

**ALL HIS**  
**Psalm 24:1**  
**(some words and ideas in the second half are**  
**from Timothy Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*)**

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**Amarillo, Texas**  
**November 12, 2023**

I could feel the excitement in the hallway this morning. It's not quite Easter anticipation levels, but surely our annual stewardship sermon is a very close second. If it becomes necessary, our ushers are prepared to bring in some chairs to accommodate an overflow crowd.

Stewardship Sunday Sermon. Oh, it's your favorite. It's my favorite. I know we'll get a lot of playback watches online, and our duplicator is ready with the expected DVD sales from this Sunday. We're prepared. We know it's a big day.

Our text comes from Psalm 24.

“The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains,  
The world, and those who dwell in it.  
For He has founded it upon the seas  
And established it upon the waters.”

The Living Bible translates it this way: “The earth belongs to God; everything in all the world is His. He is the one who pushed the oceans back and let dry land appear.”

Psalm 24 is ascribed to David. The psalm begins with the confession that God is creator. Playing in the background, we hear the music of Genesis 1 – “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” All creation has origin in God and, therefore, belongs to Him. The fullness – or all that it contains, all that fills creation – belongs to Him.

And we know through Paul, through the New Testament, that all things have come into being by God through Christ. “For by Christ, all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or principalities or power – all things have been created through Him and for Him” (Colossians 1:16; cf. John 1).

Characteristically, the first emphatic Hebrew word is “The Lord's” in (24:1) and “He” (24:2). “The Lord's” – that's the earth and all it contains, and “He” is the one who founded it upon the seas. God is dominate.

And Colossians 1:19 says, “For it pleased God the Father that in Christ all the fullness should dwell.”

All the things at our disposal – our houses, our hobbies, our bank accounts, our boats, our motorcycles, our motor homes, our clothes, and our cars – they all belong to the Christ. For he created us with the energy and intellect to empower us to produce – not from nothing but from what He has already made.

Not only does he own all the fullness of the earth, He possesses all the creatures of the earth – all those who dwell therein. Look at verse 1 again. “The earth is the Lord’s and all it contains, the world” – and notice the end of verse 1 – “and those who dwell on the earth.” For He is the one who pulled back the waters and gave us dry land. We declare in Psalm 100, “He is God; it is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people and the sheep of His pasture.”

Sometimes we confuse a stewardship sermon with a pep talk about generosity. And it is uncomfortable sometimes. But stewardship is about God owning not only all that you have, but He owns you, too.

### **I. We must be good caretakers, good stewards, of our financial resources.**

The first thing the Bible ever says about stewardship is what is stated here in Psalm 24, for it echoes the very first words of God. “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1)

Ever buttoned a shirt where you get the first button wrong and, therefore, the buttons and holes are misaligned all the way down? You have to start all over again. That’s happened to me before, and sometimes it happens when I’m in a hurry. I’m not trying to create anxiety for you – I already have the anxiety – but unlike the usual preacher of old, I don’t wear wading boots in the baptistry. I’m really in the water, really getting wet, and I really do have to dry off and change clothes.

From the baptism that begins the service to Pastor’s Pals, which soon follows, the more anxious I am getting myself together to pop through that door at just the right time when Dan says, “It’s time for our children to join our pastor at the front.” The pressure causes mistakes as I am getting ready. One Sunday I did exactly that. I got the first button out of line, got buttoned all the way down and realized I had 20 seconds to unbutton, re-button, and be ready for Pastor’s Pals. Get the first button wrong, and everything that follows is off.

Just so is the idea of God being creator and owner. Nothing else in the Bible, including the idea of stewardship, will make any sense if we miss the fact that God is the creator and has full rights and ownership of it all. The biblical doctrine of stewardship identifies our right relationship with God – God is owner and we are stewards, managers. Stewardship is not about God taking something from us. Stewardship is the discipline of acknowledging that God is owner and provider of everything. We are simply obediently returning a portion of what is already His.

The idea of stewardship is that in giving the ten percent we are reminded that God really owns 100 percent. God owns it all. And how we use all the financial resources set before us is important, not just “take off God’s ten and I can do what I want with the rest.” God owns it all. And cares about it all.

As a novice in the Catholic religious order, Ronald Rolheiser was taught the importance of religious poverty by having to write “*Ad Usam*” inside every book he was given. This was to teach him the book was given to him for his use (*ad usam* means “for use”), not for his ownership. He was a steward of the book, not the owner. This applied to everything he was given, no matter what. They were only had “*ad usam*.”

One of Ronald’s friends, another novice, eventually left the community and pursued a career in medicine. Years later, Ronald picked up one of the friend’s medical textbooks and found “*ad usam*” inscribed inside of it. “Why that in your medical book?” asked Rolheiser. The once religious order member now turned doctor replied, “Even though I no longer belong to a religious order and no longer have to have the vow of poverty, I still like to live by the principle that our novice master taught us. In the end, we really don’t own anything.” (Ronald Rolheiser, “Our One Great Act of Fidelity: Waiting for Christ in the Eucharist,” *Image*, 2015)

The discipline of tithing reminds us who is in charge. It certainly makes us grateful for the remainder He allows us to use to manage our households, put food on the table and clothes our back. We’re reminded it’s His food that we eat, it’s His clothes that we wear, His money that we invest, for He owns it all.

Each one of us is Adam. Adam was put into the garden – God’s garden – to be caretaker of God’s creation. Humanity was created to be a good steward – to care for all creation, all that God has given. God owns it all, and we’re simply managers or administrators acting on His behalf. Deuteronomy 8:18 says, “Remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you the ability to produce wealth.”

Of course, Jesus echoes this same truth in the parable of the talents. In Matthew 25, the kingdom of God is like a man about to go on a journey who calls his servants and entrusts his possessions to them. To one he gave five talents, to another, two, and to another, one, each according to his own ability; and he went on his journey. You remember the end of the story. The one entrusted with five talents doubled them and gave back ten talents. The one who received two talents gained two more – doubled his money, a 100 percent return. Then the one who received one talent went away, dug a hole in the ground, and just hid his master’s money. The master finally returned and called the servants to give an account on how they had managed his resources. What have they done with the money from the master?

“Oh, you gave me five, and I made five more.”

“Well done, thou good and faithful servant. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.”

The two-talent servant reported the same. But the one-talent recipient just hid the talent in the ground and didn’t invest wisely or produce anything. And the master replies, “You could have at least put the money in the bank, then I would have received a little bit of interest. You didn’t make anything.” He took away the talent and gave it to the one who already had ten.

Yes, Jesus – maybe even more so than Genesis – presents God, the master, as one who has expectations of our stewardship of all that he entrusts to us.

Tithing reminds us

A. God is the owner of it all.

B. We are responsible for how we use all the resources God has given us.

Our individual budgets must make God and His place of worship – our church – a priority. Second to nothing. Bring the first fruits into the storehouse, not the leftovers (Exodus 23:19).

God is not stingy with us, and we must not be stingy with His church. Where does our giving to our place of worship – the storehouse of God in Malachi – rank in our budget expenditures? Is God first or last? How we spend our money matters; God wants to be the first line in our budgets – first fruits.

A woman finished a tiring day of shopping and returned to her car to find four men inside it. She was frantic and frustrated. She immediately dropped her shopping bags, drew a handgun from her purse, and with a forceful voice said, “I have a gun and I know how to use it. Get out of the car.” Those men did not wait for a second invitation. They scrambled and ran like crazy. The woman was understandably shaken. She quickly loaded her shopping bags and got into her car. She kept looking around to see where the villains were. She wanted to get out of there and get home as fast as she could. But no matter how she tried, she could not get her key into the ignition. Then it hit her: This wasn’t her car. It looked just like her car – same make and model, same color, interior and exterior. But there her car was, parked four or five spaces away. She got out nervously and looked around to see where the men might be. She then loaded the shopping bags into her own car and drove to the police station to turn herself in. The desk sergeant, after hearing her story, nearly fell out of his chair laughing. He pointed to the other end of the counter where four men were reporting a car jacking by a woman with glasses, curly white hair, less than five feet tall, and carrying a very large handgun. No charges were filed. (Greg Laurie “A Time to Worship,” *Decision Magazine*, November 2001)

She thought it was her car, but it really belonged to someone else.

The truth is, your car belongs to someone else, too. I don’t care what the registration says. Your car belongs to God. God owns everything. He owns the car that she drove, and He owns the one that she accidentally got into. He owns all that we call “ours.” He owns it all.

When we confuse ourselves as the owner rather than the steward, we are constantly in conflict with God over what we should do with the things that we have. But when we begin to understand that God is the owner and that we’re just managers, the conflict disappears. We can find joy in giving to God, giving to our church, if freedom takes over our life.

Deuteronomy 8:17-18, cautions, “You may say to yourself, ‘My power and my own ability have gained this wealth for me,’ but remember that the Lord your God gives you the power to gain wealth, in order to confirm His covenant He swore to your father, as it is today.”

The David who wrote this psalm understands. In 1 Chronicles 29:14, concerning gifts to build the temple, he says, “But who am I and who are my people that we should be able to give as generously as this? For everything comes from You, and we have given You only what comes from Your own hand.”

## **II. Not only are we to be good stewards of our financial resources, we are to be good stewards of our identity.**

The moment you say “Jesus is Lord,” you become part of a covert operation, the covert operation for the kingdom of God. From that moment forward, your primary responsibility is the coming kingdom of God, reconciling the Creator with His creation, bringing others into restoration and redemption. Just like God doesn’t want us to think just ten percent of what we have is His, He doesn’t want ten percent of your time either. He wants to be your primary cause.

I recently heard Dr. Jane Patterson define vocation as: “How we take our places as agents of God’s mission to reconcile all things to God and to one another.” Your vocation is not being a banker or a baker, a lawyer or a landscaper, a mechanic or a machinist, a custodian or a car salesman. Those are just the ways that you earn a living in order to serve the kingdom of God. I know it’s radically re-thinking what discipleship means. The Apostle Paul was what? A tent maker (as were Prisca and Aquilla). But he made tents in order to make money so he could travel to towns and villages to preach the gospel.

The reality is we’re all bi-vocational missionaries, the biblical pattern for spreading the good news. Your vocation is taking your place as an agent of God’s kingdom to reconcile things and people into right relationship to God. God cares about the products we make, the companies we work for, and the customers we serve. Vocation comes from the word “calling,” the Latin word *vocare* – to call. The root of our word vocation (Tim Keller).

A job is a vocation only if someone else calls you to do it, and you do it for them rather than for yourself. Our work can be a calling, says Tim Keller, only if it is reimagined as a mission of service to someone beyond merely our own interests. We must always integrate our faith with our work. Being faithful in the workplace means that there is some way in which your co-workers identify you with Jesus in such a way as a companion, a co-worker, might want to know more about Jesus because of you.

Martin Luther and John Calvin argued that all work, even so-called secular work, was as much a calling from God as the ministry of the monk or priest.

1. The way to serve God at work is to personally be honest and share good news with your colleagues.
2. The way to serve God at work is to do a skillful, excellent job, to do whatever you do as if you’re doing it unto the Lord.
3. A way to serve God at work is to create beauty in all that you do and make.

4. A way to serve God at work is to work with a grateful, joyful, gospel-changed heart through all the ups and downs, mergers and mundane moments.

5. A way to serve God at work is to make as much money as you can and be as generous as you can to His people.

Your goal at work is not just self-fulfillment, but service to God.

You see it on the mission field. We send engineers into a third-world country because preachers can't get in. But the engineer knows his engineering is primarily an open door into the country through which to carry the gospel.

Or a horticulturist is allowed into a culture that is without the Christ story. A church planter can't get in, but someone who knows how to help the farmers produce more fruit has an opening. So the horticulturist goes in knowing that he is helping with the apple crop in order to really bring a harvest into God's kingdom.

Or the doctor who is allowed into a country because of her medical knowledge, where a full-time missionary could never go. I think of the work of Dr. Rebekah Naylor. In 2016, she received the American College of Surgeons Surgical Humanitarian Award. Dr. Naylor served the International Mission Board (whom we support) for 35 years as a surgeon, administrator, and teacher at the Bangalore Baptist Hospital in Karnataka, India. She established an adjoining nursing school, now named in her honor: The Rebekah Ann Naylor School of Nursing.

A reporter asked Dr. Naylor about her balance between mission and medicine.

“Did you feel conflicted between the two paths, the medical and the mission path? Was there ever difficulty balancing medicine?”

“Oh no, from the beginning they were totally integrated. For me, it was important to do both at the same time.” Dr. Naylor says this should be true for every believer. Whatever we do, we should clearly be identified as a follower of Jesus. Professionals spend so many hours in the work place, and there is great opportunity to share with colleagues.

Naylor says, “Meeting needs alone is not going to bring people to faith. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God, but we are to meet needs while we speak the Word. We can't separate demonstration and proclamation.”

She cared for her patients, but also told them about Christ. There was a time when Rebekah Naylor was the only Baptist missionary in all of India. Naylor's words to Americans are: “You need to be sharing your faith right now, right where you are. When you go overseas, you don't just automatically start telling people about Jesus. Our evangelism has to be lived out in our present context.” (Eliza Thomas, “Integrating Medicine and Mission: Award-Winning Surgeon Dr. Rebekah Naylor on Her Life's Work,” IMB, 11/28/2016)

Before you are an insurance salesman or a bail bondsman, you are a disciple maker, a covert worker for God's kingdom. What's true of the Christian doctor in India, of the farmer who is a

follower of Christ here in Texas, our main job – our vocation, our calling – is to work out what we do for God’s good.

Our church has started a new “Bridges” program that helps our church members discover their calling. We have groups meeting right now, and there will be some groups in the future. Many folks have signed up, and it is going so well. The Bridges program specifically helps you see, discover how your faith is integrated into your work. The conversation answers questions like “Does my work matter to God?” “Where does work fit into God’s plan for my life?” “How do I involve or include God in my workplace?”

Your life, your money, your all – *ad usam*. For God owns the earth and all that it contains. It’s all His. And not just all the earth, but you – those who dwell in it.

*Reader’s Digest* tells a story about a traveler between flights in an airport who went to the lounge and bought a small package of cookies. She sat down and began reading a newspaper. Gradually, she became aware of a rustling noise. From behind her paper, she was flabbergasted to see a very neatly dressed man helping himself to her cookies. Not wanting to make a scene, she leaned over and took another cookie herself – as if to re-establish her ownership. A minute or two passed, and then came some more rustling. He was helping himself, can you believe it, to another cookie. After a while, they came to the end of the package with one cookie left. She was so angry she didn’t dare allow herself to say anything. And to add insult to injury, the man broke the remaining cookie in two, pushed half across to her, ate the other half, and got up and left. She was fuming. Then the flight attendants announced, “Get out your boarding pass, it’s time to board the plane.” Looking in her purse for her boarding pass – to her shock and horror – she found her entire package of unopened cookies.

Although God gives us all things richly to enjoy, nothing is ours. Nothing really belongs to us. We are always eating God’s cookie. While we complain about our rights on earth, the Bible constantly asks, “What about your responsibilities?” Owners have rights; stewards have responsibilities.

To whom do you and all He has entrusted to you belong?