

Pastor Tom Mortenson

Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

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Stewarding the Mysteries of God

1 Corinthians 4:1-2

Prayer: *Father God, I do again thank you, I thank you for who you are, I thank you for your presence, I thank you for the gift that you've given to us of your church, the gift you've given to us of your word, the gift you've given to us of the mysteries of who you are. And Father, this morning as we finish up our look into the mysteries of God and stewarding them, I pray, I pray for your grace, I pray for your Holy Spirit's unction, I pray that my words would connect and that you would give them your power and your grace, that they may become of permanent value, and I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, this morning, we are finishing up our study of stewardship. This is the sixth installment in the study of stewardship, and just to recap, we have summed up stewardship really as a matter of passion. A steward is passionate about the kingdom of God. He or she thinks and plans and acts as if they own the kingdom of God and the kingdom owns them. We've been looking at three different areas that stewards are passionate about: We've been looking at money,

minutes, and the mysteries of God. For money, we looked at Randy Alcorn's *Treasure Principle* and we saw that living for the line of eternity rather than for the dot of this short life, defines a steward's attitude toward money. Where our treasure was will show where our hearts really were. For minutes, we saw that passion is something that is literally measurable in minutes. Whatever has our minutes has our passion. And for the mysteries of God, we look first at what that mystery was, and in capsule form, it means this: It means, number one, we were fallen, we were cursed, we were doomed by the sin of Adam and that God saw, God cared, God came to earth as the man Jesus, God lived out his life perfectly as one of us and then he went to the cross for us. Jesus took our punishment, Jesus died in our place, God the Father accepted Jesus' sacrifice, Jesus rose from the dead. We live forever when we place our trust in that God. And so in greatly simplified form, that is the mysteries of God. They are the answer to the "what" question, and today we're going to look at the "how" and the "why." How we steward the mysteries of God, and why.

Now, the scripture we are looking at this morning is *1 Corinthians 4:1-2* which says this, it says: *Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.* You know, a steward is someone who bears responsibility for managing someone

else's resource. And we spoke of money and minutes and how we steward them, but how do you steward, how do you steward a mystery? This is an issue that has divided the church for many, many years. The reformed perspective is that ever since Adam's fall, man has been rendered incapable of responding to the gospel. *2 Corinthians 4:3-4* says this, it says: *And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.* Put simply, the gospel is hidden. It is veiled to unbelievers. It makes no sense to minds blinded by the god of this world, by the devil himself. You see, the results of the fall is a radical inability of man to seek after God. And God says in *Romans 3:10*: *As it is written: "There is none righteous, no not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God."*

Now, I've asked this question many times before, and a reasonable question to raise is say well, if this is so, then why are churches and synagogues and temples and mosques so filled with seekers, I mean, if no one seeks after God? Well, the answer is that we are all desperately seeking something. You know, in some cases it's relief, some it's release, some it's community, some it's security, some it's peace, you know, these are some of the things that we

think God or Buddha or any other god will give us if we do his bidding. What God is telling us in *Romans 3:10* is that we really want nothing to do with the real God, because no one seeks for that God.

Now, the non-reformed view sincerely disagrees. It says we all fell in Adam's fall but not so radically that we still can't reach out to God. After all, Jesus says in *Matthew 7*: "*Seek and you shall find.*" I mean, doesn't that at least imply an ability to seek? And if not, isn't there some kind of a contradiction in scripture, I mean, after all, it says in *Romans 3*: "*No one seeks for God,*" but Jesus says in *Matthew 7*: "*Seek and you shall find.*" So which one is it? Well, the answer is both. There is no contribution and here is why. You see, the ability to seek God is a gift from God. God commands us to preach the gospel to all the world but only those he has chosen will ever respond by seeking him in return. That's why Jesus tells us in *Matthew 22:14*: "*For many are called, but few are chosen.*" Now we are to broadcast the gospel wholesale to every tribe, tongue, nation, and people but only to those whom God has touched retail will it make any sense. God says in *1 Corinthians 1:18*: "*For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.* The cross is foolishness to those

