



Refreshed
Part 4 – A Sense of Stewardship
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Today, we are continuing in our Refreshed series. In this series, we're talking about giving and generosity. A couple of weeks ago, we started in on talking about the four drivers of generosity. We talked about how a source of income is one of the drivers of generosity. And then after that, last week, we talked about how a sense of abundance, not a sense of scarcity, will drive our generosity. Next week, we're talking about contentment as a driver of generosity. Today, we're talking about stewardship as a driver of generosity.

I think this series called *Refreshed* is perfectly named because it's a time of year when we all tend to feel refreshed. At least I do. We come off of some down time in the summer, maybe we've gotten some vacation time. For us here at church, we got to enjoy a summer series of teaching from several different guests and several different folks that came in. I don't know about you, but I feel refreshed from this. We got to hear from folks like David Nasser and Clay Scroggins and other guest like Alex Himaya, who we can hardly count as a guest anymore; he's really kind of part of our team here. We got to hear from our own Adam Donyes and from Scott McElvain. It was a refreshing time for me hearing the Word of God and some encouragement from them.

This got me thinking about the teaching team that we have here at Woodland Hills. Really, the teaching team is a lot like toilet paper. Let me explain before you put in your own inappropriate punch lines. Have you noticed before that toilet paper on the roll can go on the dispenser one of two ways? It can either be placed so that the end of the toilet paper comes over the top or it can be placed so it goes under the bottom. How many of you have never noticed that before? I'm curious. Everyone has noticed.

For all of you that have noticed, there are two types of people: those who care and those who don't. For those that care, there are two types of people: those that prefer that the toilet paper go over the top and be dispensed with the end over the top of the toilet paper roll and then there are some of you that prefer it the wrong way, so the toilet paper comes under the bottom. Be honest. How many of you have been at someone else's house and the toilet paper is not how you like it, so you turn it around? Admit it and raise your hand. You people have a problem. It's okay; I've done it too.

The point is by the time you leave the bathroom, the toilet paper has served its purpose. I hope so because I've shaken a lot of your hands. So, the teaching team is like toilet paper. You see, when we come in here on Sunday, there are a lot of different folks that will deliver God's Word and they have different methods and different techniques and ways to communicate to us, but the fact is God has a

purpose for the teaching in your life when you come in here on Sunday morning. If we will open our hearts to the Holy Spirit, he will speak to us and he will use it for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness so that each of us will be competent and equipped for every good work. So, you see, the teaching team is like toilet paper. So, may we open our hearts today and see what the Lord has to speak to us as we go through this series on giving.

I think in a series like this, we can experience different things as we hear the teaching on giving and stewardship. Some of us may be encouraged in what we're hearing. Some of us may be affirmed in what we're hearing. Some of us may feel convicted in what we're hearing about giving and generosity. Some of us may feel all three of those in one single day. So, may we be open to God's Word and what he would speak to us today and the rest of this series and ongoing.

If you have your Bibles, open to Matthew 25. We're going to turn to Verse 14. I want to set this up first. This is the Parable of Talents. If you're not familiar, this is probably the most popular passage in scripture that talks about stewardship. First, this is Jesus as he's teaching the disciples. In Chapters 24 and 25, he's really starting to step up the teaching. He's giving them a lot of messages about what it's going to be like when he leaves and when he returns, and this is one of them. Also, he's teaching in what's called a parable. A parable is a story. It's a story that is fiction but has real life application and interpretation. So, a couple of things. 1) This must be very important because Jesus is saying, "Hey guys, I only have a little bit of time and there are some things that I really need to make sure you get. 2) There are applications outside the literal interpretation of this parable that we'll talk about.

This is Jesus. **14 "For it will be like a man going on a journey..."** The first question is what is "it"? "It" is the kingdom of heaven as it pertains to Jesus in his departure and his subsequent return. Now his departure, in this setting, for the disciples, was about to happen. For us, it has happened about 2,000 years ago. And then his subsequent return, which hasn't happened yet, and nobody knows the day or the time.

"...who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. 15 To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability." The first question you might have is what is a talent? In this story, in the literal interpretation of the story that he's giving, a talent is a measure of money. Some scholars have given different numbers about what it is. You might say it's about a truck load of money; it's a bunch of money. How much a talent is isn't the important thing. The important thing to notice here is that there are three different measures that are given: five, two, and one to these different servants.

