**“Stewards Living with Purpose”**

**Sermon, Week 3**

Text:1 Corinthians 10:31

Grace, mercy, and peace be to all of you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and may His spirit fill your hearts and your minds in the hearing of His Word. This is the third and final week of our stewardship emphasis **Everyday Stewards**. The theme for today is “Stewards Living with Purpose.” (Please be seated)

In this message, we will look at the purposes that God gives to us as His stewards. As God’s people, we have one primary purpose which is to advance His kingdom while building His Church and serving others. God tells us through the Apostle Paul that He *“desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth”* (1 Timothy 2:4). We are God’s instruments or channels through which He works to share the life-saving Gospel with all people. God calls each of us to use our time, talents, and resources faithfully to be His light in a dark world. We are called to use all of God’s gifts to us for the purpose of helping others to come to know His Son, Jesus. In our relationships with God and others, we have the purpose of giving Him glory through our witnessing, serving, and giving.

Today’s message focuses on one Scripture verse which is 1 Corinthians 10:31, which reads, *“So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”* God is telling us through the Apostle Paul that our purpose in all that we do is to *“do all to the glory of God.”* God wants and deserves to be glorified. However, it is in our nature to resist giving God glory. Every day Satan is working to encourage us to put ourselves first. Satan works on our selfish ambition, pride, arrogance, or other character flaws to get in the way of serving and glorifying God with our hearts, minds, and strength. Rather than give God glory, our thoughts are more like “What’s in it for me?” Me, mine, and I are words used again and again as we focus on ourselves. In a question-and-answer session after one of his lectures, the sainted author C. S. Lewis was asked which of the world’s religions gives its followers the greatest happiness. Lewis paused and said this, “While it lasts, the religion of worshiping oneself is best.” He went on to say that, when only short-term happiness is identified as the most important thing, it is the self we seek more than anything else. Theologian Richard Baxter wrote, “Man’s fall was his turning from God to himself.” This seeking self leads to boredom and depression and our downfall. Turning toward ourselves and seeking self-will rather than the Lord’s will and His glory is one of the biggest obstacles to a relationship with Jesus. We need to answer the question regularly as to what our true motives are and where our hearts are.

In the Old Testament book of Joshua, Joshua exhorts all the tribes of Israel to choose whom they will serve. Joshua then says, *“But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord”* (24:15). The bold choice made by Joshua serves as a pattern for making the wisest choice of all—the choice to serve and glorify God no matter what. Spiritually, every person, as I said earlier, has only two choices: serve God or serve self. In life, choices are rarely presented quite so clearly. That is because Satan is hard at work creating all that gray area, making it hard to discern between foolishness and wisdom.

Of all the gifts that God gives to us, time is one of the more difficult to use for the purpose of God’s glory. How are we choosing to spend the time that God gives us? Focusing on ourselves, we might choose to work hard at our careers, neglecting time to pray or participate in Bible studies and in worship. We may rationalize that we are providing for our families because after all, this is important and good. It is easy to get our priorities in the wrong order. Perhaps, we convince ourselves that once we start making more money, get a bigger house, or pay down some debt, then we will have more time to spend with God and be active in church. What is happening is that we are living in that gray area where poor choices are often made. We do what we want because we talk ourselves into believing that God is not that concerned with what I am doing today. We know that God is patient so we think that He will wait for us to get around to fulfilling His purpose for us. When we stop wanting to please God and give Him glory, we are elevating ourselves to God’s level by deciding what we want God to accept. Satan skews our thoughts. He is crafty.

Thinking about Joshua’s choice to serve God, we might be led to focus on what God wants and what we are able to do about it. We need to live above what others think of what we are doing and be like Joshua who made up his mind how he and his family would believe and serve God, carrying out His purpose as He enables us to give Him glory.

I am reminded of the story about three teens who were talking about their future plans. One of them talked of being a doctor because he could have fame, and people would come to him and be helped. He saw becoming a doctor to gain popularity and recognition. His purpose in life was to gain fame.

Another listened and decided he might like to be a doctor too. He described the car his doctor drove, a Ferrari, and shared that being a doctor would mean he could have the Lamborghini he admired. He then started into a dissertation listing all the things his parents could not afford that he would have. His purpose in life was to gain wealth.

The third teen was confused. He thought a few moments and then shared his desire to do something that God wanted him to do. That would mean becoming a doctor, or maybe he would be a nurse. His purpose in life was to glorify God by serving others.

As he shared his purpose of serving others, the other two teens laughed at him.

We may be laughed at or sneered at, but there is no ambiguity in our theme verse from 1 Corinthians that we are called to *“do all to the glory of God.”* It is easy for us to recognize that we give God glory in our prayers and each week in worship, but God expects us to give Him glory in all things. To serve God and to give Him glory certainly involves our relationships with family and neighbors, in our time at work or in school, in our time and involvement in church, and in our leisure times. God is glorified when we thank Him for all our gifts and blessings. Do we wake up each day giving God glory for the gift of a new day? Are we giving God glory for our vocations as parents, students, brothers, and sisters? We give God glory when go about our daily tasks in His name, doing the best that we can in all that we do. God is glorified when we allow Him to work through us. When this happens, we further the kingdom, serve the common good, and glorify God.

Jesus said, *“If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me”* (Luke 9:23). Becoming a disciple and a faithful steward with purpose requires self-denial. Jesus taught that denying self is an essential part of the Christian life. Because we are born in this sinful state of putting ourselves first, we need help from the Holy Spirit to resist our natural temptation to be self-centered rather than God-centered people. On our own, we are hopeless, but the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacrament enables us to use our lives and blessings according to God’s plan and for His glory. As new and transformed people, we can serve the Lord as He equips and motivates us. We have the Gospel, the power of God unto salvation, and we have the life-saving Word which is *“profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness”* (2 Timothy 3:16). We have the ascended Christ, seated at the right hand of God, working all things for good for those called according to His purpose. We will never be perfect, but we have the assurance that, because of Jesus’ death and resurrection, we are forgiven. We will fail repeatedly to give God glory in all that we do, but God knows our hearts. He will pick us up and encourage us to keep going in our pursuit to give Him the glory that He deserves.

It is very fitting in the final week of our stewardship emphasis **Everyday Stewards** that we are focusing on the purpose *“do all to the glory of God.”* We understand that the purpose of life is not just fun, friends, dreams, personal fulfillment, or any number of other things we might be tempted to make our focus and purpose. No, we are stewards of God’s glory. We are called to share the life-saving Gospel with people near and far. I pray that this message as well as the first message in this series “Stewards Walking by Grace” followed by “Stewardship as a Way of Life” have been helpful to you in your journey to become **Everyday Stewards**.

God has called us to *“Do all to the glory of God.” M*ay He help us all commit our time, talents, and money for the purpose to *“Do all to the glory of God.”* Amen.