

Amos 5:6-7, 10-15

Seek the LORD and live,
or else God might rush like a fire against the house of Joseph.
The fire will burn up Bethel, with no one to put it out.
Doom to you who turn justice into poison,
and throw righteousness to the ground!
They hate the one who judges at the city gate,
and they reject the one who speaks the truth.
Truly, because you crush the weak,
and because you tax their grain,
you have built houses of carved stone,
but you won't live in them;
you have planted pleasant vineyards,
but you won't drink their wine.
I know how many are your crimes,
and how numerous are your sins—
afflicting the righteous,
taking money on the side,
turning away the poor who seek help.
Therefore, the one who is wise will keep silent in that time;
it is an evil time.
Seek good and not evil,
that you may live;
and so the LORD, the God of heavenly forces,
will be with you just as you have said.
Hate evil, love good,
and establish justice at the city gate.
Perhaps the LORD God of heavenly forces
will be gracious to what is left of Joseph.

Hebrews 4:12-16

¹²because God's word is living, active, and sharper than any two-edged sword. It penetrates to the point that it separates the soul from the spirit and the joints from the marrow. It's able to judge the heart's thoughts and intentions. ¹³No creature is hidden from it, but rather everything is naked and exposed to the eyes of the one to whom we have to give an answer.

¹⁴Also, let's hold on to the confession since we have a great high priest who passed through the heavens, who is Jesus, God's Son; ¹⁵because we don't have a high priest who can't sympathize with our weaknesses but instead one who was tempted in every way that we are, except without sin.

¹⁶Finally, let's draw near to the throne of favor with confidence so that we can receive mercy and find grace when we need help.

Mark 10:17-31

¹⁷ As Jesus continued down the road, a man ran up, knelt before him, and asked, “Good Teacher, what must I do to obtain eternal life?”

¹⁸ Jesus replied, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except the one God. ¹⁹ You know the commandments: *Don't commit murder. Don't commit adultery. Don't steal. Don't give false testimony. Don't cheat. Honor your father and mother.*”^[c]

²⁰ “Teacher,” he responded, “I've kept all of these things since I was a boy.”

²¹ Jesus looked at him carefully and loved him. He said, “You are lacking one thing. Go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor. Then you will have treasure in heaven. And come, follow me.” ²² But the man was dismayed at this statement and went away saddened, because he had many possessions.

²³ Looking around, Jesus said to his disciples, “It will be very hard for the wealthy to enter God's kingdom!” ²⁴ His words startled the disciples, so Jesus told them again, “Children, it's difficult to enter God's kingdom! ²⁵ It's easier for a camel to squeeze through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter God's kingdom.”

²⁶ They were shocked even more and said to each other, “Then who can be saved?”

27 Jesus looked at them carefully and said, “It’s impossible with human beings, but not with God. All things are possible for God.”

28 Peter said to him, “Look, we’ve left everything and followed you.”

29 Jesus said, “I assure you that anyone who has left house, brothers, sisters, mother, father, children, or farms because of me and because of the good news **30** will receive one hundred times as much now in this life—houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and farms (with harassment)—and in the coming age, eternal life. **31** But many who are first will be last. And many who are last will be first.”

Sermon

[God’s Pie \(Video\)](#)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father, our resurrected Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit: Amen.

Today, we begin our three series on Stewardship. That's right, we're going to walk together through three ways that God calls us to become stewards. Today we'll discuss how God calls us to utilize our Time as stewards of grace. Next week we'll look into how God invites us to put our Talents into the service of the Gospel. We'll culminate on Reformation Sunday with a conversation about how God challenges us to put our Treasures to work for God's Kingdom. Time, Talent, and Treasure for the sake of the Gospel – that is the focus of this series.

Before we dive in, though, let me assuage a few concerns. The goal of this series isn't take your money away from you, or to add even more appointments to an overstuffed calendar, or force you to work on church-related projects. Let's be honest: I can't force your hands

that way! And even more, I don't want to! Anyone who would try to do that has a distorted view of stewardship.