who are perishing. Have you ever wondered why it is that the cross wasn't foolish to you? I mean, were you and I just more clever, more spiritual, more insightful than all the others when we saw the cross as truth and not foolishness? Or did the grace of God have something to do with that? You see, when God says, "*No one seeks for God,*" he is speaking absolute truth because no one does seek, but God's not stymied by that. You know, Jesus once told his disciples that it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into heaven, and the disciples, they couldn't believe what they were hearing. They were absolutely blown away. You see, they always thought that wealth was a sign of God's particular blessing. You know, Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the patriarchs, well, they were all extremely wealthy and the disciples just assumed they got that way because God in particular favored them. So their response to Jesus' words is shock and dismay and they say: "*Well then who can be saved?*" Jesus' response covers the wealthy, the poor, and all those in between. This is what he said in this dialogue. This is *Matthew 19:25*, it says: *When his disciples heard it, they were greatly astonished, saying "Who then can be saved?" But Jesus looked at them and said to them, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."* You see, Jesus told us it's impossible for man to find God without God moving first. *Ephesians 2:8-9* tells us: *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that*

not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. You know, it can't make it any clearer, that's the gift of God, not by works, so that no man can boast. What God is saying is salvation has to be 100 percent God who saves us or we would spend eternity boasting. We'd be strutting around heaven saying, "Look what I did."

We spent a lot of time studying *Ephesians 1:4* which says: *He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.* Those whom God has chosen have been given the grace to make sense of the mysteries. To those who are chosen, it is not utter foolishness; to those not chosen, it is. And yet some insist that God isn't fair to give it to whom he chooses. It was Charles Spurgeon who spoke to those who would complain about the injustice of God for choosing some and not others. This is what he said. He said: "Supposing I had in my hand something which you do not value and I said I shall give it to such and such a person. You would have no right to grumble that I did not give it to you. You could not be so foolish as to grumble that the other has got what you did not care about. According to your own confession, many of you do not want religion, do not want a new heart and a right spirit, do not want the forgiveness of sins, do not want sanctification, you do not want to be elected to these things; then why should you grumble? You count these things

but as husks, and why should you complain of God who has given them to those whom he has chosen? If you believe them to be good and desire them, they are there for thee. God gives liberally to all who desire, and first of all he makes them desire, otherwise they never would. If you love these things, he has elected you to them, and you may have them. But if you do not, who are you that you should find fault with God, when it is your own desperate will that keeps you from loving these things, your own simple self that makes you hate them!" You see, the fact is that Spurgeon is pointing out is natural man's simple self makes him hate the gospel, plain and simple. Again: *For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to those who are being saved it is the power of God. (1 Corinthians 1:18)*

You know, I know most of this comes under the heading of that icky word "predestination." I realize this is a subject that we can spend a great deal of time on, but the issue this morning is not predestination. The issue is how do we steward the mysteries of God? The problem is how we feel about predestination directly affects how we steward this gospel. You see, if man's fall is not so severe as to still allow him to seek after God, then my stewardship of the gospel has to do with, number one, getting your attention; number two, making my case; number three, persuading you that the gospel is real and worth embracing. However, on the other

hand, if men cannot see God unless God has predestined him to be adopted as a son through Jesus Christ, then the gospel is really not about persuasion; the gospel is simply about presenting truth. You see, if man's will is the key to the gospel, then the gospel will be tied into appealing to that will and the gospel will suddenly shift from being God-centered to man-centered. And for the last hundred years now, I contend this is just what has happened to evangelical Christianity. And I might add, it has become wildly successful. And evangelicals have become indistinguishable from the world. You know, divorce, abuse, pornography, corruption, and now homosexuality are just as much a part of the church today as it is in the world. And it didn't used to be that way. I believe it's because the focus is no longer on the glory of God as found in the mystery of God. Instead, as I've said before, the focus of the church is on God's wonderful plan for your life, and how God can make you a successful businessman or a successful wife with successful kids and a success-filled household, whatever that he means. That, to me, is gospel gobbledygook.

The mystery of God is just what Paul said it was in *1 Corinthians 15:1-4*, he said this: *Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I*

preach to you -- unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. See, we have to ask ourselves what is of first importance to us today, that gospel or the gospel of success?

