lab Jeriko.

On one of her daily walks, she makes new friends in her neighborhood. People come up to her and say, "What a cute puppy! Can you sit? Sit. SIT!" Sarah would then say, "Uhm... he's not going to understand you! He only speaks Italian" Then there is the reply, "Aw. Can you say it in Italian, then?" ... "Jerikó, seduto!" ... and Jerikó sits. A dog in the US that only speaks Italian! Love it.

Sarah has been an excellent steward of the blessings and favor of God! **Stewardship** is basically how we use the blessings and resources God has loaned us... are we using God's blessings the way God had created them to be used.

- If a person is a poor steward, they become like a plugged drain. A poor steward actually stops the flow of blessings that God wants to give them!

This happens, when a poor steward does not use the blessings God has given them - in the way God intended those blessing to be used. When that happens, they block the flow of blessings.

Now what happens when a sink gets plugged and you can't get rid of the water? It gets stale and smelly. The same thing happens to our faith when God's blessings aren't allowed to flow through us - to others; our faith gets stale, stagnant and smelly. Poor Stewardship blocks the flow of blessings.

So how do we use the blessings and resources that God has loaned us?

Now I'm not just talking about just money, I'm also talking about our Spiritual gifts, our passions/Heart, Our abilities, and our life experiences. This includes how we respond to problems and trials in life. In other words, how do we live for God? Your answer speaks volumes about you... it tells what your priorities are, what your weaknesses are and what controls you. It's important to realize how we handle the blessings God loaned us for many reasons:

- How we handle money, time, spiritual gifts and abilities, how we allow ourselves to be handled by them, effects how we grow spiritually or whether or not we become stunted in our spiritual growth.
- Also, for the Christian who wants to grow spiritually, developing the ability of being a good steward is essential. Why? Because, ***“How we handle the blessings God gives us shows how much we trust God.”***

With this said, lets turn our attention to today's scripture James 5:1-6:

Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming on you. ²Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. ³Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire.

You have hoarded wealth in the last days. ⁴Look! The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. ⁵You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter.^[a] ⁶You have condemned and murdered the innocent one, who was not opposing you.

In today's scripture, James writes to people he describes as rich. Now you may not see yourself as rich - most people don't. Many rich people don't see themselves as rich. ***But we live in a country with resources that most of the world only dreams about.*** The people James is speaking to here... are people who are hoarding the blessings God gave them, and neglecting to pay the bills they owe.

Now James isn't knocking being rich. As a matter of fact, God wants us to prosper. Psalm 1 describes the righteous believer as being, ***“Like trees planted along the riverbank, bearing fruit each season without fail. Their leaves never wither and in all they do, they prosper.”***

James is scolding “Poor Stewards.” Those who profess to be Christians, they’re connected to a church; but their faith and trust is not in God. They trust their own abilities and they trust **the** blessings rather than trusting the one giving the blessings... and that causes God’s blessings to be blocked from flowing.

So how can we be Good Stewards of God’s blessings? *My Mother-in-law once made a pumpkin pie for Thanksgiving. But she forgot to put in sugar. My point is that in baking you need each and every ingredient, and in the right amount.* When you step back and look at scripture as a whole, you find 5 ingredients that if used equally and regularly will guide you to be a good steward of God’s blessings.

1. **The first ingredient is to pray!** Prayer is the foundation of our relationship with God. The theologian Samuel Chadwick once wrote that, “*The one concern of the devil is to keep Christians from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, prayerless religion. He laughs at our efforts, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray.*”

In **James 5:16**, James explains, the earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and wonderful results. If we have problems or needs in our lives and family or jobs, community, our nation’s leaders, our school system and *especially our church*, the **first** thing we should do is turn to God in prayer.

Prayer releases the power of heaven. Why? Because to pray is admitting we can’t do it ourselves and our efforts are futile, we must humble ourselves to admit that we cannot be successful in our own power.

