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HOME GROUP & DEVOTIONAL MATERIAL

“Stewardship” –by Jacqui Rivas – 25 July 2021

Sermon link: #Soundcloud <https://soundcloud.com/gracepointsa/good-stewardship-by-jacqui>

Scripture

John 15:11-17

Open your mind and heart as you read the passage of Scripture aloud and then again quietly to yourself. Listen for God’s word to you.

Observation

The key to this passage is that God chooses people Himself and those people are to love one another. This is the New Commandment Jesus gave and it is the purpose of all those who follow Christ.

The scene took place in the upper room just before Jesus left to go to Gethsemane, after sharing His last meal with His disciples – His friends. He wants those gathered there to understand that He cares for

them deeply and He wants them, and those who come after them, to love one another too. Jesus emphasised that people are not to live in competition with one another but to love each other, just as He was about to demonstrate to them by laying down His life for His friends. Jesus showed those who follow Him the way.

Jerome, a father of the faith, used to tell people at every gathering he attended, ‘Little children, love one another.’ When his followers complained at the repetition of his message he told them that this was the commandment of the Lord, and the observation of it alone is sufficient. Christ-followers are called to be Jesus’ partners and to work alongside Him in this world; to be His ambassadors and to represent Him in the world pointing the way to Christ; and to live their lives the way Jesus has taught them to live, so others are attracted to Him. John Wesley described his conversion in later years as ‘a time when he exchanged the faith of a servant for the faith of a son’. Such a relationship requires obedience on the part of those who follow Christ. Jesus has



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chosen all who follow Him so they would respect His commandment and bear fruit for the glory of God.

When the Body of Christ lives according to this commandment to love one another, it follows that they will care for those around them and for all of God's creation. When someone follows Christ they must accept the stewardship that is placed on all Christians so they can love as Jesus loves and put others before themselves.

John Wesley on Stewardship

John Wesley considered stewardship to be a primary focus for Christian discipleship and held it to be at the heart of Methodism. The discipline of giving was seen as an expression of love for both neighbours and God. Towards the end of his life he was concerned that the hard work of those called Methodists, and the caution they exercised in the way they spent their money, was resulting in increasing wealth for them. He saw the Methodist movement threatened by both this and the failure of Methodists to pass on their wealth to others. He believed that as people gained wealth, they became, increasingly proud, angry, lustful and arrogant.

When he was a student, Wesley himself lived on £28 a year. As his income increased over the years, he still only used £28 for himself and gave the rest away. He believed if he possessed £10 when he died, people could accuse him of robbing others. He taught that the way around this was not only to gain all one can, and save all one can but also to give all one can.

'Earning all one can' involves taking part in God's healing and creative work in the world. Methodists were not to earn at the expense of others, at the cost of their own health or by doing work that would violate their Christian principles.

'Saving all one can' encouraged people not so much to accumulate wealth but to use what they earned wisely by living a simple life-style. Wesley believed that stewardship involved as much what people are willing to do without as much as with acquiring possessions. 'Giving all one can' is the reason for the previous two maxims. Methodists earn and save so they can give, considering the needs of others to be as valid as their own. Giving in such a way involves building relationships with those to whom they give. Wesley encouraged people to give personally, rather than using a 'middle man'. This is not just financial giving but involves giving medical care, speaking out for those who have no voice of their own, and mentoring and impacting communities where such help is needed. In this way, those who follow Christ fulfill Jesus' command to love God and their neighbour as they love themselves. Early Methodists worked towards improving the environment in their day. They encouraged people to learn about a cleaner environment and basic health care. As a result their teaching resulted in the lowering of the death rate in England in the 18th century.

God's very nature is to give in love. He gives from pure generosity because of his love for people. The way Christ-followers use the gifts of life and grace are their offerings back to God. How they respond in various circumstances, how they use their time and their money and how they treat others are all gifts of God they can pass on to others and return to God Himself as they serve Him with joy.

Wesley was certain that if people give in this way, which was modelled to humanity by God, they would always have enough for their own needs. In his own words he said: "(Money) is an excellent gift of God, answering the noblest ends. In the hands of his children, it is food for the hungry, drink for the thirsty, raiment for the naked. It gives to the traveler and the stranger where

to lay his head. By it we may supply the place of a husband to the widow, and of a father for the fatherless; we may be a defence for the oppressed, a means of health to the sick, of ease to them that are in pain. It may be as eyes to the blind, as feet to the lame; yea, a lifter up from the gates of death."

Icebreaker:

Who would you say was your best friend in school? What was so special about the relationship? Are you still in touch with one another? Why/why not?

Application

- *'Earn all you can, give all you can, save all you can.'* How does Wesley's perspective on *stewardship and sharing what we have with others* relate to your own perspective? *What is God saying to you through Wesley's words today? What, if anything, do you think you may need to change?*
- How does the concept of earning a good salary so you can share more generously make you feel? Why do you think this is so?
- Jesus commanded us to love one another. How do you feel you are doing? Where do you think you could love more?
- How does the love you have for God express itself in the love you have for those around you and for creation? Where do you struggle the most in this regard?
- How would you describe your relationship with the poor? Are you satisfied with the way you relate to them? Why/why not? What one step could you take to build a relationship this coming week to help you to learn their actual needs, rather than the needs you presume they have?
- Humanity has abused creation for generations. What specific area of the abuse of creation hurts you the most? What could you do to make a difference?
- How can the group help you with the struggles you have mentioned during this session?

Prayer

Pray for one another in regard to the issues that have been raised during your discussion time, and in regard to other needs of the group.

Service

How can you be a good steward this week? In response to the conclusions you personally have made in regard to this study, what one step can you take to line up more closely with Jesus' command to love one another? (You may decide to consider creation in your response.) Take that step this week and report back to the group next time you meet as to what you decided and what happened.