

**THE JOY OF GENEROSITY**  
**(1) TREES, TIME, TALENTS, TREASURES**  
Psalm 8; Ecclesiastes 3:1-11; 1 Peter 4:7-11; Deuteronomy 8:10-18  
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Part 1

To Affirm Our Stewardship of Trees

Psalm 8 (NRSV)

O LORD, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark because of your foes, to silence the enemy and the avenger. When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor. You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas. O LORD, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Meditation:

Picking up the message of the creation story told in Genesis 1, Psalm 8 introduces us to the grand themes of biblical stewardship. Stewardship is rooted in who God is (the Creator) and who we are (God's creatures ruling over God's creation).

Psalm 8 recognizes the sense of insignificance that the cosmos creates within human hearts. "What are human beings?" asks the psalmist. In the face of the immensity of the universe, the answer seems obvious: Nothing! But we discover our place in this world not from the pages of creation but through the special revelation of divine truth. "What are human beings?" In a sense, masters of the universe! We are created stewards, rulers over the works of God's hands. Psalm 8 reaffirms the cultural mandate given in Genesis 1:28.

Stewards of trees? It's simply a catchy phrase for our stewardship of all of creation. As we exercise that stewardship, we exalt God's name and give honor to the divine excellence.

Song #2279 (seated) "The Trees of the Field"

## Part 2

### To Affirm Our Stewardship of Time

#### Ecclesiastes 3:1-11 (NRSV)

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away; a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace. What gain have the workers from their toil? I have seen the business that God has given to everyone to be busy with. He has made everything suitable for its time; moreover he has put a sense of past and future into their minds, yet they cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.

#### Meditation:

Although we don't often think of it, we are stewards of time. Sometimes we feel imprisoned in time, at the mercy of events over which we have no control. Yet Ecclesiastes tells us, "For everything there is a time."

But the writer of Ecclesiastes isn't announcing a pessimistic fatalism. Implicit in the first eight verses of the chapter is a sense of God's control over the times of our lives. Time is God's gift. That gift needs to be employed with a sense of the eternity that God has placed in human hearts. And while in ourselves we cannot understand things from beginning to end, yet in humility we can use the gift of time to find joy and fulfillment in our daily activities. Because God is the Lord of time, we, as stewards, can make the most of every opportunity God entrusts to our care.

Song #2203 (seated) "In His Time"

## Part 3

### To Affirm our Stewardship of Talents

#### 1 Peter 4:7-11 (NRSV)

The end of all things is near; therefore be serious and discipline yourselves for the sake of your prayers. Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaining. Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all

things through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

Meditation:

In this passage, Peter reminds us of the nature of the times in which we live. “The end of all things is near” in our place in the flow of redemptive history (v. 7). For Peter, this was not a chronological but an eschatological nearness, growing out of the coming of the kingdom of God in the person and work of Christ (1 Cor. 10:11).

Because we live in the time when the end of all things is near, some activities are critical—including the exercise of our spiritual gifts. The Greek word for gift is *charis* or grace. Thus Peter links our stewardship of gifts with the nature of God’s gracious and Spirit-directed kingdom.

Spiritual gifts are actually the ways in which God graces our lives with the ability to serve others. Gifts, then, are more than mere talents. Spiritual gifts refract God’s grace into a rainbow of ministries that center around two poles: word gifts and service gifts (v. 11). As we exercise stewardship over our gifts, we become stewards of one another.

Song #2176 (seated) “Make Me a Servant”

Part 4

To Affirm our Stewardship of Treasures

Deuteronomy 8:10-18 (NRSV)

You shall eat your fill and bless the LORD your God for the good land that he has given you. Take care that you do not forget the LORD your God, by failing to keep his commandments, his ordinances, and his statutes, which I am commanding you today. When you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied, then do not exalt yourself, forgetting the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, who led you through the great and terrible wilderness, an arid wasteland with poisonous snakes and scorpions. He made water flow for you from flint rock, and fed you in the wilderness with manna that your ancestors did not know, to humble you and to test you, and in the end to do you good. Do not say to yourself, "My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth." But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, so that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your ancestors, as he is doing today.

Meditation:

Among the talents God entrusts to us is the ability to make money. But that phrase contributes to the misconception that we have somehow made our money ourselves. Deuteronomy warns the Israelites against making the claim “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me” (v. 17). This same danger threatens any established and prosperous society—including our own!

What is the antidote? Again, it’s a vision of ourselves as stewards—this time of treasures. Since God gives us the ability to produce wealth, it follows that what we have is a trust from our Lord and Maker. Deuteronomy connects forgetting our stewardship of treasures with forgetting God. Where the one happens, the other is sure to follow. But the reverse is also true. When we remember who we are as God’s stewards, we remember that our wealth is a trust—on loan—from the Lord.