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Heavenly Father, thank you for this beautiful day. Thank you for the freedom to come together and to love each other and to love you and to worship you and to learn from your word. God, as we dig in now to your scriptures and learn about stewardship, we pray that you will help us to understand just what it is you're calling us to and what you would have us do. And please speak to our hearts with your Holy Spirit. We pray in Jesus' name, amen. So like I said, stewardship. I've been at the Western yearly meeting sessions since Thursday. And I've been working with the youth, but they said that the adults are going to be talking about stewardship. And so I made sure that when we were talking with the kids, we were also talking about stewardship. And as I was praying and putting together the lessons for the youth, I said, oh, this is something we should talk about at church. So we're going to. Now, when I say stewardship, most people-- the first thing they think of is that I'm going to give the tithing sermon. And that's not what this is. Tithing is really only a small part of being a steward of your money. And being a steward of your money is really only a small part of stewardship. So we're looking at the big picture today. But we are going to talk about being a good steward of your money. And the first place that we read about that in the-- or the first place we're going to talk about that is when the people are talking to Jesus. And they say, are we supposed to pay taxes? Because the taxes go to Caesar, and Caesar is evil, and he's persecuting the Jews. And are we supposed to pay taxes? And Jesus took a coin, and he said, whose picture is this? And whose inscription is this? And they said, Caesar's. And then in Matthew 22, 21, he said, well, then give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and give to God what belongs to God. In Acts 2, 45, as it's describing the early church and how they live and went about their lives, it says they sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. In 1 Corinthians 16, Paul is writing to the church in Corinth, and he says, regarding your question about money being collected for God's people in Jerusalem, you should follow the same procedure I gave to the churches in Galatia. On the first day of each week, you should put aside a portion of the money you have earned. Don't wait until I get there and try to collect it all at once. So these verses, I'm just bringing these up to say that these are an example that in the Bible, God expects us to do good with his money. Just as simple as that. We should look at the money as coming from God, which is what Jesus was saying when he says, give to God what is God's. He says, if you have skills, if you have a job, if you have a source of income, then you should recognize that that's from God, and you should take a portion of that, not all of it. Give as much as your heart wants, but take at least a portion of that and put it to the work of the kingdom. Bless God, glorify God with some of your income. But other verses about money are more cautionary in nature. When Paul is writing to Timothy, in chapter 3, he says he's describing what an elder should look like. When he says, Timothy, as you're picking elders, one of the requirements, he says, is make sure that they're not a lover of money. And then later in chapter 6, he expounds on that. He says, for the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. And some people, craving money, have wandered from the true faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows. That's a verse that's, as you may know, is often misquoted. People say, money is the root of all evil, and that's not what it says. It says, the love of money, not money itself. And it says, the root of all kinds of evil, not all evil. All right? The idea being there, we've been talking the past few weeks about discipleship and how Jesus is supposed to be number one in our hearts. He's supposed to be our obsession. And some people have misplaced their obsession and become obsessed with money. And in doing so, they have run into all sorts of evil and caused all sorts of evil as they pursued their new obsession of money. Later on in that same chapter, Paul says, teach those who are rich in the world not to be proud and not to trust in their money because it's unreliable. Their trust should be in God, who richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment. Tell them to use their money to do good. They should be rich in good works and generous to those in need, always being ready to share with others. By doing this, they will be storing up their treasure as a good foundation for the future so that they may experience true life. Again, Paul is emphasizing here, tell anyone who has money not to be obsessed with it. Be obsessed with Jesus and use that money for his glory. In the book of Hebrews, Peter tells us in chapter 13, verse 5, don't love money. Be satisfied with what you have, for God has said, I will never fail you. I will never abandon you. And in Matthew 6, 24, Jesus says, no one can serve two masters. You will hate one and love the other. You will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money. I just read the story this week back in-- I want to say-- I should have written it down. It was either 1 Kings or 1 Samuel. But it's the story about how the Philistines captured the ark. And the Philistines worshiped this god Dagon. And they had a statue of Dagon. And so they capture the ark. And they're like, yay, we've got two gods now. We'll be twice as powerful. And so they take the ark and they set it up next to the statue of Dagon. And they all go to bed. And they wake up the next day, and the statue of Dagon is knocked over. And they're like, huh, that's weird. So they