"Then he went away. 16 He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. 17 So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. 18 But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money." So, we see the contrast of the two different behaviors there.

19 "Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. 20 And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.' 21 His master said to him, 'Well

done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.” Those are nice words to hear, “Well done good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your master.” ***22 “And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.’ 23 His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’”*** Same behavior, different amounts, same response.

24 “He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, 25 so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’”

26 “But his master answered him, ‘You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? 27 Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. 28 So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. 29 For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance.’”

Remember, a sense of abundance is one of our drivers of generosity. ***“But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. 30 And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”***

Those are some pretty harsh words that we hear from the Lord teaching in this parable. So, what is he teaching the disciples? He’s teaching stewardship. If you know me, by now you know that I like to define things. When I define things, I like to define them pretty simply. We’re going to do that with stewardship this morning. We’re going to define stewardship as “managing something for someone else.” It’s just that simple.

Have you ever borrowed something from someone? It’s kind of a rhetorical question. Really, we’ve all borrowed something at some point. I think we use this word *borrow* sometimes when we don’t really mean borrow. If someone is on the phone and they have some information they need to write down and they say, “Can I borrow a piece of paper?” That’s not really borrowing. You can only keep it, right? It’s of no use to me anymore and you’ve got information on it that you need, so you can have it. They say, “Can I borrow a Kleenex?” No, you can’t borrow it. You can keep the Kleenex and whatever you deposit into the Kleenex.

Then, sometimes we misuse the word *borrow*, when it’s not really a borrowing like, “Hey can I borrow your bathroom?” Well, you’re not really taking possession of it, but you can use my bathroom. But don’t you dare turn my toilet paper around.

Then there are sometimes when we borrow things or people borrow from us that really need to be returned. They’re things of value that are important to us. I’ve borrowed some camping equipment from people before when we were seeing if camping was something we were going to do, so I borrowed it to try it. I’ve borrowed tools from people. People have borrowed tools from me. These are important things that should be returned. They are of value.

And then there's the big one to me. Borrowing someone's car. Have you ever borrowed someone's car? It makes me nervous when I'm driving someone else's car. Because I don't want anything to happen to this car. It's not my car. It's of value to them. For most of us, it's the second most valuable thing we own besides our home, so this is a precious possession to this person. So, when I drive someone else's car, I'm borrowing it. I mean hands are at ten and two and I'm in full and complete stop and I'm looking left and looking right multiple times. I'm stopped way ahead of the stop sign. I'm not following too closely behind. I'm staying below the speed limit. Our oldest just got his driver's license. It reminds me now of him studying for and practicing and taking his driver's test. That's me when I'm going to borrow a car.

Now, contrast that with when I'm driving a rental car. Even more so, when I'm driving a rental car, for which I have bought the comprehensive insurance. You know what I'm talking about. Is there anymore carefree driving than driving with the insurance where you can walk away from anything? It sounds pretty dramatic when they sell it to you. They say, "Do you want the insurance on this rental car that you're taking? You know, if anything happens to it, anything at all, it doesn't matter who's fault it is, you can just walk away from it." I say, "Yes, please."

Some of you say that's a waste of money; you're not supposed to buy the insurance on the rental car. I buy it because I like the carefree nature of that driving and the ability to walk away. To me, I get this picture in my mind of the movie scene where the guy with the sunglasses is slowing strutting away from the car and the car explodes behind him and he just keeps strutting like nothing even happened. That's what I picture when they tell me I can walk away from anything. You're like, "Shouldn't that guy care that the car is exploding behind him?" He doesn't and do you know why? It's because he bought the insurance, the walk away from anything insurance.

But when I borrow someone's car, that's not the case. I'm taking gentle care of the thing. And I do return it with a full tank of gas. They ask me at the rental place, "Do you want prepaid gas?" I don't want prepaid gas; we'll take care of that. "Well make sure you bring it back with a full tank of gas." I'm thinking, *I just bought the walk away from anything insurance. The level of gas in your tank should be the least of your worries right now.* But I return a borrowed car to someone with a full tank of gas, washed. Maybe your parents taught you this too. When you borrow something, return it in better condition than you got it. That's how you return things that you borrow from someone.

