

42

Days To Victory

Stewardship Enrichment Devotionals

Week 2

The Anatomy of a Christian Steward

A Mind that Remembers

Day 8, Sunday, September 23

If you are like I am, you have a problem with forgetting things. Well I used to, but not since I took that Sam Carnegie course!

Now there are only three things I have trouble remembering. They are names – faces and – I can't remember the third one.

An older couple was watching television when he got up to get a coke she said, "While you are in there bring me a dish of ice cream with chocolate syrup and cool whip. You had better write it down or you won't remember."

He was gone about 30 minutes and returned with a tray – 2 eggs sunny side up, crisp toast and jelly. She said, "I told you to write it down. You forgot the bacon."

Whether we are young, old or in between, there are some things we should never forget:

1. We should never forget God.

We are living in a day and with a generation that has mostly forgotten God. He has been put on a pension and given the honorary and harmless title "Heavenly Father" or "the man upstairs" or even "God Emeritus."

We have forgotten that God is alive and loose in the world! He is still the almighty God – the creator of heaven and earth – the Sovereign of the universe. Many have forgotten that "He's got the whole world in His hands, He's got you and me in His hands", as the song says.

Isn't it time for God to step in and say to us, as He said to ancient Israel, "Don't forget when you have an abundance, when you have eaten and are full, when your silver and gold have multiplied that it is the Lord your God who gives you power to get wealth. Remember that it was I who delivered you from bondage and brought you into this abundance." (a paraphrase of Deuteronomy 8:6-20)

2. We should never forget that the Lord Jesus Christ redeemed us.

The Bible reminds us of this on practically every page of the New Testament. Consider this verse:

"For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver and gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ..." (I Peter 1:18-19)

We must never forget that we belong to Jesus Christ. He is Lord of our lives. Since this is true we owe Him our obedience. We should never forget to be thankful and express it.

One of the most obvious ways we can show our love for Christ and express our thankfulness is in our church. The scripture tells us that, "Jesus loved the church and gave Himself for it." In fact, He so identifies Himself with His church that the way we treat the church is the way we treat our Savior.

Paul says, "I was persecuting the church." When he met Jesus he was asked, "Why are you persecuting me?"

In Stewardship Enrichment we all will have an opportunity to show our love and express our thanksgiving by our sacrificial commitment.

Soon we will all hold a commitment card in our hands. Our church will be asking us to make a financial commitment, which represents our faith and love for our church and our God. May we do this with joy.

In Champagne for the Soul, Mike Mason writes, "Joy comes from thinking God's thoughts, doing his will, looking at everything through His eyes by the power of the indwelling Spirit. To embrace entirely God's point of view, however briefly, is to be joyful."

"A blanket acquiescence to the Lord's will – and not only to His will but to His ways – is the high cost of joy. Even if we are convinced that God's ends for us are good, we may still question His means. Joy gives up all this questioning and hands the Lord a blank check, saying, "Write upon it whatever You will; I'll gladly agree." Joy, by definition, does everything gladly."

Lord, I love You with my mind. You are always in my thoughts.

The Anatomy of a Christian Steward

Eyes That See

Day 9, Monday, September 17

*“...your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.”
Acts 2:17*

When Disney World was completed and the ribbon cutting was taking place, an executive and friend of Walt Disney began thinking of the vision that Walt had had years before his death. He turned to Mrs. Disney and said, “It’s a shame Walt couldn’t have seen this!” Mrs. Disney replied, “He did! That’s why we’re here today!”

The vision had become a reality. Think of it. Visions become a reality when there is leadership and sacrifice.

Our church has vision. It is true that, “our young men have visions and our old men dream dreams,” (Acts 2:17) but all of us share the vision of what we could accomplish and what we will accomplish for His glory.

For our vision to become a reality however it must be:

A Common Vision – We must all share the vision of what God would have us do. If each has a different vision we shall be fragmented. It will cripple rather than give wings. We the church are a body in which all parts work together in unity. This is happening as we follow the leadership of the Holy Spirit, of our Pastor and staff, and of our stewardship leadership team.