set the statue back up, go to bed again, and they wake up the next day. And he's knocked over again. And his head has been broken off and his hands have been broken off. And the point of that story is that God will not share space with any other god, whether it's Dagon or whether it's money. And Jesus is saying, you can't have this dual-- godship is dual idolatry in your life. You can either love and serve and be obsessed with God, or you can love and serve and be obsessed with money. But you've got to choose one or the other, because God will not share his throne. So the Bible teaches us that part of the way, that God takes care of us is by giving us money, but that we should use some of our money to help those in need. And that's what it means to be a good steward of your money. But there are other things that we have that we need to be good stewards of. Psalm 24, verse 1 says, "The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein." This verse tells us two things. First, it tells us that the earth is the Lord's. So you may remember-- I think I've mentioned this before-- that in the book of Genesis, back when God was creating everything and he was making everything perfect, his perfect idea for humankind was just to live in the earth and take care of it. Genesis 2.15, "The Lord God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and watch over it." That was it. That was our first job, just taking care of the planet. And that hasn't changed. In fact, we really need to step it up now, because now that we've sinned and now that sin and corruption and death has entered this world, there's a lot more that needs to be taken care of. And I'm not going to be drug into any arguments about global warming and all that kind of stuff. It's up to you to use your brain and read and decide what you believe. But wherever you come down on those controversial issues, at the end of the day, recycling does help. There's some really simple things you can do. Don't pour motor oil down the drain. Even if you don't agree on those issues, there's just some basic stuff you can do to take care of the earth. And so recognize that God has given this place as our home. And it's not just your home for you right now. It's also your home for your grandkids and your great grandkids. And we're trying to leave a world from them that isn't full of poison water and depleted of resources and stuff. So we should be responsible with the earth. But that verse tells us that the earth is the Lord's and those who dwell therein. So not only should we be taking care of the earth, but we should be taking care of the people who live on the earth. And I'm saddened sometimes because I see people who get so caught up in environmentalism and in saving the planet and stuff, and they don't care about the brothers and sisters in this world who are sick and malnourished and dying and suffering and war and those kinds of things. Humans really are more important than the planet. We should take care of both of them, but never lose sight of the fact that God created humans and God loves humans. And we need to do what we can to alleviate the suffering and the burdens of this world. Matthew 5, 44 says, "Love your enemies. Pray for those who persecute you." And someone starving to death in Africa may not be your friend or your enemy, but gosh, if Jesus tells us to love the person who's your enemy, the person who's the furthest from you, then all the people in between, the people who you don't know and don't have anything good or bad towards, you ought to be loving them too. First John 3, 17, "If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion, how can God's love be in that person?" James 2, 15, "Suppose you see a brother or a sister who has no food or clothing and you say goodbye and have a good day, stay warm and eat well, but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do? So you see faith by itself isn't enough unless it produces good deeds. It is dead and useless." We are around the people we are around because God has put us around them. The people at your job, the people in your neighborhood, the people in your family, the people in your church, the people in your clubs, the people you're around are there by God's design. And on some level, God wants you considering them and turning your hearts towards them for His glory. Now maybe for some people that means sharing the gospel, sharing the good news, maybe for some people it just means forgiving and being nice. Or maybe for some people it's just baking some food for them and you never even get to see them. Like when you adopt a kid with Compassion International, you may never get to meet that person, but you're still doing good and you're helping that person. Whether you are a brother, a sister, a husband, a wife, a student, a classmate, a neighbor, whatever you are, God wants you to be the best blank as you can possibly be. The best neighbor, the best brother or sister, the best parent. And then there's something else that we should be a good steward of, and it's found in these two verses. First Corinthians 4.1. "Let a man so consider us as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God." First Peter 4.10. "As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." We are to be stewards of the mysteries and grace of God. Now this means really two things. There's two things you can do to be a good steward of the mystery and the grace of God. And the first one we kind of just touched on that is sharing this mystery and this grace. You see, the most precious thing you have is your faith. And I hope if you're a Christian, I hope you understand that. If you have true, genuine faith, then no matter if you lose your money or your job or your house or your health or your relationships or whatever, if you're still on the rock of Jesus, you