Prayer breaks the stronghold of pride and self-sufficiency. For any person who may say that prayer doesn’t work, **God does answer all prayer!** So the 1st ingredient for healthy stewardship is to pray for Your church and your part in it.

2. **The second ingredient is worship.** If Christianity is a relationship with God, then worship is the *expression* of that relationship. If we have a relationship with God, then doesn’t it make sense - regular worship should be as natural as breathing? That’s why Ralph Waldo Emerson said, “*We must be careful of what and how we worship, for what we are worshiping we are becoming.*”

I don't believe any of us would want to be as crude, heartless and as thoughtless as the Christians James is talking about in today's scripture! But when we take our eyes off of God, we naturally place our eyes on something else - if we don't worship God, we *will* worship other less eternal and less powerful things.

That's why God tells us in Hebrews 10:24, 25, "*Think of ways to encourage one another to outbursts of love and good deeds. And let us not neglect our meeting together as some people do.*" In worship, we receive the encouragement, strength and comfort from the Body of Christ.

- But, what would you think would happen if your heart would beat once and skip the next?
 - Maybe your child missed school every other day?
 - Or your car's engine only ran on half its cylinders?

My point, irregularity in any part of our life causes problems. The Bible talks about how the early Christians continued faithfully with the apostles, in the doctrines, and in fellowship, in breaking bread and in prayer **and they grew in faith and saw great signs and wonders.**

But if we are hit and miss with our worship, our faith will be more miss than hit. Remember... **we become what and how we worship.** The second ingredient for good stewardship is to participate regularly in Worship.

3. **Next invite others to join us in worship.** Paul said in Romans 10 that, "Faith comes from listening to this message of Good news – the Good News about Christ." Peter explained in 1st Peter 3:15 that, "*If you are asked about your Christian hope, you should always be prepared to explain it.*"

People won't hear about God's grace if we don't tell them about it. I'm not talking about building our membership or convincing people to come to our church instead of another. **What I am talking about is reaching out to those who are hurting and anxious, those who are lonely and suffering from depression.** We are to be people who explain *HOW* God can help in their struggles today, but live it too.

The reason we reach out, is because God tells us to share how God transformed our lives and how we are living better for it. The 3rd ingredient for good stewardship is to share Jesus by inviting others into our fellowship, so they can experience God's hope and the opportunity to receive God's grace.

4. **The fourth is to follow God's will by working in and through the Church.**

Can a leg or arm live apart from the body? No of course not! Well the church is called the "Body of Christ," one body and many parts. And God designed the body to work together and serve. That's why Paul told his friends in Galatia that, "You have been called to live in freedom – not freedom to satisfy your sinful nature, but freedom to serve one another in love."

I can just hear Paul telling his friends, "This is what I mean"

Love children by teaching them the bible and the freedom and power it brings.

Love people who are new to the community.

Love teenagers, struggling with the relevance of God to their lives.

Love hungry & homeless people, there's more of them around then you know!

Love unwed mothers.

Jesus said it this way, "*By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*" This means to step out of your comfort zone and worship God through service. The good steward sees each opportunity to lead or serve as an opportunity to worship God. Now we discussed praying for the ministry and leadership of the church, attending worship regularly, finally we are good stewards for God when we:

5. **We give financial support to God's work in our church and community.**

Do you know, in Malachi 3:10 we find the only place in scripture where God tells us to test Him? Here God challenges us, "*Bring the full amount of your tithes to the temple, so that there will be plenty of food there. Put me to the test and you will see that I will open the windows of heaven and pour out on you in abundance all kinds of good things.*" **Look at - "Put me to the test."**

God wants us to prosper, and God wants us to be faithful and trust Him. When we give to God, we provide for His work, but we also give God the opportunity to prove His faithfulness. **We honor God by acknowledging the Lord as the source of all we possess and as the One worthy of our worship.** God knows that we put our money where our trust is, we place our money where our priorities are.

PRAYER: