

Stewardship: Our Lives

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 26 February 2012

Preacher: Franklin Tseng

[0 : 00] Okay. How you guys doing? Everybody's really quiet after that. What's up with that? Hey, we are finishing up a three-part series that we did, what we've been doing on stewardship.

And so today we talked about stewardship of God's Word, was two weeks ago. We talked about stewardship of God's money and the stuff that God's given us.

And today we're going to talk about the stewardship of our lives. And so with that, I want to read the passage in your bulletin. So would you please stand with me and let's read God's Word together and honor His Word as we read it.

And we're just going to look at the passage today comes from the book of Joshua and the book of Judges. And you can follow along in your bulletin. The people have just been released from captivity in Egypt after 400 years.

They've wandered in the desert for 40 years. And now they are about to enter into the promised land. And we picked up in verse 1. Now when all the nation had finished crossing the Jordan, the Lord spoke to Joshua, saying, Take up for yourself twelve men from the people, one man from each tribe.

[1 : 07] Command them, saying, Take up for yourself twelve stones from here out of the middle of the Jordan, from the place where the priest's feet are standing firm. And carry them over with you and lay them down in the lodging place where you will lodge tonight. So Joshua called the twelve men whom he had appointed from the sons of Israel, one man from each tribe.

And Joshua said to them, Cross again to the ark of the Lord your God in the middle of the Jordan. And each one of you take up a stone on his shoulder according to the number of tribes of the sons of Israel. Let this be a sign among you so that when your children ask later, saying, What do these stones mean?

Then you will say to them, Because the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord when it crossed the Jordan. The waters of the Jordan were cut off. So these stones shall be a memorial to the sons of Israel forever.

Thus the sons of Israel did as Joshua commanded, and they took up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, just as the Lord spoke to Joshua, according to the number of tribes of the sons of Israel. And they carried them over with them to the lodging place and put them down there.

Then Joshua set up the twelve stones in the middle of the Jordan at the place where the feet of the priest who carried the ark of the covenant were standing, and they are there to this day. For the priests who carried the ark were standing in the middle of the Jordan until everything was completed that the Lord had commanded Joshua to speak to the people.

[2 : 21] According to all that Moses had commanded Joshua, and the people hurried and crossed. And when all the people had finished crossing, the ark of the Lord and the priests crossed before the people. Then after many years we're told that if Joshua leading God's people, we're told that Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died at the age of 110, and they buried him in the territory of his inheritance, Timnaheres, in the hill country of Ephraim, north of the Mount Gash.

All that generation were also gathered to their fathers, and then there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord, nor yet the work which he had done for Israel. This is God's reading.

Please be seated. The people of Israel had seen amazing things. They had been in captivity for 400 years, and God raised up a deliverer to come in and to deliver them, and now they have been walking in the wilderness for 40 years in the desert.

God had been feeding this mass of people for 40 years. Can you think of that? Every day a cloud followed them and covered them from the heat to protect them from the heat of the desert, and at

night a pillar of fire came to give them warmth.

The clothes they had on their back, we're told in Scripture, the clothes they had never wore out. Now I don't know how you would feel about wearing the same pair of pants and jeans for 40 years. My wife could not get into that, and most of us probably couldn't either, but the clothes never wore out.

[3 : 50] They had water for 40 years from a rock that followed them around, and now they are about to enter into the promised land, and the Lord has them set up a memorial, a reminder for them of God's faithfulness.

Actually, it's a reminder of God and what he's done in their life and how he's gone before them. It's a reminder of God's relationship with us.

It's a reminder of God's stewardship to his people. The stones just don't represent memories of the great and amazing things that God did, but they represent God's presence with them now and how he always will go before them, and he will always work and do things.

And so when people looked at these stones, it was a memory of these things, but it was also a memory of them because there was one taken for every tribe, and these stones represented the people of God.

These represented God's people. In verse 6, I find it very interesting. He says, what do these stones mean to you? It's very personal.

[4 : 52] What does God's faithfulness mean to you? As you look around and you see symbols of God's working in your life, what does that mean to you? When you see the things that God has brought you into and the places that he takes you, when you see his stewardship and how he's gone before you so obviously, what does that mean to you?

And how will you share with your children the amazing things that God has done in our life? I've asked Franklin to come up.

Franklin and Therese have been with Watermark almost from the beginning. They came right afterwards. Franklin, and you've seen them walking around. They are an amazing couple.

They came from Beijing. Franklin was actually born in Hong Kong. Therese was born in Taiwan. And they have been married for almost 30 years. Therese, is that correct?

I just want to make sure, because Franklin told me. I just want to make sure he's correct on that.

Okay, and so Franklin has been working with some back in Beijing and in China and America with some large corporations.

[5 : 59] And now he's kind of at a different stage of his life where he's kind of his own boss. And so I've kind of asked him to come up and share of God's stewardship and faithfulness in his life in the things that God has been teaching him.

So Franklin, will you come on up and share with us? Thank you, Tobin and the worship team. And the powerful video that we have.

The question that the video showed was, how do we feel in that dash in our life? The dash from the date when we are born to the date where we leave this earth.

How do we want our life to be remembered? And how we want God to remember us as? I think these are all great questions to ask ourselves every day, examine ourselves.

Several weeks ago when I was asked to share with you about stewardship and how it relates to my life, I told Tobin that talking about my life is easy to let pride creep in and that I've done this and done that, I've been successful in this and that.

[7 : 05] So I pray that the Lord, the Holy Spirit will guide me, guide my thoughts as Apostle Paul reminded us in 2 Corinthians that if I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness because Jesus Christ is my strength.

The Bible passages that I will be quoting will be in the bulletin. So what is stewardship? And it took me a while to check out, make sure that I got the definition correct.

And it is a responsibility to take care of something belonging to someone else or entrust it to our care and we should exercise diligence and responsible management towards it.

So what are the things that doesn't belong to us but we have to care for? So from the very beginning of the Bible in Genesis 1, verse 27-28, So God created man in his own image.

In the image of God, he created him. Male and female, he created them. God blessed them and said to them, Be fruitful and increase in number.

[8 : 17] Fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the seas and birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground. Throughout the Bible, God constantly reminded us and reminded me that everything we have were created by him and belongs to him.

And that included me and you. God also gave man the responsibility to make productive use of what he gave us so that it will be fruitful and it will multiply by managing it responsibly, cultivating it, exercising control and influence over it.

And I look back, you know, as engineers or scientists or businessmen or even students, it's easy for us to think that we have made things.

We make things, we build things. I was in construction and built things. And finance things as a banker or as students. We've got excellent grades, exceptional grades in exams.

We do it all with our own strength, tenacity, take credit for all that work. But let's take a look, think about it.

[9 : 27] Examine a small part of a body, for example. Without the wondrous and miraculous brain that God created for in each one of us and somehow being connected to our hands and feet, without that connection in the most miraculous way, we could do nothing.

We cannot even have the ability to lift up a feather with our fingers. So the last two weeks, we have explored the stewardship of God's word and money. And in discussing my life, allow me to be transparent and vulnerable to you.

Allow me to reveal the things that has happened in my life as it relates to stewardship of relationships, time, work, children, etc. All such things that have valuable lessons that have taught me and have enriched my life abundantly.

Hopefully, it will be an encouragement to you also. I've divided my life into three phases. The first phase is about my spiritual journey.

I came from a large, non-believing family. Don't be scared. A family with 12 kids. I went to Catholic school, in primary school, which taught me that there is God and our God is authoritarian and disciplinarian to us.

[10 : 51] When I do something wrong, I will be punished unless I go into confession. And the way to redemption was to say the Lord's Prayer and Hail Mary so many times a day.

So from very young age, I know and was fearful of this God. But on the other hand, knowing that this God will save me from troubles, so I prayed often, saying the Lord's Prayer and Hail Mary as I was told to do so.

Then when I entered junior high and high school, I went to a Protestant school. There, the Bible was a required subject that I must study in order to go through high school.

The subject was called biblical knowledge, so we were taught knowledge about the Bible.

Unfortunately, in those years, we were caught by a change in the education system in Hong Kong, and the foreign teachers have to leave us.

And the one who ended up teaching me the last couple of years of high school smoked and swore in and out of class. So what taught to me from the Bible was a total contradiction to the behavior of the teacher.

[12 : 05] Yes, I have gained some knowledge of the Bible, but it was absolutely no meaning to me. It was just a story, and I really disliked the memorization of the historical facts that was required in the exams.

And let's look at my family. My parents were good people, honorable people, taught me how to be a gentleman, honest, hardworking, diligent man that I can, you know, ought to be.

My father made the conscientious effort to sit down with us almost every Sunday morning to try to impact us with his stories and values repeatedly.

But all 12 of us behaved very differently as we grew up in terms of values and personality. He had tried very hard to impact us from a young age, but not all of us enjoyed this time with him or appreciate all the things he says.

There was not an authoritative standard of value and behavior that we can learn and love to live by. After high school, I went to the United States for college.

[13 : 17] And there, I left my family and was approached for the first time actively by Christian brothers and sisters. In Wisconsin that I went to, the brothers and sisters, the Christian brothers and sisters were very tenacious, and they kept on asking me if I were a Christian every time I met them.

When I told them I was not, they went their way to fellowship with others, leaving me cold in the fellowship. So that had turned me off and I stopped going to the Bible study group after a few times. And I graduated from Wisconsin and then went on to grad school. And it was when I got to grad school that something had changed. The brothers and sisters in the Chinese Bible study group there was very warm and inviting.

It allowed me to search and seek the Bible freely, asking questions and accepting my sometimes off-the-wall answers. The summer after I went to grad school, looking for a place to live, a brother rounded up 12 others and rented a house and called it the Christian house.

Though I was not a Christian, then they invited me in, accepted me as the one of them. There I saw how these Christian brothers and sisters lived their lives, helping each other and encouraging each other, especially in studying the Bible.

[14:42] I have the opportunity to discuss many issues in the Bible with them, openly and in greater depth. After a few months, I began to really want to have that peace and joy that they have.

As I said before, being brought up in a Christian school, all along I knew there is God, but do not know who that God is. It was when I was invited to a retreat that I came to know who Jesus Christ is and why He has made the substitutionary death on the cross for my sins.

and a brother led me to receiving Jesus Christ into my heart as my own personal Savior and Lord. Brothers and sisters, in this city of Hong Kong, where we can meet people so easily with so many events and gatherings, many were brought up with similar background as me.

Heard of God, studied biblical knowledge as a requirement, went to church sometimes, or have encountered unpleasant experiences with other Christians at home, school, or business.

How do we exercise good stewardship to those who God placed in our path, allow us to lead them to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, or are we chasing them away by being either too cold, too warm, too aggressive, or too impersonal?

[16:07] In Romans 10, 14, it reminded me, how then can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?

And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? I'm very glad and blessed that the Lord put loving, caring brothers and sisters in my path who ministered to me at a critical point in my life before I graduated from college and go on to the busy world that was full of distractions and temptations.

Little bit back at this part of my life, God has reached out to me, but I was running away from Him for a long, long time. But a seed was sown in my heart from very young days and along the way, and He never gave up on me to call me home to be with Him.

Let's take a look at the second part of my life. The second phase of my life began after I graduated from college.

This was shortly after I accepted Christ and serving in a church in Boston. I was living a life like a Christian should, doing all the right things. My career has been smooth sailing, never skipped a beat, always had a job despite several economic crises.

[17:32] When I was not satisfied with one job, I would quit and there was another one waiting with more challenges and more responsibilities. Career-wise, I was moving right along, but spiritually, I wasn't growing.

I attended Sunday school, read the Bible occasionally, but found it difficult to understand in boring reading, and my mind often wandered and distracted by work or other things that seemed important for me to do.

after getting married and children came, life was busier than ever. Then the second one, then the third one. When I was in my mid-30s, I faced the so-called midlife crisis.

I was not satisfied with the menial paycheck and small pay raises that decided that it was time to venture out of corporate life despite the steady paycheck was what the family needed.

I went out on my own doing something more independent. It was then that my life rapidly went to a tailspin. Making money was a lot of work, and the more difficult it gets, the harder I want to work to prove that I can do it on my own.

[18:47] As a man, I was trying very hard to be the provider for the family with my own strength.

This had taken a toll on our marriage, and we were constantly fighting for time that I don't have and income that was not coming in steadily to provide for the family.

Through prayers of my wife and brothers that embraced us through those difficult times had brought me back to God's Word through serious, disciplined Bible studies.

and as I spent more time in reading and understanding God's Word, His Word became much more interesting. His Word starts speaking to me with meaning and application to my life.

During this trying period, two passages came to me. Let me share it with you. In Matthew 6, 25 to 27, it says, Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life.

What you will eat or drink or about your body. What you will wear. Is not life more important than food and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds in the air.

[19 : 59] They do not sow or reap or store away in barns and yet your Heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable in the day? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life?

And then the other verse in Psalm 127, verse 1 to 2, as I was building buildings, it meant so much to me because it says, Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain.

Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchers stand guard in vain. In vain, you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat, for he grants sleep to those he loves.

these words have reminded me that I have to let go of my pride in being the provider for my family and allowing God to take care of this family.

And then I, second thing is, I have also decided that I do not want to live in the second part of my life as in the first half, allowing God to be the captain to steer this ship rather than me.

[21 : 08] And the third thing I realized was that work should not only be work, but work should be my mission field. Not long after making those decisions, the Lord opened up the door to me to return to China in 1995.

And for the past 16 years, he has provided much blessings for our family. The Lord know my weakness and has used these difficult times to prepare and equip me so that I will be more ready and matured spiritually to go to places where he had led me to go.

All glory and praises to the Lord. Brothers and sisters, in this high-pressure Hong Kong, we're all struggling to succeed, to be recognized, to build relationships, fighting for time.

Many of you are probably in this stage similar to my first half of my life, looking for opportunities by your own strength and ability. by your likes and dislikes. You may be working very hard to gain the next promotion or looking for the greener pasture next door.

Have you been thankful to the Lord for the blessings that he already gave you? Are you submitting to the Lord to be a provider for all your needs? Are you turning the captain of the ship to God to steer it for you?

[22 : 33] Are we using the opportunity need at work to minister to those who are struggling in career or relationships? Are we reaching out to them, praying for them?

The third phase of my life concerns passing the torch to the next generation. A month ago, something struck me. I went back to my hometown, my wife's hometown of Taipei for a reunion with her brothers.

Teresa came from parents who were believers and prayer warriors. It was when we visited the grave side of her parents. The Lord opened my heart to appreciate our marriage so much more. He allowed me to see how from one set of parents' prayers led to the strong faith from Teresa and her brothers. And now, both of our families have passed our faith to our seven children, three from my side and four from her brother's side.

When we came back and lived in China 16 years ago, just like many of you came back as expats, as an expat, yeah, we have a better pay package, much better benefits, but on the flip side, the company expects a lot out of you.

[23 : 56] They expect you to be on call 24-7, expect you to go on trips, and better, to stay in a hotel with co-workers than spend time with your family. They make you work until your wife and children do not see you at all.

I'm sure many of you felt the same way. Maybe some of you are children of an expat and looking at the lives of your parents, you know exactly what I meant. At that time, our children were four, six, and nine years old when we came to China.

They were at their very active age, ready to absorb anything that was taught by anybody around them. Since I travel so much, making time with the children and Teresa have to be intentional.

because there were always things that needed to be done in the office, or there were phone calls to make, and these days, an email to return from your buzzing smartphones.

When we want to relax, there were hundreds of TV channels or shows and sports, maybe serving the internet, so much interesting things that can consume our time away from our family.

[25 : 06] fortunately, when we were in China in the mid-90s, where the distractions at that time was limited. But even before we came to China from a very young age, we started reading the picture Bible to our children almost daily from cover to cover and pray with them even for the five or ten minutes that sometimes I don't have, that only half.

As they grew older and able to read and understand, we graduated them from the picture Bible to the full NIV Bible. So from a very young age, they have a good overview of the stories and teachings from the Bible.

With the three of them, sometimes it's hard. They were at different level of reading skills, so both Teresa and I have to juggle to read the Bible to all three of them, until they can do it on their own.

When I had to travel a lot in China, after talking with them over the phone, checking on their needs, oftentimes I would pray with them over the phone, letting them know that they would have to depend on the Lord for their studies, for their exams, or other challenges in their life.

During our conversations, we let our children know that we are also depending on the Lord for our decisions. so that they can model after us. While in China, we go to the international church, at that time, the community groups were not very well organized, and when the children stepped in the teen years, the youth groups were not developed, and our children did not click well with the kids in the groups.

[26 : 53] so we have tried different things, but it was through spending time at home with them, and our weekly devotions, that we were able to give them spiritual nourishment.

We have dedicated every Sunday evenings to our family devotion, and intentionally, we made no appointments or engagements with anyone. an hour to two every Sunday evening, we sat together to go over our schedules and needs, and to read and discuss passages in the Bible, and sometimes what we learned from the sermon.

It was through these frequent encounters with God's Word and how it interrelated to our daily lives that they came to personal knowledge and acceptance of Jesus Christ into their daily lives, and were baptized in Beijing.

Now that our three children all graduated from college and they are living away from us in New York City, they face similar pressure and distractions like I did when I would first enter industry, if not worse.

The three of them felt the need to hold onto each other accountable and continue with this family tradition by getting together once a week in devotions and prayers for each other.

[28 : 12] For us, as parents, this is the greatest blessing and assurance that the Lord can give us. Not to say that we have succeeded. There are still many challenges ahead in their lives because the world consistently pulled them in different directions.

It's hard to believe where the faith will be if it weren't for the urge to come to seek together, seek the Lord, together with all three of them.

I've learned through our children's lives that exercising good stewardship to one of the most precious gifts that God gave us, which is our children. It's the most worthwhile investment that we've ever made.

It is worth so much more than any high position or high return investments that we've ever made. there is nothing short of spending time with them and time with them in God's Word from the time they were very, very young.

As in Deuteronomy 6, verse 6 to 9, says, these commandments I gave you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

[29 : 32] Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the door frames of your houses and on your gates. Brothers and sisters, preaching to our children in God's Word may not touch their hearts, but talking about them often when you sit down at home, when you walk around the road, when you lie down and when you get up, making use of daily situations that they encounter as a teaching tool, reminding them of God's creation, allowing them to experience God's goodness and reality in their lives.

God's Word also reminded us constantly that we have to be very mindful of our actions and our speech doesn't match up with what I have taught them.

Our children are watching every move and every action that you make. How you react to those around you? How do you make decisions in the workplace? How do I deal with my staff and co-workers?

How do I manage the things that God blessed us with? Helping them to experience the reality of Jesus Christ in their lives personally, will help them build a solid foundation for them to move forward into their adult lives and prayerfully, one day, they will pass on the same faith to their children and their children's children.

Many Christian parents will send their children to church and Christian schools hoping that they will learn the gospel from it and become good kids. From my experience through church and Christian school, those church and Christian school play an important part in helping them to learn from the Bible.

[31 : 19] In the end, a child's ability to come to Christ will be taught at home. Following your examples, what you do, what you speak, your decisions at home and in business.

if we do not spend the time with the children, then they will be taught by others. No wonder from a study from Focus on the Family in America that out of 100 children that entered college professing their Christian faith, only 30 of them graduated keeping their faith.

70 of them went on adopting the ideals and liberties that was taught to them by their professors, their peers and society.

That is astounding statistics in America and I don't think Hong Kong is any different. For those of you who are single or do not have children yet, the same principles apply on how your lives affect those around you.

Our best teacher is Apostle Paul who remained single but yet how he had administered and loved the brothers and sisters in the communities that he reached out to, allowing him to become the spiritual parents to many.

[32 : 37] In 1 Peter 4.10, each one should use whatever gifts he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.

let this be a constant reminder for us to use our gifts to affect those young brothers and sisters that cross our path so that they can find the new life through Jesus Christ, spending time with them, loving them and nurturing them so that they can become spiritual parents also and pass it on to the next generation of family and friends.

in conclusion, let's remember the video that we just saw. Ask ourselves some questions.

What are things that we can take away one day when we leave this earth? Can we take our work?

Can we take our money? Our ambitions?

our possessions? Our plaques? Our titles? Or anything? Can we take any of those things away?

And then ask another question.

[33 : 49] What are things that we can do today that will continue on after we leave this earth? Are we teaching our beloved children that God lead us, lead them to Jesus Christ and guiding them to hold on to the faith through adulthood so that they can pass on to the next generation?

Or are we helping to make spiritual children so that their faith will strengthen through our relationship with them?

It's not what you gather but what you gather that tells what kind of life you have lived. How would you like our Lord Jesus Christ to call you when you meet Him one day?

Would you like Him to call you as in Matthew 25, 23? Well done, good and faithful servants. You have been faithful in few things. I will put you in charge of many things.

Come and share in your Master's happiness. Let us pray. Father, we thank you for this time to allow us to look into our lives and to look into our lives.

[35 : 02] Are we being a good steward to the things that you have bestowed upon us? You reminded us in Matthew 16, 26, 27 that what good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world yet forfeeds his soul?

Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels and then he will reward each person according to what he has done. Father, help us to exercise good stewardship in our lives to those that cross our path. Reach out to them, to our children, spend time with them, to our work, allow you to be the provider and guide.

Father, we ask you to come to our hearts today as we walk this journey of life, allowing you to steer the ship of ours throughout our lives. Help us, Lord, in the name of the Son, Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.