will be OK. That's how valuable and that's how precious your faith is. But the people of this world don't have that. They build their houses on the sand of money and money gets washed away out from under them and then their life is chaos. Or they build their house on the sand of relationships and then they break up. Or they build their house on the sand of their job and they get outsourced. And when these things, these temporary things get washed out from under us, washed out from under them, it just destroys their life. They fall apart. They don't know what to do because they don't have the faith that we have. They don't have a rock to build their life on. And even if we were to lose our very lives, we know that we have hope that we will take our last breath here and take our next breath with Jesus. So being a good steward of the mystery and the grace of God means sharing this wonderful, amazing, valuable thing with those who don't have it, with those who are still foolishly building their lives on that which is just going to fall out from underneath them. We have a precious gift. We have what they need. And God expects to take what we have and share it, to share that hope with a lost, hurting, dying world. So partly to be a good steward of the mysteries and the grace is to share it with others. But another part of being a good steward of the mysteries and the grace of God is to build it up and nurture it inside of us. If you neglect to take care of yourself, you're not going to be able to take care of all of these other things we've talked about, money and the earth and your brothers and sisters out there. If you want to be able to do all that, you have to start by taking care of what's inside you. If you're at the store and you see something you really love, what do you do? You buy it, right? And if you really love it, you don't even look at the price tag. You just-- I've got to have it. Just don't-- just put it in the bag. Just tell me. Just take my money. First Corinthians 6.20, you were bought at a price. Therefore, glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's. You see, God looked at you and he loved you and he had to have you. And the price tag said the blood of Jesus. And he said, I'm willing to pay it. I've got to have that. I've got to have them. But now that we've been purchased, you are not your own anymore. One of the greatest differences between how this world lives and how Christians are to live is that we realize we are not our own. We belong to God. Galatians 2.20 says, I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. And the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. If you ask people, what's your obsession? What's the thing that gets you out of bed? What do you live for? Well, some people are going to say, I live for money. I want the nice car. I want the nice clothes. I want the nice house on the beach with the plane and the boat. And I want it all. I want money. I ask someone else, what's your obsession? What do you live for? And they say, I live for so and so. They are my light and my joy and my love, and I live for them. Another person will say, I live for freedom from work. I'm working hard, saving up, and investing so that I can retire early and just vacation and live free from work. That's what I live for. Someone else, typically the younger generation, will say, I live to party. I work Monday through Friday. He said, that starting Friday night, I can party straight through to Sunday night and buy eyedrops at the gas station so I can make it to work on Monday. Other people, if I say, what do you live for? They say, I want to achieve greatness. I want to accomplish great things. I want my name to go down into history books. I want my name to be taught in schools and remembered for as long as possible. Or I want to be famous. I want to have fans that adore me and have posters of me on their wall and have my DVD on their bookshelf. Or other people will say, if I say, what do you live for? What's your obsession? They'll say, I live for personal enlightenment. I want to be the best human being I can be. I want to be perfectly fit, perfectly calm and rational and completely in control. I want to be the pinnacle of human evolution. I want to be perfect human. I bet if we asked the Christians in this country, what do they live for? What is their obsession? We might get a lot of those answers. But as Christians, we need to give up those obsessions and become obsessed with just one thing, Jesus. The answer to the question, what do you live for should be Jesus. What do you get out of bed in the morning for should be Jesus. Why? Because he purchased me with his blood. He loves me that much that he saved me from the mess I was in. I live for him now. And when I make decisions and choices, it's always because he is at the front of my mind or the back of my mind or whatever. It's for him that I do what I do. When I decide the course of my life, it's with Jesus in mind. Our final bit of stewardship is that you need to take care of you. Recently, as many of you know, the Pedigos lost their son Nathan. And he was an amazing young man, and he did a lot of great stuff for God. But at some point along the way, the devil got into his head. The devil convinced Nathan of things that weren't true, things like he was worthless and had no hope, and that there was no way out of his situation. And so even though he had done these great things for God, the devil won that fight and convinced Nathan to end his own life. Philippians 3, 13, this is the verse that we've been teaching the kids at summer camp this year. "Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended, but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." This is not just Paul's way of saying try harder. This is Paul's way of saying, you guys, we are