



Every Gift is From Above

Stewardship is the working and keeping (Gen. 2:15) of the good gifts that come from the hand of our loving heavenly Father to His redeemed and restored people. In the book of James, we are told, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change” (1:17 ESV). EVERY gift is from above! Every gift is perfect! This clear confession of the Scriptures makes this season of the church year ripe for teaching stewardship in a whole life

way. What a wonderful opportunity to teach that the gifts that are wrapped in the shiny paper nestled under the splendidly trimmed tree or stuffed in the stocking hung by the chimney with care are not from some rotund man in a red suit or even the parents who love their children more than life itself. The gifts actually are given to them from God! How might this teaching of stewardship change the way we look at all of the First Article gifts that we give and receive this time of year?

There is good theological reason for us to teach this kind of stewardship during this season of giving. While it might be fashionable to use this communication tool to launch into another diatribe against the evils of materialism, this *StewardCAST* will not reach for the low-hanging fruit. The problem with calling out materialism as evil is that it can quickly devolve into the gnostic idea that material is evil. James makes it clear that the things of creation are not evil. They are given to us by the hand of the Lord who loves us and provides for us all that we need to support this body and life. The gifts we receive daily and we take for granted, like daily bread, are just as much gifts from the Lord as are the “special” gifts that we receive at Christmas.

But then again, all our life as baptized children of God is a gift. This is the affirmative method of teaching stewardship during the Christmas season. Every good and perfect gift that we receive during the holidays and



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every good and perfect gift we receive on the “ordinary days” of the year flows from the greatest gift of all: the Gospel! Luther captures this thought in the Large Catechism beautifully:

When we were created by God the Father, and had received from Him all kinds of good things, the devil came and led us into disobedience, sin, death, and all evil. We lay under God’s wrath and displeasure, doomed to eternal damnation, as we had deserved. There was no counsel, no help, no comfort for us until this only and eternal Son of God, in His unfathomable goodness, had mercy on our misery and wretchedness and came from heaven to help us. Those tyrants and jailers now have been routed, and their place has been taken by Jesus Christ, the Lord of Life and righteousness and every good and blessing. He snatched us, poor lost creatures, from the jaws of hell, won us, made us free, and restored us to the Father’s favor and grace. He has taken us as His own, under His protection, in order that He may rule us by His righteousness, wisdom, power, life and blessedness (Large Catechism II, 28-30).

When the Lord Jesus Christ comes into our world as THE good and perfect Gift from the Father, it was for the purpose of restoring our relationship with Him, the creation and one another. That Gift, wrapped so beautifully in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger, is given in such a way that it changes everything for us. It restores our orientation to the Lord and His creation. This Gift is none other than the Gospel in the flesh. This is God’s all-powerful and creative Word come to save us from the destiny of our own making. No gift of gold or silver, or reason or effort in all creation, can have more impact on the eternity of all humanity than the gift of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a Gift given freely to the world in Word and Sacrament. It is not earned or found. In the simplest and purest form it is laid out for God’s beloved people.



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This Gift given freely to the world is given to be shared. It is the stewardship of the Gift of the Gospel that is the sole purpose of the Church. Luther in the Large Catechism makes this clear:

Neither you nor I could ever know anything of Christ, or believe in Him and take Him as our Lord, unless these were first offered to and bestowed on our hearts through the preaching of the Gospel by the Holy Spirit. The work is finished and completed, Christ has acquired and won the treasure for us by His sufferings, death, and resurrection, etc. But if the work remained hidden and no one knew of it, it would have been all in vain, all lost. In order that this treasure might not be buried but put to use and enjoyed, God has caused the Word to be published and proclaimed in which He has given the Holy Spirit to offer and apply to us this treasure of salvation (Large Catechism II, 38).

The publishing and the proclamation of the Gospel is at the heart of stewardship. In the modern world this process takes resources of all types. This means financial support not solely for institutional survival, but for the sharing of the Gospel. It means setting aside personal gain and ambition for the sake of giving away this Gift of the Gospel. As the Lord leads His people to the faithful use of all of life and life’s resources for the purposes of God’s kingdom, it is really a call to steward the Gospel. Faithful stewardship removes barriers for the Gospel. Paul illustrates this point as he writes:

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of

StewardCAST is published monthly by:
 LCMS Stewardship Ministry
 1333 S. Kirkwood Road
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StewardCAST may be reprinted with acknowledgment given to The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

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Give Now

those who preach the good news!” (Rom. 10:14-15 ESV).

The faithful response of the Lord’s baptized people serves as an instrument in the employ of the Holy Spirit to deliver the Father’s greatest Gift to a new generation of those who so desperately need it. The stewardship of the individual and the congregation as a whole does not accomplish it directly, but it does open up avenues for the Gift to be shared. This sharing takes place in the congregation, the community and throughout the world. The faithful response of God’s people allows for the sharing of the Father’s greatest Gift: Jesus!

It is this Gift-to-gift connection that converts stewardship from a membership transaction to a transformational discipleship experience. The gifts the Lord leads His people to lay before the altar are connected to the Gift of the Gospel that the congregation gathered around that altar is called to share. The generosity of God’s people flowing from the radical generosity of Jesus in the manger, on the cross and bursting forth from the tomb is transformational for both the giver and the receiver. The transformed steward no longer gives *to* (the institution, the budget or

favorite ministry project) but, by the conversion of the Holy Spirit, now gives *for* the sake of sharing the Gift that has been received.

This kind of stewardship is seen in the transformed shepherds after they met the infant Jesus. They had received the wonderful privilege of laying eyes on the Gift. While we never hear of these simple shepherds again in the Scriptures, it is clear through the pen of Luke that the Gift was transformational for them at the moment. In response to the Gift of seeing the Gospel in the flesh, they invested all of themselves in sharing that Gift as they made known abroad what had been told them about the child Jesus. In the local congregation, our Lord personally meets simple sinners week in and week out. This great Gift comes not in swaddled clothes but in bread and wine. The great Gift of the Lord to all humanity changes us going forward. The child of God leaves the altar heading out into the world as steward of this tremendous Gift. As instruments in the hands of the Lord, we are used by Him to do what needs to be done for the sake of the kingdom. The stewardship of our entire lives is really nothing more than the sum total of our Spirit-inspired stewardship of the Gospel! The rest of the year flows from here!