A Consecrated Vision – Our vision must be God’s plan for us, not just our human desires. We firmly believe that God has led us individually, as committees, and as a church. It has been, and is being, bathed in prayer. His leadership is evident everywhere we look.

Where God guides God provides! He would not have placed the vision in our minds if He did not plan to provide the means – and you are part of His plan.

A Challenging Vision – Our church never has had small dreams. Our dreams will always be great because they are given to us by a great God. Our members have always responded as God led. Sacrifices will be required if we are to accomplish God’s will for our church.

When we look at plans for the future of our church, we can see all of this becoming a reality. We see a facility teeming with activity for God’s glory. We see multitudes being reached for the kingdom. We see the miracle of God’s grace.

Perhaps you don’t see today what many see, but you can. Remember the account in II Kings 6:16. Elisha’s servant looked about and saw the horses and chariots of the enemy. He thought the battle was impossible. Elisha then says “Fear not” and he prayed, “Lord open his eyes that he may

see.” And the Lord opened his eyes and he saw the horses and chariots of fire of the Lord surrounding them. Victory was theirs.

There are times when our vision gets dimmed. Sometimes it is blurred:

◆ Blurred by Tradition

Someone once said the seven last words of a church are, “We never did it that way before.”

◆ Dimmed by Selfishness

I know a deacon who violently opposed the building program of his church. He knew the need and recognized the consequence of not building. He didn’t want to give himself nor his wealth, so he opposed the program.

◆ Blinded by Satan

Some have Spiritual Myopia. They can only see the immediate situation and are unable, or refuse, to see the long-range impact of God’s plan for the church. Long-term possibilities for service and ministry are lost.

When our vision is dimmed, we can’t see the youth of our church being nurtured and developed into examples of Christian leadership. We can’t see the unreached being won to Christ and nurtured in our beloved church. We can’t see the plans and possibilities God has before our church.

Pray that the Lord will open our eyes and enable us to catch the vision that He has for our church. He will answer that prayer and “show you great and mighty things beyond your imagination.”

Someone asked Helen Keller, “What could be worse than having no sight?” She answered, “Having sight and no vision!”

*Lord, I have eyes to see. Please open my eyes so that I can see Your vision,
as if I were seeing through Your eyes.*

The Anatomy of a Christian Steward

Ears That Hear

Day 10, Tuesday, September 18

“He who has ears, let him hear.” Matthew 11:15

God is speaking to us all the time and our ears can be attuned to His voice.

The problem is that there are so many voices – a cacophony of sound. The radio, the television, the Internet and the newspapers – all are clamoring to be heard. Sometimes we feel like a stray dog at a whistler’s convention. We are not sure what to listen to.

Samuel prayed, “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.” (I Samuel 3:10) His voice does not always come as we expect. Look at Elijah. He was listening expectantly. First the wind came, “but the Lord was not in the wind.” Then came an earthquake, “but the Lord was not in the earthquake.” After the earthquake came the fire, “but the Lord was not in the fire.” And after the fire, there came the “still small voice”. God spoke to him and his life was changed.

We, too, will hear His voice in the medium that He chooses to use. Certainly He speaks through the Bible. He speaks as we pray, as we worship, and in our devotions (such as this one). He speaks in the circumstances of life and at times we are not expecting. He speaks through our pastor and our leadership team as they call us to focus on stewardship enrichment.

When God speaks, it may be a call to salvation. “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone will hear my voice...I will come in to him...” (Revelation 3:20)

It may be a call to service. He called for one to serve and Isaiah responded, “Here am I, send me.” (Isaiah 6:8)

It is a call to surrender. Listen to God as He speaks through David, “Who is willing to consecrate his services this day unto the Lord?” (I Chronicles 29:5)

It certainly is a call to stewardship. Jesus Himself says, “Give and it will be given to you...” (Luke 6:38)

Author O. S. Hawkins writes...

“The principal hindrance to the advancement of the Kingdom of God is greed. It is the chief obstacle to heaven-sent revival. It seems that when the back of greed is broken, the human spirit soars into regions of unselfishness.