The best personal example I can think of is my friend, Josh Putnam, in Columbia, Missouri. There was a weekend project that he needed to take care of with a chainsaw and I had a chainsaw. He said, "Travis, can I borrow your chainsaw?" I knew Josh well and I said, "Of course you can borrow it. Take it, use it." The next week, he brought it back to me. He brought it back to me almost unrecognizable, in a good way. It was polished, cleaned, the chain had been sharpened, the sparkplug was replaced, the fuel and oil were both filled up. It was like a brand-new chainsaw that came back to me.

Maybe you've had the opposite experience before. When you've loaned something to someone and you've gotten it back unrecognizable in a bad way. What does that do the borrowing relationship. Suddenly, it's like that's not happening. For Josh, I was like "Josh, do you need to borrow anything else? I have a whole garage of stuff that could really use some of your borrowing."

What we're talking about today in stewardship is not just borrowing things from people. This is the Lord, our Master delivering things to us for which we will have to give an account. This is the Lord calling us to stewardship of the things that he has given us. He's calling us to add value to it, to be invested in it, increasing the value of the things he delivers to us.

What is a talent? When we take the interpretation of this parable, what are we talking about when we talk about a talent, the things that the Lord has delivering to us? There is one answer that is very simple. That answer is *everything*. Absolutely everything. Everything that exists. We know this because of Psalm 24. ***1 The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; 2 for he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters.*** It is all his. The talent is everything.

First, that should cause us to loosen our grip on the things of this earth. Sometimes we have a white-knuckled grasp on some possessions and things of the world, don't we? With that, it's important for us to start to understand the difference between ownership and stewardship. There is a difference. We know now that stewardship is managing something for someone else and we know that the Lord has delivered everything that we have to us to manage for him. That's stewardship.

Ownership is *this is mine. I possess this; it's mine*. It brings with it a sense of entitlement and actions of greed, the greedy behaviors. We see this play out in our kids sometimes, don't we? I might say to one of my kids, "I need you to let your brother borrow your backpack for his overnight trip this weekend." What are you met with? "That's my backpack." "Oh really? What did you pay for it? And what did you pay for those clothes you're wearing, the bed that you're sleeping in?" As parents, we can get kind of exasperated at these behaviors from our kids.

How many of you parents have declared to all of your children, "Everything in this house is mine"? Thank you. No one else has admitted it yet. "Everything is mine; I allow you to use it." Some of you have been frustrated to that point. We get frustrated with our kids at these behaviors. But let's check ourselves. How often do we take on this ownership mentality with the Lord. Everything is his, yet we hold onto it and say, "That's mine." It's an attitude of ownership versus stewardship.

Let's talk a little bit about "talents." What are some specific things that the Lord blesses us with that he gives us that we are to increase the value of, we are to add value to as we manage for him?

Money – This is the one that we've talked the most about in this series on giving and generosity, which makes sense because that's, for the most part, how we express giving and generosity. Remember the parable of the talents where I said the amount of money doesn't matter? The fact that there were three different amounts is what matters. To one he gave five, to one he gave two, to one he one. The master wasn't concerned with the sum of money that he received back at the end, but rather the behaviors that took place while those talents were in the servants' possession. We can look at all the amounts that we want to, but the fact is if the one talent servant had carried out the same behaviors as the two and five talent servants and vice versa, the five talent servant, if he had buried his talents, would have been called a wicked and slothful servant just the same as the one talent servant was because of the way he handled what he was given.

Marriage – It's important that we also understand things like our marriage. Our marriage is something the Lord has given to us. In case you haven't noticed, if you don't invest in your marriage, it will decrease in value. Are you caring for one another's heart? Are you speaking words of value into one another? Are you spending quality time with one another? How are you stewarding the marriage that the Lord has given you?

Position/Authority – A lot of us have different position and authority over different people. How are you stewarding that? In business, some would suggest that's more valuable than money even.

Politics – Even in politics, how are you stewarding any position or authority that you have?

Time – This one is interesting to me because if you think about it, if the parable was just time, each of the three servants would have had the same portion: 24 hours in one day. We all have the same portion as far as time goes, the same 24 hours in a day, seven days in a week, twelve months in a year. The thing that is variable is the number of years that we have.

Physical Condition – How are you stewarding your physical condition? We know that the leading causes of death and disability are preventable causes based on good habits that you participate in or bad habits that you avoid so you can steward the time that you have. We know that when we are unwell, our focus becomes inward. When we are well, we can better turn our focus outward. How are you stewarding your physical condition?