Stewardship is about using the pie that God brings to make a Kingdom impact on the world in which we live. God brings the pie, so that should shape how we use it! In other words, God gives us the time of our lives. God bestows on us talents to use. God shares with us treasures to bring life. That's the pie, so to speak, that we're called to divvy out in our daily lives. So how do we understand stewardship as an aspect of a vibrant faith rather than a burden of church membership?

Perspectives on stewardship often get distorted, sometimes by the church's treatment of the subject and sometimes by our unquestioned cultural assumptions. So, let's first name a few things that stewardship isn't.

Stewardship isn't about all people giving the same, whether a total amount or a percentage. Remember the story of the

poor widow who gave two copper coins to the treasury at the temple? Jesus praised her giving over that of the rich. She didn't give nearly the same amount that others did, but her commitment to giving led her to give an astronomical percentage of what she had. Nor is stewardship about guilt, though all too often stewardship conversations feel like this kind of blame game. Jesus didn't call out that woman's faithfulness to guilt the rich into giving more, but to reshape how we think about stewardship. Stewardship is about conviction that we give of ourselves not because we can or even because we should, but because we're called to make a difference in the world. Jesus has given us the resources of our lives, our time, talent, and treasures, to make that difference on his behalf. That's what stewardship is all about.

The goal of this series is to help us, as a people given new life by Jesus Christ, orient our lives around our priorities.

Yeah, you heard that right. Stewardship is ultimately about how you prioritize your life, in light of God's work, and how you make those priorities come alive. We often get bogged down in stewardship because we think that someone is just trying to take our money away, right? All too often churches feel like the pastor is up front begging for a salary or some committee is clamoring for a new building. Even the fear of paying the normal bills for things like electricity. Let's be honest about that. This is an anxiety inducing conversation.

One of the fortunate realities of being a Redevelopment congregation like us is that for the immediate future, we don't need to worry about keeping the lights on. I'm not pleading for a paycheck, because all that's handled by our redevelopment funds for the next three years. When we talk about stewardship, we're talking about a long term commitment, one that we need to start making now. We're talking about creating habits of giving

that help to ensure there's a congregation here that carries on vital ministries years after all of us are gone, ensuring things like worship and Across the Spectrum and Highlander Lutherans and Healing Services and Rough Draught Coffeehouses happen to continue the mission of God in our community. We're talking about investing in the work of God here, in the New River Valley, through the people of Christ Lutheran Church. So today, we're not gonna talk about monetary stewardship anymore. If we're talking about establishing and ensuring the future of CLC, what we're talking about is time.

“Seek the Lord, and live!” Isaiah calls out to us, seek the Lord and there you will find abundant life. Use the time of your life to seek the Lord, and with that search you will find life abundant. If we live as good stewards of the time we're given to live, then we'll find the abundant life Jesus offers in the Kingdom of God.

What does this look like? What is stewardship of time?

Let's watch this video and get a bit of perspective. TIME USE

VIDEO

The video's a bit intense, but that pressing nature is part of the point. Time is a gift, it is the only present that we live in for our entire lives, but one that we can't acquire more of. Nor can we depend on how much time we have left. We can only depend on the time that we're living right now, so much so that it's our most valuable resource. More than talents. More than treasures. Because without time to use well, then there's no way for us to leverage our talents and treasures for God's work in the world.

As the video points out, the time we use is an investment. To seek the Lord is an investment. It's like liquidating every asset you have and putting it all in one stock. After recent news in the auto industry, though, just make sure that stock isn't Volkswagen. This is the kind of time

investment that we see in the disciples. As Peter says, “Lord, we’ve left everything to follow you.” In other words, all of our time is wrapped up in you, everything that we once had is now devoted to you.

How we use our time is ultimately a reflection of our priorities. And that’s why stewardship is about prioritizing our lives. We may say that we value certain things, certain relationships, but where and how we spend our time reveals our true commitments.

The Creation story in Genesis helps us to see God’s value on time, and through that, the kind of values we’re called to live out as we invest our time in life. We read that, for six days, God worked at making this world a beautiful, life-giving place to thrive for all creation. God used six days to make the world better and better. And on the seventh day, God rested. God took time to enjoy creation, to rest and rejuvenate after hard work. Our time is meant to be in

this balance of giving life and receiving life. We're meant to support the lives of others and to rejuvenate the life that God gave us to live.