I believe it is safe to say there can be no continuous revival without “hilarious” giving. And I fear no contradiction: wherever there is “hilarious” giving there will soon be revival!”

Look at your life in the light of eternity. Imagine that you are in the presence of Jesus and the two of you are looking over your life...

- ◆ Imagine how your time was used to enrich the lives of others.
- ◆ Imagine how your talents brought glory to His name.
- ◆ Imagine how your treasure enriched His church and brought others to know Jesus.

Today, this very hour, you can begin to live this life.

Today is the first day of the rest of your life – a new beginning!

“Today if you hear His voice, harden not your heart!” (Hebrews 3:8)

Lord, I hear so many sounds around me, but the sound I long to hear above all others is your still, small voice saying, “I love you, my child.”

The Anatomy of a Christian Steward

A Tongue That Tells

Day 11, Wednesday, September 19

James 3:1-12

Careless speech can cause all sorts of trouble and offend God and others. Proverbs 6:16-19 says there are seven things God hates: “haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to run into evil, a false witness who pours out lies, and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers.” Three of these have to do with the tongue. Also notice that two of the Ten Commandments have to do with the use or abuse of the tongue.

The book of James has more to say about the tongue than any other book in the Bible. All five chapters deal with the tongue in various ways. Chapter three says more than any others.

First, he deals with the potential of the tongue. He points out the tongue can guide life. Just as the bit in a horse’s mouth controls the horse, so the tongue controls one’s life. Control the tongue and you can control the passions of life.

Then James says the tongue can harm lives. The illustration of fire is used. A little spark can ignite dry, brittle leaves and destroy an entire forest. Think of the harm done by the tongue of fire. Lives ruined and reputations destroyed by an evil tongue.

Have you ever tried to influence a bowling ball with “body language” after it’s left your hand and is heading for the gutter? It’s hard to control the ball at that point.

The same is true of the words we speak. They are difficult to control after they leave our lips. Only time will tell the good or evil they will bring.

Next, the Holy Spirit deals with the power of the tongue. It can either bless or curse, depending on its use.

The tongue can bless by confessing Christ Jesus as Savior. In Romans 10 we read, “That if you confess with your mouth “Jesus is Lord”, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.” (Romans 10:9-10)

And Jesus said, “Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him in heaven before my Father.” (Matthew 10:32)

The tongue can bless by encouraging and comforting. Our world is filled with lonely, empty, discouraged people who are hungry for a kind and loving word. There are those who are hurting and crying out for words of comfort that only a caring Christian can give. You can be that person.

The tongue can bless by witnessing. A teenager was overheard once saying, “I am a Christian because Barbara told me about Jesus and what He meant to her.” You can do the same for

someone you know. He will put His words in your mouth. Jesus said, "For it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you." (Matthew 10:20)

The tongue can bless by testifying. The little girl who said, "Since Jesus came, I feel clean inside," can share her heart's purity with others. The washwoman that E. Stanley Jones tells about, who exclaimed, "I ain't what I ought to be and I ain't what I'm gonna be, but I'm heaps better than I used to be," can tell people how it is that she is different.

When we hear other people's stories of conversion, it has a great effect on us. People's hearts are moved by people whose hearts have been moved.

Your own stories are just as precious and powerful. Have you shared one with anyone lately?

*Lord, my experiences of your love burst from my heart.
Please give me the words to tell my stories to those longing to know you.*

The Anatomy of a Christian Steward

A Heart That Gives

Day 12, Thursday, September 20

Today your heart will beat 103,369 times, and during this time it will pump your blood 168,000,000 miles. This vital organ is no larger than a man's fist, and yet its condition largely determines the state of a person's health.

But what about the "spiritual heart"? The Bible has much to say on this subject. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they will see God." (Matthew 5:8) Obviously He wasn't talking about man's physical heart. In fact, when the Bible uses the term, it refers to the moral and spiritual life of a person. The condition of this heart determines the spiritual health of an individual, just as the physical heart does the physical health. The Hebrew word refers to the intellectual, emotional, and volitional aspects of one's personality.

As the Scripture says, "For as he thinks in his heart, so he is." (Proverbs 23:7) In fact, our entire relationship with God is determined by the attitude of our heart.

We are invited to...

Seek God with all our heart. (Psalms 119:2)
"Blessed are they who seek him with all their heart."

Believe God with all our heart. (Romans 10:10)
"For it is with your heart...that you are saved."

Love God with all our heart. (Matthew 22:37)
"Love the Lord your God with all your heart."

Serve God with all our heart. (Joshua 22:5)
"Serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul."

Do the will of God with all our heart. (Ephesians 6:6)
"Doing the will of God from your heart."

Give with all our heart. (Exodus 35:5)
God said, "Receive an offering for me from those who have a willing heart."

It should not surprise us that when the apostle Paul wanted to challenge us in the principles of giving, that he focused on the heart: "Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." (II Corinthians 9:7)

Here Paul is speaking to the Christian. He says that God has given you a new heart through faith in Jesus Christ. It is a heart filled with love and faith. A Christian is one who has been forgiven. He has a heart that is forgiving and a heart for giving. It is the new nature to give!

In light of this, and realizing that we are God's stewards and His fellow laborers, we are blessed with His guidance in giving. Notice what He has said on the subject...

Willing - God's first command about fund raising was "receive an offering from those who are of a willing heart." (Exodus 35:5) David said, "I have given willingly; the leaders have given

willingly and now I have seen with joy how willingly your people have given.” (I Chronicles 29:6,17-18)

Generous – God has been generous in giving to you, how can you do less?

Sacrificial – as David said, “I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing.” (II Samuel 24:24)

Proportionate – as Paul told all of us, “give as God has prospered you.” (II Corinthians 9:7b)
Jesus said of Mary, “She has done what she could.” (Mark 14:8)

Cheerful – Remember, “God loves a cheerful giver.”

Loving – Jesus said, “God so loved the world that He gave...” (John 3:16)

Jesus was saying – love matters! God knows your heart.

Yes, we can give without loving, but we cannot love without giving. When we love we give generously and gladly. We give as God has given, whether it be large or small.

“Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift.” (II Corinthians 9:15) There is no “hardening of the hearteries here!”

*Lord, give me a willing heart.
Bless me with the joys that flow from a giving and cheerful heart!*

The Anatomy of a Christian Steward

An Appetite that Hungers

Day 13, Friday, September 21

Matthew 5:6

Abraham Lincoln, it is said, was always striving to be better. On one occasion a friend found him sitting with his Bible open on his knee. Lincoln said, "I have been reading the Beatitudes and can at least claim one of the blessings. It is the blessing pronounced upon those who hunger and thirst after righteousness."

What could Jesus mean by saying we are blessed when we hunger after righteousness? Perhaps we will understand it if we consider His words one at a time. Let us note the following:

A. The Condition He Described – "hunger after righteousness"

We all differ in many ways – DNA, fingerprints, color, height, weight, I.Q., etc. But all the races, nations, and individuals are the same in that we all hunger and thirst.

But we are dealing here with a spiritual hunger that can only be satisfied with a spiritual experience. We "hunger" – intensely desire – righteousness.

It is this hunger that Jesus is talking about! Actually, hunger is a sign of health. A good appetite indicates growth. One of the first things a doctor asks is, "How is your appetite?"

It is also a sign of spiritual health and growth. God has placed in each of us an insatiable hunger for Him. The Psalmist cried out, "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O, God." (Psalm 42:1)

B. The Challenge He Gave – "hunger after righteousness"

This is considered by many to be the most challenging of all the beatitudes. It is uncompromising. It insists that the Christian life is not for one who is simply interested or attracted, but for those who desire righteousness as a matter of life and death.

Remember, the righteousness that Christ is talking about is not a possession, but a passion. It is an intense desire to be "right" with God. This is settled when we give our lives to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

It also means to "do right" toward God. The starting point is to "love the Lord the God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." (Matthew 22:37). When we fail to put God first and do His will, we are not "doing right" toward God.

