

Entrusted: Stewardship Sermon Series Introduction (2 Timothy 3:14-4:5)

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WATCH/LISTEN: www.fbcjc.org/sermon/entrusted/

During this time of the year, there are a few things that you know you can always count on:

1. The leaves on the trees changing to their fall colors.
2. Baseball season ending at some point for your favorite MLB team.
3. And – if you attend a Baptist church – there's guaranteed to be a sermon series about stewardship.

Of course, sermons about stewardship are usually focused exclusively on your financial resources – your money – and the importance of planning to give a percentage of your income (the amount that was established in the Old Testament scriptures is 10% of your income) to your church during the coming year.

Today we begin a new series together called “Entrusted.” The basic idea is that God has entrusted us with many things in the world and during our lifetimes. During the coming weeks, Melissa and I will preach about the following topics within this theme:

- Vocation, Creation, Gifts (Abilities & Opportunities), Wealth, the Gospel (Good News message)

As Melissa stated in her newsletter article to the congregation this month:

“Gospel stewardship encompasses everything, not just our finances. God has entrusted us with gifts, resources, opportunities, stories, relationships, and more. Everything we have has been given to us to stewards in a way consistent with the kingdom of God.”

“In this series, we’ll talk about being good guardians and investors of our vocations, creation, gifts, wealth, and the gospel. God has put these precious things into our care and protection for God’s glory and the benefit of others.”

This entire concept forces me to ask some questions of myself – and really I think they’re questions that every Christ-followers has to wrestle with.

First, is what I have in this life really “mine,” or is what I have actually owned by God, but that God has entrusted me with? I’ll try to explain what I mean by that...

A few weeks ago Carolyn and I sold the used minivan that we had driven for years. I wish I had a nickle for every soccer practice and game that that van had taken our family to. The van had served us well, but it was time for a new vehicle. And since Carolyn kicked one of our boys out the house and he no longer lives with us – he’s enjoying the college life now – we felt like it might be time for a smaller vehicle. Anyway, Carolyn did a great job of cleaning the van and making it look like the deal of the century. She posted it for sale on a Saturday evening, and the next Sunday afternoon we had one potential buyer after another lined up to come and look at it. One woman arrived who attends another church here in Jefferson City. As we talked with her, we learned how she – as a follower of Jesus – had been called to be a foster parent for several young children. She told us a bit about how she was currently struggling to get the young ones in and out of a relatively small car whenever she drove them somewhere. It became very obvious that getting a minivan like ours – despite its old age and high miles – would be a great help to her and the kids. It worked out for her and her husband to buy the van. I don’t remember the exact words she said as she thanked us and tears flowed from her eyes,

but it was very apparent to me that she was convinced that God had provided that van for her and her family. In a sense, it really was “God’s van” and she – with her family – were using it as they lived their lives for Jesus.

So that’s what I’m trying to get at. The realization that everything we have or possess are things that God has blessed us with... or to say it better: That God has entrusted us with.

Second, why does this matter? What benefits come from being a good steward? I’m going to quickly give you two things I’ve experienced in my own life.

1. First, whenever I’ve made the decision to share – whatever that may be: money, time, wisdom, a car ride, a seat at the table, an invitation to come over for a meal, whatever – my life is more meaningful. It’s more fulfilling and just better. But whenever I hold on too tightly to what I have and keep it to myself, my life always gets narrow and empty and it feels like I’ve lost my way.
2. Second, when I live in this way, it also helps connect me to God in a deeper, more personal way. I’m more in-tune to God’s voice in my life, and I feel closer to God.

But that’s more than enough about me and what I think about this topic. Let’s turn to a scripture passage and see what the Apostle Paul had to say. We’re going to look at 2nd Timothy. It’s important – as always – understand the context of this specific book.

- This is Paul’s second letter to the younger Timothy. Paul is the older, seasoned Christian leader. And Timothy is the younger minister who Paul continues to mentor and encourage.
- Timothy is most likely serving the church in the city of Ephesus during the time of this 2nd letter.
- Paul wrote this letter from a Roman prison cell in the mid 60s AD – so a little more than 30 years after Jesus’s life and ministry.
- >This was also written just before Paul’s death, so in a very real sense it’s a the last words of advice from an older friend and minister to a younger, dearly loved friend.

And I have to admit to you before I read this, reading some of Paul’s writings makes my head hurt. He sentences are often long and complex, and not always the easiest to navigate and understand. But we’re going to jump into this together today...

2 Timothy 3:14 – 4:5

14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, 15 and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16 All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.

1 In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you: 2 proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching. 3 For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, 4 and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths. 5 As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully.

From this passage, I invite you to focus in on three important points that Paul makes to Timothy:

1. V. 17: "...so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work."

This is a very general statement. But I think it is especially significant in our culture today – especially if we focus on that significance of that word "good." The church and Christians can be focused on a lot of "works" in our world today. But many of them are not what I would call "good." Unfortunately, we can join in – often without even thinking about it – with the "bad" works that is so prevalent in our society. We can name call, laugh at, judge, shut out, condemn, and basically do all kinds of other things in the name of religion and faith that don't fall into the category of "good work."

And that leads us directly to this...

2. V. 2: "...proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching."

This directive is linked tightly with the Christian message... with the Christian faith and belief. It's about our words and actions being very much the "message" that we proclaim to other people. And this is where it can get a bit tricky as we do our best to interpret these specific verses. Because we must remember that Paul is writing to a specific person, Timothy, who is a minister and who is tasked to "proclaim the message" through preaching and teaching within the church. Of course, not all of us are in that same position. But I do believe that this is still relevant for all of us when we consider the "message" we're sending to those around us. Especially those opportunities we have to "encourage" others.

It seems like we – both as a church and as individuals – are constantly fighting discouragement. Life is often hard and challenging, and it's easy to get beat down. So if there's one take home point, or action point from the message today, this is what I want to challenge you with: Be an encourager this week. Find ways to build others up. Use your words and actions to make a positive difference. That's not always easy to do, which leads to...

3. V. 5: "As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully."

And finally, the emphasis on "enduring" and "carrying out" what you have been called to do. I do have to say – because I was curious about it myself – that the word "sober" here isn't referring to alcoholic consumption. Other versions use phrases like "control yourself at all times" or "keep a clear mind in every situation."

But I'm going to wrap up things today by focusing on that important word that follows the "be sober" comment: "ENDURE." Many of us are tired. We want to give up. We're tempted to just throw up our hands and walk away from whatever it is that God has called us to be doing. But don't do that. Don't give up. Endure. Carry things out.