at war. If our life is a race, the devil is allowed to stand on the sidelines and shout lies and insults and anything he can to give us to slow down or even just quit and give up. And because of this, because we have this evil coach right next to us in our lives, we need to get serious. We need to live like athletes. We don't need to run just a little faster. We need to run like a lion is chasing us, because that's what the Bible describes the devil as, is a lion who wants to devour you. And so we need to live our lives like that is the race we are running. God has a plan for you. It's a plan to prosper you. It's beautiful. It's wonderful. But when you chose Team Jesus, you also got an enemy with it. And the devil's plan for you is to kill you, to steal what you have, and to destroy what you've done or what you might do. And the way he's going to do this is through your mind. I don't know exactly what anything was going through, but I do know the kinds of thoughts and feelings that he felt, because I felt them. And I'm sure you have too. We've all stepped up and tried and done something and started hearing that little whisper in our ear that you messed up. You failed. That was miserable. And if we get 100 people that tell us we did a great job, one person criticizes, and we think they're the one telling the truth, and that everyone else was lying. But here is the truth. You are special to God. He did look at you and decide, I want to pay the price to purchase you. He loves you more than you are capable of imagining. You realize that if God didn't love you, that you-- well, first of all, he could have just ended your life before you were born. The fact that we're alive and breathing is the first sign that God loves us. But even more than that, the fact that you have faith in your heart, the fact that you believe in Jesus is evidence that God loves you. Because until God put faith in our heart, we weren't able to believe in Jesus. The Bible says that the faith that we have-- you were saved by grace through faith, and that faith is not of yourself. That faith is from God. So don't ever doubt that God loves you, because the fact that you are here and breathing and that you believe in Jesus is evidence that he loves you. And so as stewards of God, it is your highest priority to be a steward of your heart and your mind. You need to get into your Bible and study it, not just skim it, not just read it. Study it. Read it, meditate on it, and pray about it. Pray all the time. And most of all, you need to fight the devil's lies in your head with the truth, God's truth. First Corinthians 9, 27. This is Paul speaking. "I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified." If the greatest apostle ever says, I have to discipline myself, otherwise I'm going to stumble and fail, then brothers and sisters, we also need to get serious about disciplining ourselves. We could debate about how great Paul was, but he did a lot. He wrote a lot. And yet he still said, I have to be serious about this. This is-- I've said this before. This is not a hobby for me. This is something I am in the middle of a war. There is a lion chasing me, and I need to get serious. Otherwise, I'm going to mess up and fail. But the good news, 1 John 4, 4. "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world." "He who is in you is greater than he who is chasing you," is what that says. Romans 8, 31, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" So that's the good news is that we are in this difficult, desperate situation, but we have someone so strong on our side, someone who's filling our hearts with power and love and who is guiding us into everything that we need to complete this race with victory. But to do that, we need to stay. We need to get the Bible into our minds, and we need to get prayer to change our hearts. And we need to be ready to shoot down all the lies that come our way with the truth of God. And if we want to do these things, we're going to have to let go with all that other nonsense that we're obsessed with and become obsessed with Jesus. I have to say, I'm not going to obsess. I'm not going to spend all my time thinking about money. I'm not going to spend all my time thinking about relationships or parties or fame or whatever. I'm going to spend my time thinking about Jesus. And if I have to think about something else like my job or do something else, I'm going to figure out how to make Jesus a part of it. I'm not just going to leave Jesus at Sunday morning. I'm going to bring him into my conversations, into my workplace, into my neighborhood. Since Jesus is now my obsession, I'm bringing him into all the little other places where I am. The Bible calls that dying to self, which means we say, I'm not going to be like the world. I'm not living for anything except Jesus. I'm going to get to know him. I'm going to go where he goes, do what he does, think like he thinks, speak like he speaks, love like he loves, forgive like he forgives. And I'm going to keep doing that until people can't tell the two of us apart. That's what God has called us to, is to keep imitating Jesus until people can't tell you and Jesus apart. That's the life we've been called to. Let's think about that during our time of open worship now. [AUDIO OUT] Heavenly Father, we are so humbled and amazed that you chose to love us even at the cost of your son Jesus. And God, we are sorry and we repent for living our lives like they're still ours anymore. God, help us to understand what it truly means to be obsessed with Jesus, to live like him, to mirror him, to bring him into every aspect of our lives. Help us to understand, fill us with the Holy Spirit to give us the power and the strength and the wisdom to live the lives that you've called us to live. In the name of your son Jesus, I pray, amen.