Children – This is one, parents, that it's hard to switch on that stewardship versus ownership mindset. Maybe you're the type of parent that really clings to that child and does not want them to grow and mature and leave the home as a responsible adult. Or maybe you're paralyzed by fear of the thought of losing your child. That's where it's hard to turn on that stewardship mindset. Remember I said I have a 16-year-old that just got his driver's license, so I can feel that coming in. The only thing that can squelch that fear is an understanding that our children are for us to manage for the Lord, to raise them up as they should go, and that we don't own them – they are the Lord's.

Spiritual Gifts – We read in Romans and 1 Corinthians this list of spiritual gifts that when we receive the Lord, we receive the Holy Spirit who bestows upon us at least one of the spiritual gifts. The scripture is very clear that those spiritual gifts are for the purpose of building up the body of Christ. That's us, that's the church. Those spiritual gifts have been given to you and you are to steward them to use them to build up the body of Christ. How are you managing your spiritual gifts for the Lord?

Relationships – You have a lot of relationships around you with your family and your friends and your co-workers. How are you stewarding those relationships? Are you adding value to the relationships around you? Or are you constantly making withdrawals from the relationship? Are you the exhausting person? Are you feeding into the lives of these people and increasing the value of the relationships?

God's grace - How are you stewarding God's grace? In Ephesians, in his letter to the Church at Ephesus, Paul says that he is called to steward the grace of God. What does that mean? That's the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He later said in 2 Timothy that we've been given the good portion that has been entrusted

to us. How are you stewarding the Gospel of Jesus Christ? Are you burying it like a wicked servant? Or are you increasing the value of it like a good and faithful servant?

We could spend all morning talking about the different things, the ways that the Lord has blessed us, the things that he has given us that we don't possess, but rather that we steward. It's important for us to understand all of these things are things that we steward for God. They don't belong to us; they belong to him and we steward them for him.

We see some people who are obviously very blessed in many different ways: financially, with relationships, position, authority, all the children, and all these other things. We observe some people that do this well. They enjoy the blessings that the Lord has given them, and they subsequently bless others from their blessings. It's fun to watch, isn't it? Isn't it neat to see? You really appreciate that person or those people and the way they manage the things the Lord has given them.

Then there are some we can be critical of that we start to question their stewardship and think they are really burying their talents in the ground from what we observe. You may think, *Well, why doesn't so and so or these people give more to this, this, and that in the community? Why aren't they contributing more to all of these things.* "If I had their money, this is what I would do." Or you may say, "They have so much more time than I do; why aren't they the ones that are managing their time this way for the Lord?"

We can become critical of other people in the way that they are managing their talents for the Lord, but the thing is, we're not responsible for keeping track of how others steward their talents. We're responsible for our own talents, our own blessings, and our own things that the Lord gives us to manage. You notice that the master in the parable didn't say to the two-talent servant, "I want you to manage these two talents and, oh by the way, I've got another job for you. I want you to keep up with the one-talent servant and the five-talent servant. Watch what they're doing and see how you think they're doing managing their talents." That's not said. What's more, the master doesn't say, "If you don't think they're doing well, don't talk to them about it, but go gossip about it. Better yet, post your thoughts on social media about their lack of generosity."

The fact is, really, when it comes to generosity, if someone is doing it right, you don't see it. You don't see their generosity. They're being generous in ways that the left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing, as we're told to do. They are doing it in private and in secret. Remember, we're not responsible for keeping up with other people's talents and how they manage them, but rather we focus on our own talents and what the Lord has given us to manage.

All throughout scripture, we have different analogies that use fruit. The Lord communicates to us through his word with fruit. John 15: 5 says, ***"I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."*** We read in Galatians about the fruit of the Spirit. At our salvation, we receive the Holy Spirit and we should be expressing these character qualities of the Spirit described as the fruit of the Spirit. You see, fruit is used a lot through scripture.

So, today, I want to use a fruit analogy to help illustrate and kind of tie up this issue of stewardship as a driver of generosity. I'm going to start with this tree. This is an apple tree. The first thing to think about this apple tree is it started first as a seed and then a sapling. It didn't plant itself. Someone or something else planted that tree. Once it started to grow, it needed some things to be able to mature into a fully developed tree. It needed sunshine and it needed rain. The sources are outside of itself, but it needs these things to be able to grow and mature. Once that tree receives these things, it then starts to produce fruit from the resources that it was given. Once it starts producing fruit then, it's interesting that the fruit the tree produces is not primarily for the benefit of the tree itself. The tree doesn't eat its apples, but rather the fruit benefits those in proximity to the tree. Do you see that?

We are that tree. Each of us started as a seed and, subsequently, a sapling. The Lord knitted us together in our mother's womb. He formed our inward parts. He formed us. He created a little sapling. He then, over time, provides resources to the sunshine and the rain. Would anyone testify that you've experienced some sunshine and some rain in your life as you develop and mature and grow? Looking back, we know that they are both blessings from the Lord. We receive blessings from the Lord that gives us resources and then we subsequently manage them well, developing them, adding value to them, and producing fruit. You see, we have something at stake here in our responsibility to steward the resources that we're given.

One of my favorite quotes is St. Augustine – "Pray as though everything depends on God. Work as though everything depends on you."

Once we start taking these resources we've been given by the Lord and we are working to increase their value, then we are able to bless those around us, in close proximity to us.

I want to point something out. Those that are in your closest proximity are going to be your family. 1 Timothy 5 says, ***8 But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.***

We understand the importance... I have a family and it's important for me to be generous to my family. That can be hard sometimes because we can start spreading generosity of our time, our finances, our energy, our spiritual gifts, our relationships outside of our family, but if we deny this family, then we have denied the faith and are worse than an unbeliever. It's important to focus generosity on our family, which is hard to do sometimes, and we neglect.

Then, beyond that, to our friends to our co-workers, and those outside of our family. So, you see, and we understand also that, again, we started as a sapling. We came from nothing and the Lord blesses us. He grows us, gives us resources, and as we grow and develop into that mature tree, we take responsibility, working as though it all depends on us. Then we let the stewardship mindset drive our generosity. And so, the Lord, through our work and his blessings, produces fruit in us, so we're generous.

We're generous with our money. We're generous with our time. We're generous with our relationships. We're generous with our authority. We're generous with the blessings that the Lord produces through us as well.

The important thing is that delivery matters because sometimes we want to rare back and throw a fastball because we have an attitude of "Okay, fine! I'll give it up!" Here you go! Frankly, if you're on the receiving end of that, that's not comfortable. You end up with a black eye. So, delivery matters. Sometimes, we cling to it. We have that white-knuckle grip on the blessings that we have and we cling to it and we don't want to give it up. So, you understand that delivery matters.

Another thing to notice about these blessings is what's inside of each of these apples. Seeds. And as we receive blessing from the Lord, we work to increase that which we have been blessed with. If we steward it well and we manage well, we add value to it and produce fruit and then we are subsequently generous to those around us. We're planting seeds of generosity all around us so that that sapling of generosity can grow into a fully blown tree of blessing, blessing to others. Can you think of a more efficient way to increase the value of what the Lord has given you than to spread your generosity to the stewardship of the things that he's given us?

Before we close, I'm going to invite the prayer team to come down front and let you know again that through this series on giving and generosity, in the last couple of weeks, our prayer team has had some resources to provide to those who have needs right now and we're just kind of cutting out the red tape saying, "Come forward, be prayed with for any needs that you have, and the prayer team can meet that need for you this morning." So, let's stand and pray together as we close.

I'll also remind you that we have shoe vouchers. Another thing we have, as we remember the importance of feeding into our family and being encouraging to them, being generous with our encouragement, we have these cards that are in the back. The greeters are going to be handing them out. I'll be honest with you, the original intent was to put them in backpacks and lunch boxes and maybe on your kids' dashboard for back to school, but a lot of adults in the first service said, "I want these for my spouse, my adult children." I encourage you to take a stack of these and use them to be generous with your encouragement to your family members, friends, or whoever this week.

Lord, we love you and we're grateful, Father, for the many blessings you give to each and every one of us. We understand that whether we are a one-talent servant or a five-talent servant, it is all yours. We understand that we are called to manage things for you, to steward the blessings that you have given us for the purpose of enjoying and to bless others.

Father, I pray that as we go from here, you would help us to have received your word, to speak to us, Lord, and to use your word for your purpose in our lives. That you would help us to go out and change things that need to be changed or improve things that need to be improved, but, Father, most of all, to manage things well for your glory and especially for the grace of you through your Son Jesus.

We love you, we praise you, we give you thanks, and it's in Jesus' name that everyone agreed and said... Amen.