PART FIVE

WALKING THE TALK IN DAILY LIFE

I. MOTIVATIONS AND RESPONSES. God’s promise of eternal life through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is adequate motivation for anyone calling himself or herself a Christian. At times we are moved to give but too often we are unmoved and disconnected.

A. What motivates people to give? Dr. Kennon Callahan identifies five internal motivations for giving that are a part of our personhood:

1. Compassion: sharing, caring, giving, loving, serving, supporting
2. Community: good fun, good times, fellowship, affiliation, belonging, a sense of family and home
3. Challenge: accomplishment, attainment, achievement
4. Reasonability: data, analysis, logic, and thinking that it makes good sense
5. Commitment: dedication, faithfulness, duty, obligation, vows, loyalty

All five motivations are gifts of grace. Dr. Callahan says that although two of these motivational resources are generally predominant at any given time during a person’s life pilgrimage, no one is locked into the same two resources forever. Our motivations may change as our circumstances change and our journey progresses (Giving and Stewardship, pages 65-66).

B. Former Luther Seminary professor Steven Ramp suggests that Christians should daily respond to God’s generosity by being:

1. Grateful: Like the woman who washed Jesus’ feet with expensive ointment and tears
2. Generous: Give from first fruits, not leftovers
3. Mindful of the Poor: Extend hospitality to strangers (Good Samaritan Parable)
4. Cheerful Givers: Give what you have decided in your heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver

5. Proportionate Givers: Give as God has prospered you

6. Faithful Stewards: To whom much is given, much is expected

7. Planners: Plan your giving

II. **WE ARE SUPPORTED AS WE “GO.”** Our primary sources of support and strength are God’s word, our family and friends, and other Christians within our congregations and communities. Although often overlooked as gifts, fellow Christians and communities of faith are also gifts (See Matthew 11:30).

A. Congregational leaders, whether ordained or lay, need to be sure that worship is Christ-centered and that the Gospel is proclaimed so that members receive the fuel they need for their stewardship journeys. Additionally, stewardship should be presented as a life-style, a way of living in response to God’s love and generosity, and not as an annual event designed to help balance church budgets. When these things are done, stewardship will have more meaning for clergy and parishioners alike.

B. Ultimately, God is calling us to respond to his love for us by witnessing to and serving others. In other words, we need to get outside of ourselves. Jesus commands us to go and spread the good news. In essence, we are made stewards of his life-saving message (Matthew 28:19). Just as God equipped Peter and John with the power of the Holy Spirit when they went to Samaria (see Acts 8:14-17), God will equip us with the power to make a difference in the world (beginning at home and at work). When we go, we go forth in grace to be good stewards. Paul says “And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Colossians 3:17). Ron Vallet (Stepping Stones, pages 9-10) says that as we go forth on our stewardship journey we need to realize that the Christian steward walks with a limp — evidence of his having struggled with God. On our journey we walk with Christ and discover a treasure more valuable than gold or silver — the gospel of Jesus Christ.
C. Although God operates from a theology of abundance, we often operate from a theology of scarcity. Someone once said that the question we need to ask is not “How much of what I own should I give?” Rather, the question we should ask is “How much of what belongs to God am I willing to let go of?” Tithing (percentage giving) is a useful tool, a measurement. As a tool it helps us measure our stewardship progress, but it should not be the end objective. If we center our hearts and minds on Christ, the rest of us, including our money, will come along. But Christian stewardship is about more than money. It isn’t just about making an annual pledge decision or a weekly offering decision. It’s a life-long journey. It’s a way of thinking and acting, a lifestyle. We need to let go and let God work in our lives. When we do, giving (of all kinds) will feel good and right. If giving doesn’t feel good, we probably are still too inwardly focused. Ultimately, Christian stewardship is about our relationship with God. Gifts given during lifetime and upon death are expressions of the depth and strength of our relationship to and love of God, and serve as powerful faith statements to loved ones.

D. Bruce C. Birch, Dean and Professor of Old Testament at Wesley Theological Seminary, writing in the Foreword to Ronald Vallet’s book, The Steward Living in Covenant, urges us to participate in “…an expanding conversation that is exploring the challenge to act as God’s stewards in all areas of Christian life and discipleship. How we use and manage God’s gifts affects far more than our economic life. We are stewards in our use of God’s creation, in our personal relationships, in our political and ecclesial institutions, in our work, and in our use of time. Indeed, we are stewards of the gospel itself — the good news entrusted to all of us in the church” (page xii). Someone once said “At the end of your life, give people a reason to say, ‘He died vertical. He stood for something.’” What do you stand for? Would anyone know you are a Christian by how you live?
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What motivates you to give of your time, talents, and treasures? Which is easier to give?

2. What inspires you to give? What turns you off and why?

3. Where do you find encouragement for your stewardship?

4. In what ways do you encourage others?

5. What would it take to make you feel good about giving?