You know, back when my daughter Lydia was in high school, she came home from school one day and she was very upset. She had a Hindu friend in school and she was sharing the gospel with her, and she got her a copy of Ravi Zacharias' book *Jesus Among Many Other Gods*, and Zacharias is a convert from Hinduism, is a gifted speaker, writer, evangelist, we have some of his books downstairs. Lydia came home very upset because another friend of hers had told her that it wasn't right for her to -- quote -- "shove her religion down somebody's throat" by giving her that book. Now, the problem was the guy who told her that was a pastor's son, an evangelical pastor's son. You see, the mystery of God is that he would take on flesh and pay the price of perfection for my soul, and only Christianity makes that claim. A practicing Hindu has a very different idea from Christianity on how to achieve her own perfection, and one of these ideas is not just wrong, one of them is mortally, fatally wrong. And the most loving thing, the most caring thing a person can do for that person is to pray and to show

her the real mysteries of God. And to think that that is shoving religion down throats is to think that all religions are basically equivalent and that sharing the gospel is just shoving my religion down your throat. That is the legacy the evangelical church is now in danger of embracing.

Unless you think I'm being extreme here, consider the recent evangelical bestseller, *Love Wins* by Rob Bell, an evangelical pastor of a church of ten thousand. The book is subtitled: *A Book About Heaven, Hell and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived*, and it contends in the end there's no hell, everybody is going to heaven, everybody is ultimately saved and those who preach about hell and judgment are just stuck in a primitive understanding of what the gospel is.

We've got to ask ourselves how in the world did we get here? Well, I contend it has to do with how we steward the mysteries of God. There are two different visions of that stewardship, and they depend on your notion of what matters most to the kingdom: Is it the glory of God, or is it the spreading of the gospel? You might say well, isn't that the same thing? I mean, don't we glorify God by spreading the gospel? Well, we do indeed. But there is one crucial difference between spreading the gospel and the glory of God that we ignore at our peril, and it's the reason why the

evangelical church is increasingly mimicking the world over the last five decades. You see, spreading the gospel is an incredibly important means to an end. But the end itself has always been the glory of God. And when spreading the gospel becomes an end in itself, bad things begin to happen. You say well, how can that be? How could sharing and spreading the gospel be a bad thing, I mean, didn't Jesus tell us in *Matthew 28*: "*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all I have commanded you*"? Well, when that gets translated into "God loves you and has a perfect plan for your life" or just "Accept Jesus as your personal savior," or any of the dozens of other ways that we've shrunken that gospel, then the glory of God begins to pay the price.

Here's how it happens: Let's just say I'm a car salesman and I've just started working for you, and the first week you've noticed I've tripled the sales of all the other sales people put together. So you call me into your office and you say, "Well, what is your secret?" And I tell you, "Actually it's very simple. I tell the customers these cars get 80 miles to the gallon and I sell them for 2,000 bucks apiece and they sell like hot cakes." Well you know, the reason why the cars sell is because I oversold the benefits and I undersold the cost. And when the gospel is sold as an end in

itself, the very same thing begins to happen. Temporal benefits are oversold. We are told that Jesus will give you health and wealth and happiness and most of all he will give you success. That is overselling the temporal benefits. And on top of that, we wind up underselling the cost of discipleship. "Just say a prayer," "Just go forward at a meeting," "Just sign a card," "Just invite Jesus into your life," all gain and no pain. Listen, Jesus always accepts us just as we are but he never accepts us just to leave us there. The cost is his Lordship over your life, the benefits at least in this life are oftentimes trials, troubles, difficulties, and testings, and today's gospel leaves people completely unprepared for that.

Now, I spoke with a new believer awhile back. She put it very simply, said, "You know, this new life is hard." It is hard. But it is good, and the benefits are clear. You see, the benefit is the grace of God shaping and molding us into the very image of his Son and that is often times very painful and very frustrating. In fact, it seldom looks like the success the church promises today. You know, the primary benefits that Jesus promises us are the fruits of the spirit: Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, meekness, gentleness, and self-control. These are lovely things to possess, but they are very costly to develop, and they seldom at first look like success. The problem is for many

evangelicals, we have oversold the temporal benefits and we have undersold the cost of commitment. You see, we have been chosen and we've been chosen out of a world that loves its own, and once God has entered into our lives, we are no longer a member of that kingdom, of that world. And believe me, that doesn't sit well with that world. In fact, the world hates us for rejecting it as a kingdom. Jesus said in *John 15*: "*If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.*" See, if you live for God's kingdom, you're going to find God's health, God's wealth, God's happiness, and God's success but it will be on God's terms, kingdom terms, and not on the world's terms. And often times they are diametrically opposed to worldly success.

You know, we saw a perfect example of that in Randy Alcorn, you know, we talked about Randy Alcorn, we learned that an abortion clinic had secured a \$1.8 million judgment against him. He lost his pastorate, he lost his job, he lost his income, he lost his security. That sure didn't look like a blessing to anyone. But we saw that it was. You've got to go back to message one and two where we talked about that, but Randy himself said it was the best thing God ever did for him. You know, the world can't understand

that at all. But Jesus said: *"My kingdom is not of this world."* He also said: *"Take up your" -- take up your what? -- "your cross, and follow me."*

You see, the gospel is about glory, and glory is about the cross: Christ's cross and your cross. God says in *1 Peter 4:13*: *But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.*

You know, when my daughter Lydia came home, I told her that she was actually blessed for being insulted for Christ's sake. Jesus said this in *Matthew 5:11*, he said: *Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.* You know, when I was working as a cabinet maker, I learned numerous times that folks in town referred to me as "that religious nut case." I considered that an extraordinary blessing. If you just read *The Voice of the Martyrs*, you will see that the very worst thing that could happen to us in this country is a pin prick, it's a mosquito bite compared to what other saints around the world have to endure, and I can also say as many of you here

can say, I know by experience that life is hard. I know that. But I also know that God is good.

Now, is this the same gospel that gives instant success and costs me next to nothing? Not even close. You know, Jesus said that his followers would be the light of the world and the salt of the earth. They are supposed to be different. They are light. And the world sees them and like it or not, they know they are different. You know why the world today hardly sees any difference? You know why it doesn't really notice a difference any more? It's because the gospel has become an end in itself. Growing in numbers and in influence and power and wealth and success has become the new gospel paradigm instead of the glory of God, and it all goes back to the stewardship of the mysteries of God. Is it for glory, or is it for growth? I mean, growth is increased. What exactly is glory? Well, according to *Vine's Expository Dictionary*: Glory is the revelation and manifestation of all that God is and has. You see, God has given us this stewardship, this job, this task of telling the world who he is and what he has done and the difference it makes. Now, do you think it matters to him whether or not we do it faithfully? You see, if growth is the most important measure of success and if man himself has the capacity to choose and seek God, I'm going to shape my gospel accordingly. I'll knock off the hard edges, I'll underplay

the cost of commitment even though Jesus never did, and my gospel is bound to appeal to your broadest spiritual interest. As I've said, we all have a desire for relief and release and community and assurance and certainly don't forget success. You can get that in a mosque. You can get that in a temple. You can get that in a church, but it is not G-O-D. We don't seek G-O-D. God says no one does. Now, does that mean that we seek God only when he forces us to? I mean, do we all become mindless robots dragged into the kingdom against our wills? And again, absolutely not. Every one of us in this room came to Christ for the exact same reason, every one of us chose to. It was our choice. We all personally decided to follow him because we all wanted to. The question is where does the "wanting" to come from? And for that, God -- and not man -- gets the credit.

Jesus says in *John 15:16*: "*You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit -- fruit that will last.*" You see, once again we're back to stewardship here.

Jesus says: "*But I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit -- fruit that will last.*" Okay. So how do I do that? Well, you know, what's always mattered most to God when it came to stewardship? It's always mattered most to him that we be faithful. "*Well done, good and*" -- what? -- "*faithful servant!*"

Do you see how all of this fits together? If you remember 1 Corinthians 4:1-2 says this, it says: *This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.* And then the very next line, verse 2, says: *Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy. Faithful.* You know, when I was a new believer, I learned that Jesus died for my sins and that's what made me fit for heaven. I learned as John Piper puts it: The wisdom of God made a way for the love of God to save us from the wrath of God by confirming the justice of God. I thought because I thought, this is what I was taught, that it was my job not just to faithfully present that truth but to get others to convert to Christianity. I never realized it at the time, but that's not my job; that is God's job. My job is to be faithful. Again, verse 2: *In this regard, it is expected of managers that each one of them be found faithful.* You know, I talked, I argued, I wheedled, I shilled for the gospel because I thought that was my job. I thought people's eternal destiny hung on my skill at persuasion. So I did just what our car salesman did, I oversold the temporal benefits and I undersold the costs. Jesus will take care of all of your needs. All you got to do is say "yes." I actually consciously avoided all of the difficult parts of the gospel such as God's holiness, God's judgment, hell and the like because the most important thing was to get folks to accept Christ first, and then the hard stuff, well, you know, the stuff that came

under the heading of "discipleship," that could wait, that could wait until he or she was ready for hard truth. I thought all that people needed to know was that God loved them and had a perfect plan for their lives. Folks, that's not the gospel. But it certainly is part of it but by no means is it all of it. And it's disingenuous at best and outright dishonest at worse to pretend otherwise, and I know because I did that for years. One day God made it crystally clear how a faithful steward of the mystery, how he presented that mystery. It was in *2 Corinthians 2:14-16* which says this: *But thanks be to God, who always puts us on display in Christ and through us spreads the aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place. For to God we are the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To some we are the aroma of death leading to death, but to others, an aroma of life leading to life. And who is competent for this?* The scripture was revolutionary to me because in it I saw what God was saying about faithful stewardship. He's saying something that nobody told me for the first ten years of my Christian life. He says we are to be a fragrance or an aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and that much, I already knew that. Here's the part that I didn't know: He says we are to be an aroma of Christ among those being saved, and -- and among those who are perishing. Well, this I never knew. I had heard Isaiah 55 quoted many times which says: *"My word shall not return unto me void."* I always

understood it as stating that God's word is powerful and that it is never wasted. But you know, the second part of that verse tied everything together, and I never understood that. It says this in *Isaiah 55:11*, it says: *So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.*

You know, the second part of that verse was a revelation to me. What God was saying there is that My word always, always accomplishes what I desire. For those who are being saved, my word is the aroma of life itself, but for those who are perishing, it is the stench of death. And what God is saying in *Isaiah 55* and *2 Corinthians 14* is that every time you faithfully proclaim God's word, you either affirm his mercy by bringing the sweet smell of life to those who are being saved or you affirm God's justice by bringing the stench of death to those who are perishing. And Paul goes on to say in *2 Corinthians 14*, neither of these are your call to make. He says: *And who is competent for this?* In other words, what man or woman is competent or capable of that judgment? I mean, I know that I'm not and I know neither are you. But here's the marvelous liberating truth. The truth is that God is. He does the saving, he does the judgment, he opens eyes and ears because no man comes to the Father except through Him, and my job is to faithfully get out that message because I am truly just the messenger. And when I finally realized the impact of that, I

understood that my confidence was no longer in my wit, my cleverness, or my wisdom, because none of them are clever enough, because the bottom line is no one seeks for God.

The beauty in all of this is that it is God who seeks for us, and he never loses. In *John 10*, Jesus says this, he says: "*My sheep hear my voice, I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish -- ever! No one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all. No one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. The Father and I are one.*" You know how that changed how I steward the mysteries of God? When I understood that there was now only one thing that mattered, it's the one thing that always matters. Again, it's *1 Corinthians 4:2*: *Moreover it is required in stewards that they be found faithful.* See, the command to be faithful -- not clever, not deceptive, not overselling the benefits nor underselling the costs, just faithful is what God calls us to. The very next verse, *2 Corinthians 2:17* says this: *For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.* See, God wants stewards whose life and message is without phoniness, whose life and message is filled with integrity and sincerity, so that when we share the gospel, it must be warts and all with nothing held back. And to some it will be the sweet smell

of life itself and to others it will be the stench of death, but that's in God's hands; it's not in mine.