From this God give perspective, how can we, in the words of this video, "invest in every opportunity...(and) make the best of every opportunity"? When we talk about stewardship of time, about making the time that we have matter, there's a few pointed questions we can ask ourselves that help us see where we need to make changes in our lives. For instance, we might ask, "Is what I'm doing life giving?" For six days in creation, God gave life to others, and in the seventh day, gave space for that divine life to rest and rejuvenate, to grow in appreciation for the life created. For us to be good stewards of time, we need to use our time to give life. This happens in a number of ways. Parents give life as they tuck children in and pack school lunches and work to provide a healthy environment for their

family to grow. Web developers give life as they create tools for human interaction and art for human appreciation. Of course, these things can run out of control as well. Too much work becomes a detriment rather than a blessing to a family. Despite the good gifts that web developers create, I'm not sure that binging twelve consecutive hours of Game of Thrones is life giving for anyone, and that's coming from a fan. "Is what I'm doing life giving" is a question about stewardship, and if the answer is no, we know we need to change our behavior.

Another way to think about the stewardship of time is to ask this question: "Who are we living for?" Amos doesn't say, "Seek self satisfaction and live!" No! Seek the Lord and live. Peter and the disciples don't say, "we've abandoned our old life for an even more self centered approach to the world, to follow our own desires 24/7!" No! Lord, we've left everything and followed you. Think even about the creation

story. God spends the vast majority of time working to ensure the thriving of others, to support abundant life for everyone else. Six out of seven days are spent totally devoted to someone else, and even the seventh day is spent with others! Alongside creation. Walking in the garden in the cool of the day alongside Eve and Adam.

So, for us, as a church, we must consider the stewardship of our time, being sure that what we're doing is life giving, and focused on giving life to others. This is incredibly important for us as we continue in the redevelopment process. If the only reason we want to grow as a congregation is survival, then we're missing the boat. That's not good stewardship. Think again to the Genesis story. Living the majority of our lives for the sake of someone else is good stewardship. As we consider our future, the question we should be asking is not, "Can we survive next

year?" but instead "How can we bless someone in the future?" How can we use our time to bless others?

Around the church, we know of a number of ways that we can work to bless others. Across the Spectrum and Highlander Lutherans and Rough Draught Coffee House and the like, and I'd love to see more participation in each of those things and all of our ministries. But what I'm talking about is more of a cultural shift, a more fundamental change in how each of us approaches life in the world. This isn't just finding someplace to volunteer a few hours but reorienting our time to God's purposes. This means less time spent entertaining ourselves and more time spent enriching the lives of others. So, I have a time challenge for you. This week I'm sure you'll find some time where you can choose what you will do. The challenge is this. Six out of seven times, choose to do something life-giving for someone else first. Rather than watch T.V. or mow your own yard or take a

nap, visit one of our shut in members. Call someone who hasn't been to church in a long time. Do chores for someone who is having a difficult time. Serve at the local soup kitchen or clothing bank. Pick up garbage at a park. Do something to bless someone else six out of seven times.

Here's the interesting thing about that approach. It allows you the permission to spend time on yourself every seventh time not as a selfish act but as a commission from God to rejuvenate, to find life yourself just as you've been giving life to others. Even more than this, we may discover the balance that God intended for life, where we find the life we need as we serve the lives of others. It helps us to find the joy in living for others. To experience the cleanliness of the park as God intended creation to be is surely life giving for us as well. To hear the joy in an old friend's voice is surely life giving for us as well. To help fill empty stomachs and warm cold bodies surely brings to us a new appreciation for

the lives we've been given to live, for the time that we've been blessed with.

I'm convinced that, the more we live our lives for others, the more others live their lives for us. If we, as a community, commit to spend more time caring for others than ourselves, we will be actively caring for the needs not only of this church, but of the NRV community. This is the kind of exponential impact even a small congregation like ours can have. Not only with the mundane things be cared for - watering the memorial garden, painting the lift rooms, and all sorts of other things that need done with our time - but as our community reaches out, we will become more connected, a larger web of interrelated people who celebrate with those who are joyful, who mourn with those who are sad, who work for those who are in need, and whose time is always wrapped up in the mission of God.

That's the time of our lives, and oh, what a time it will be.

Amen.