Certainly it involves keeping His commandments. A good starting point here is the commandment, "Love your neighbor as yourself." This is not easy, but it is godly. Someone once said,

To dwell there above

With those that we love
Oh, that will be glory.
But to live here below
With those that we know
Well, that's another story.

What about His request that we, "Bring all the tithes and offerings into my storehouse." Oh that's another story too, but we can't pick and choose can we?

C. The Comfort He Defined – "shall be filled"

Sure it is demanding. No one said it was easy. The price is great, but so is the reward. When we meet His demand to "hunger after righteousness", He promises us that we shall be "filled." What a picture! The word was used to describe the feeding and fattening of cattle. The idea is that one keeps on hungering, but is constantly being satisfied.

God said, "...Open wide your mouth and I will fill it." (Psalm 81:10)

There is no satisfaction greater than having hungered to know and do God's will, and then doing it. This results in His saying, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

*Lord, I hunger for You. Fill me completely with your Holy Spirit,
that I may do Your will.*

The Anatomy of a Christian Steward

Hands That Help

Day 14, Saturday, September 22

Ecclesiastes 9:10 and Ephesians 4:28

Grandchildren have the happy way of questioning us with their riddles. For instance:

- * What did the digital clock say to its mother? ...Look Mom, no hands!!!
- * If you have eight oranges in one hand and eight oranges in the other, what do you have? ...Big hands!!!

Well, no matter how many hands you have or how big they are, the Bible has much to say about how you use them.

Through the centuries, God has chosen to use hands that are committed to Him.

He asked Moses – “What’s that in your hand?” “Why Lord, it’s a shepherd’s staff.” God said, “Use it for my glory.” And Moses led God’s people out of bondage in Egypt to the promise land.

Samson, “What’s that in your hand?” “It’s only the jaw bone of an ass!” “Then use it for my glory.” And the Philistines were destroyed.

David, “You are only a shepherd lad, but what’s that in your hand?” “It’s only a sling Lord!” “Then use it for my glory.” And the giant Goliath was slain.

Jesus looks to a young boy and asks, “What’s that in your hand?” “It’s just a lunch – five loaves and two fishes.” Jesus said, “Let’s use it for God’s glory.” So He took it, blessed it and fed the five thousand.

In like manner God asks you – “What’s that in your hand?” And your answer –

- “It’s a computer skill”
- “It’s an artistic talent”
- “It’s a teaching ability”
- “It’s farming knowledge”
- “It’s a large stock portfolio”
- “It’s a management ability”

And God says, “Use it for my glory.” The need is great. The opportunities are everywhere. God needs your hands to help.

A well-known preacher, C. Roy Angell, told the following story that illustrates this. It is about an incident that happened in a little village in France after the war...

A detachment of soldiers had been left as occupational troops to keep order in the town. Time hung heavy on their hands. One day they decided to help the villagers restore their bombed homes and city. They started on the church. It was a big job, for the church had received a direct hit. They worked joyously and cheerfully, cleaning up debris, putting back the windows, and rebuilding the pews.

Amid the debris they found a marble statue of Christ. It was badly broken, but they managed to cement it together and set it up in its niche in the wall. But search as they would, they could not find the hands for the statue of Christ. And so when they had finished arranging the statue in its place, a moment of inspiration came to one of them. He made a sign and hung it on the statue. These simple words were printed on it, "He has no hands but yours."

In a few days, God will say to you. "What is that in your hand?" And you will answer, "It is my commitment card." And God will say, "Use it for My glory." Your card and the commitment it represents are important to God, His church and you.

Before you turn in the commitment card, ask yourself these questions:

- Would I be pleased to place this card personally in the nail pierced hand of my Lord?
- Would I be satisfied saying to Him, "This represents my love for you?"
- Would I be comfortable saying, "This expresses my thanksgiving for the sacrifice you made for me on the cross?"
- Could I say to Him, "This is a sacrifice. It is in proportion to what you have given me."

Lord, take my hands and let them be used to serve and sacrifice for You.