

Nehemiah 1-2:6
"God's Work, Our Hands" Part 1
"Genuine Concern, Accountability and Sacrifice"

Generosity, or being generous, is an offshoot of biblical stewardship. See, stewardship is how we care for and use all that God/Christ gives us. To be generous is to show a readiness to give more than is strictly necessary or expected. Stated this way, to give more than is necessary of all that God has given to us. Biblical stewardship acknowledges that all we possess is on loan. All we have truly belongs to God. I need not spent much time proving this point because most of us have lost a loved one and either directly or indirectly been privy to the decisions regarding what to do with what has been left behind. Our possessions are really not our possessions. A sobering truth, which is the entry gate to faithful stewardship and the key to being or becoming generous. Until one believes this, he or she cannot enter the joy of generosity.

Haggai 2:8, ⁸"The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, says the Lord of Heaven's Armies.

1 Sam 2:6-8, "The Lord gives both death and life; he brings some down to the grave but raises others up. ⁷The Lord makes some poor and others rich; he brings some down and lifts others up. ⁸He lifts the poor from the dust and the needy from the garbage dump. He sets them among princes, placing them in seats of honor. For all the earth is the Lord's, and he has set the world in order.

James 1:17 ¹⁷"Whatever is good and perfect is a gift coming down to us from God our Father, who created all the lights in the heavens. He never changes or casts a shifting shadow."

Regardless how we may have obtained it, all that we have has been given to us by God. About this time annually we are reminded of this fact and our call to generous living. So, we discern what we will commit/give to the work of the gospel here at FPC in the coming year. To help us do this faithfully we turn to Nehemiah this year. At first glance one would not take Nehemiah to be a book on stewardship. But as one uncovers the leadership of Nehemiah one soon realizes that faithful leaders are good stewards, leading generous lives. Nehemiah is a perfect example of this. And so, we will spend the next 2 Sundays, and possibly the first Sunday of Advent examining Nehemiah's example. Today, drawing from our text, I will share three things we learn from Nehemiah regarding faithful stewardship.

First, we see in Nehemiah's example that faithful stewardship shows genuine concern. It cares about what God cares about.

V1:4, 2:3-5 "When I heard this, I sat down and wept. In fact, for days I mourned, fasted, and prayed to the God of heaven....³ but I replied, "Long live the king! How can I not be sad? For the city where my ancestors are buried is in ruins, and the gates have been destroyed by fire." ⁴The king asked, "Well, how can I help you?" With a prayer to the God of heaven, ⁵I replied, "If it please the king, and if you are pleased with me, your servant, send me to Judah to rebuild the city where my ancestors are buried." Nehemiah wasn't simply sorrowful regarding the situation in Jerusalem. See, one can be sorrowful about something and do nothing in effort to change it. Many are sorrowful regarding the state of the church in America but not all are doing something about it. Faithful stewardship shows genuine concern and

genuine concern always, not sometimes, but always leads to action; leads to one doing something about it. Nehemiah prays and he makes a request with his employer. He is determined to do something about the situation in Jerusalem. Church, he cared about what God cared about. It is very important to note that Nehemiah is leaning on God his entire journey. That is to say, faithful stewardship is the work of God's Spirit in our hearts. Faithful stewardship is a matter of our hearts not our wallets.

Prov 19:17 "If you help the poor, you are lending to the Lord—and he will repay you!

Heb 6:10 "¹⁰For God is not unjust. He will not forget how hard you have worked for him and how you have shown your love to him by caring for other believers, as you still do."

2 Cor 9:6-8, "⁶Remember this—a farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop. But the one who plants generously will get a generous crop. ⁷You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. "For God loves a person who gives cheerfully." ⁸And God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others."

Second, we see in Nehemiah's example that faithful stewardship takes accountability. V1:5-7, "Then I said, "O Lord, God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps his covenant of unfailing love with those who love him and obey his commands, ⁶listen to my prayer! Look down and see me praying night and day for your people Israel. I confess that we have sinned against you. Yes, even my own family and I have sinned! ⁷We have sinned terribly by not obeying the commands,

decrees, and regulations that you gave us through your servant Moses.” Nehemiah doesn’t pass the buck. He does not lay the blame on someone else. He includes himself in the number. The situation is what it is because of what they failed to do, not God. No time for pointing fingers. If we fail to faithfully care for that which God has given us, we cannot expect to prosper. Israel failed miserably at caring and showing concern for God’s covenant and the result was exile and ruin. Nehemiah understood this and started where faithful stewardship, in situations like this, must start, confession. Why confession? Nehemiah knew his pursuit would not be successful apart from the hand of God being upon him. Disobedience brought about the circumstance and confession would bring about restoration. Church, resources are good. God’s anointing is better! Faithful stewardship takes accountability. Is there anything we may need to confess as we, metaphorically, rebuild the walls.

2 Chronicles 7:12-14, “Then one night the Lord appeared to Solomon and said, “I have heard your prayer and have chosen this Temple as the place for making sacrifices. ¹³ At times I might shut up the heavens so that no rain falls, or command grasshoppers to devour your crops, or send plagues among you. ¹⁴ Then if my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and restore their land.”

Psalms 127:1-2, “Unless the Lord builds a house, the work of the builders is wasted. Unless the Lord protects a city, guarding it with sentries will do no good. ² It is useless for you to work so

hard from early morning until late at night, anxiously working for food to eat; for God gives rest to his loved ones.”

1 Sam 15:22 “²²But Samuel replied, “What is more pleasing to the Lord: your burnt offerings and sacrifices or your obedience to his voice? Listen! Obedience is better than sacrifice, and submission is better than offering the fat of rams.

Finally, we see in Nehemiah’s example that faithful stewardship is willing to sacrifice. V1:11b, 2:2-3, “In those days I was the king’s cup-bearer... ²So the king asked me, “Why are you looking so sad? You don’t look sick to me. You must be deeply troubled.” Then I was terrified, ³but I replied, “Long live the king! How can I not be sad? For the city where my ancestors are buried is in ruins, and the gates have been destroyed by fire.”

Nehemiah laid it all on the line. Remember, to be generous is to show a readiness to give more than is strictly necessary or expected. He risked his life and laid down his prestigious, comfortable, and prosperous position as the king’s cupbearer so that he could go and do something about the situation in Jerusalem. And when he arrived on the scene, he gave and he gave and he continued to give. Church, he sacrificed. Faithful stewardship gets us out of our comfort zones, at times, because in being uncomfortable we learn that God is faithful and that he is ultimately the One who provides. As we consider what we will give next year, let’s get just a little uncomfortable. Nehemiah teaches us that faithful biblical stewardship shows genuine concern, takes accountability and is willing to sacrifice. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.