You know, I mentioned years ago, many years ago I once shared the gospel with Jan's cousin Bob, and I didn't know it at the time but he was deeply, deeply offended by that and as a result, he cut off all contact between him and us, and so you could say that my presentation of the gospel had literally the stench of death to it. You could also say that God's justice was glorified in the way that Bob sneeringly rejected God's offer of reconciliation. But you know, ten years later I received a phone call from Bob telling me that he had come to know Christ as his savior, that he had become gloriously saved, and he just wanted me to rejoice with him in that. And so ten years later, the stench of death had become the sweet aroma of life itself. Now, you tell me, who's equal to that task? The answer is: God alone. We are just the messengers. It's because perhaps we've misunderstood God's criterion for success. It's not getting decisions for Christ; it's getting glory for God. I was speaking to someone recently who lamented: "I've never saved anyone. I've never led anyone to Christ. I just sow seeds wherever I can," and I said, "You know, a steward's responsibility doesn't necessarily include leading someone to Christ, because only God can do that." Leading someone to Christ is an incredible joy and privilege, but it usually

happens only after many others have sown seeds.

In describing his stewardship, Paul says in *1 Corinthians 3*: *Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.*

Like I said, we are just the messengers. One of us plants, one of us waters, but only God can make this grow. You know what I think many of us fear is that somehow or other we're going to get the message wrong. I don't know my Bible, I don't know my church history, I can't argue, I can't debate. Listen, *Acts 1* describes what our steward's task is. Jesus said this in *Acts 1*, he said: *"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem and all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth."* What is it that everyone wants in a witness? Is it not faithfulness? I mean, there's something about Jesus Christ that every single one of us have Ph.D.'s in and that's what he has done in our own lives. All of us can witness to what Christ has done in our lives. We can all point out that without Christ, we have no hope. All God is looking for is faithful witnesses.

And so my question this morning is: Are you a faithful steward of

the mysteries of God? And what it is can be summed up in one verse, *Romans 5:8: But God demonstrates His own love toward us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* And how we are to deliver that message can be summed up in one word, *1 Corinthians 4:2: Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.*

And finally, why we deliver that message faithfully is because we are not salesmen. We are ambassadors. As ambassadors, our task is to faithfully deliver our Master's message, and to some it will be mercy, it will be the sweet smell of life itself to those who are being saved. To others it is judgment, it is the very stench of death to those who are perishing. And none of us is equal to the task of deciding who's who. Only God is equal. You see, His word never returns void. It accomplishes the purpose for which He desires, for which He sent it. You see, ambassadors don't make policy. They just communicate it faithfully, sincerely, and without phoniness. And Paul said in *2 Corinthians 5:20: Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: We implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.* That is our job, that is our message, not health, not wealth, not worldly success, but reconciliation between God and man. It's one of the greatest privileges we have and it's also one of the greatest pleasures.

You know, when you finally realize what is God's job and what is man's job, then you are freed to be what God wants you to be. You know, I turned my view of sharing the gospel from that of a salesman overselling the benefits and underselling the cost to a steward and an ambassador representing my Master. And believe me, it doesn't get any better than that. That's the steward's task: To manage his or her money and minutes and the mysteries of God faithfully, whether it's two pennies or \$2 million, whether it's leading the church or taking out the garbage, whether it's proclaiming the gospel to the nations or just sharing it with my neighbor. These are not jobs that we do to earn our right to heaven. These are jobs we do because God has chosen us to do them. Again, *John 15:16: You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain.* You see, God has replaced our stone hearts with hearts of flesh, and those hearts desire to please the Master.

You know, in each of these stewardship parables we've looked at, the wicked steward was cast out not because of lousy performance. He was always cast out because he simply had no heart for pleasing his Master. His lack of a heart for stewardship identified him as a false believer. See, all of the examples in all of those stories

that Jesus told about stewardship go not to performance but to the heart. And so the big question remains. Here's the question: Do you have a heart for stewardship? Are you passionate about pleasing the Master? And do you do it faithfully? That's the question we all need to answer. *It is required in stewards that a man (or woman) be found faithful.* Let's pray.

Father God, I do thank you for your word, I thank you for the truth that is contained in it, I thank you for the charge that you've given us to be faithful. Lord, I pray that we would hone in on what that gospel is and understand that we are not equal to the task of discerning whether our words are going to be the sweet aroma of life or the hideous stench of death and that you alone are capable of doing that, but that every time we faithfully present your gospel, you are glorified, you are honored, either your mercy or your justice is glorified and honored and it is a privilege for us to do that. Father, give us hearts that desire to do nothing more than to faithfully present your gospel, I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.