

“Stewards of God’s Grace”

Eph 3:1-3

4.16.23

We’re back. We’re back in Ephesians. It is a great book for us to know well and live out. Today, we begin chapter 3. Paul begins the chapter by reminding the Ephesian Christians what he was called to do by God. Please turn with me to Ephesians 3:1–3 (ESV). Page 977 in the Red Bibles. “For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles— ² assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace that was given to me for you, ³ how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly.”

We can be confident that when Paul entered heaven, he heard “Well Done, My good and faithful servant. Enter into your rest.” Do you hope to receive these words of affirmation one day? If so, it requires fruitfulness and faithfulness.

We can learn how to be fruitful and faithful through Paul’s life. In this passage we are going to see three actions to do to be fruitful and faithful.

The first action to be fruitful and faithful is to:

Change your perspective.

Verse 1, “For this reason, I, Paul, a prison of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles.”

Paul wrote the letter to the Ephesians while in prison in Rome. He incarcerated for five years until he was killed.

What perspective did Paul have that can help us? Paul knew that nothing he faced in life was ever an accident. Nothing that happened to Paul was a surprise to God. Nothing was out of His control. Everything Paul faced was allowed by the loving hands of God.

Paul's perspective came from his understanding of God's sovereignty. God is sovereign means He is the ultimate ruler over all of creation. To be sovereign, God must be all knowing (omniscient) and all powerful (omnipotent).

"The Lord has made the heavens his throne; from there he rules over everything."
Psalm 103:19 (NLT)

We see God's sovereignty even over God's greatest adversary- satan. Satan thought Job was a righteous man because God protected him. But if Job didn't have all the resources then satan believed Job would curse God. God gave satan some leeway with Job's life.

"Satan replied to the Lord, "Yes, but Job has good reason to fear God. ¹⁰ You have always put a wall of protection around him and his home and his property. You have made him prosper in everything he does. Look how rich he is! ¹¹ But reach out and take away everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face!" Job 1:9–11 (NLT)

Satan could not test Job without God's permission. God responded, "All right, you may test him," the Lord said to Satan. "Do whatever you want with everything he possesses, but **don't harm him physically.**" Job 1:12 (NLT) So Satan left the Lord's presence.

Peter was in satan's crosshairs. Jesus knew it and let Peter know. "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to **sift each of you like wheat.** ³² But I have pleaded in prayer for you, Simon, that your faith should not fail. So when you have repented and turned to me again, strengthen your brothers." Luke 22:31–32 (NLT)

Satan had to ask God to go after Peter for God is sovereign over all kings, all presidents, all spiritual beings. No one is more powerful or wise.

When Paul wrote, I am a prisoner, he made sure the Ephesians knew who held him in prison. It wasn't the Roman guards. It wasn't the Roman court system. It wasn't

Emperor Nero. Paul was in prison because of Jesus. The Lord had brought Paul to the prison for a reason.

God had a plan for Paul. "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." Ephesians 2:10 (ESV) That plan included a Roman prison for Paul.

Because Paul was in Rome, he was able to testify about Jesus in front of important people. He was able to see people come to Christ- including some of the guards. These guards worked in the prison as well as serve in Caesar's palace- in Rome- not Las Vegas. Listen to what Paul wrote to the Philippians, he wrote, "The saints in Caesar's palace, your new brothers in Christ, greet you" Phil 4:22.

What do you attribute to the experiences in your life? Coincidence? Bad luck?

The proper perspective is: **what we experience in the Christian life comes from the hand of God.** It is no accident. It is no coincidence the situation you are in right now. You are there because of the loving hand of God. Yes, **loving hand.**

You might be experiencing God's discipline for wrong behavior- that is the loving hand of God bringing you back into the fold.

You might be experiencing trials- that is the loving hand of God purifying your character and strengthening your faith.

You might be experiencing a stretch of peace- that is the loving hand of God extending you rest.

Allow God's sovereignty to give you comfort. Nothing. Not one thing is outside the loving hand of God. He intimately knows and allows certain things to come our way for

our best and the best of others. We will become more like Jesus and others will come to Him in faith.

Pastor John Courson comments, “Whenever I complain about my circumstances or situation, I am really complaining about my Father, for it is He who sets our course and determines our days.”

Do you trust God to steer you in the right direction? Do you believe that He has your best in mind?

Paul never lost this perspective that loving God is sovereign. That is why He could say, “I’m a prisoner of Jesus Christ.”

The second action to be fruitful and faithful is to:

Own your responsibility

“For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles— ² assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace that was given to me for you.” Eph 3:1-2

When Paul came to Christ, he realized that he was no longer free to do whatever he wanted with his life. He wrote, “For if we live, we **live to the Lord**, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, **we are the Lord’s**.” Romans 14:8 (ESV)

Paul was called to the “stewardship of God’s grace” for others.

Stewardship means “tending to or managing the affairs of someone else.” Paul was a steward or administer of God’s grace.

Paul recalls what Jesus said to Him on the road to Damascus, “I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have

seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, ¹⁷ delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—**to whom I am sending you** ¹⁸ to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.”
Acts 26:16–18 (ESV)

To the Colossians, Paul wrote, “Of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, ²⁶ the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. ²⁷ To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Colossians 1:25–27 (ESV)

Paul was tasked to go to the Gentiles and share the mystery of God. “How the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly.” Eph 3:3

We are not going to spend time on the mystery as it is a focal point in the verses next week. Please come next week to understand it. I am being a little mysterious about the mystery.

Paul was willing to travel over 26,000 miles and suffer great hardships to take the gospel to the far reaches of the world. Paul was willing to go to prison to bring God’s grace to the Gentiles.

Paul owned the responsibility God entrusted to him. Though he sacrificed his life for Christ, he could say, “But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.” Acts 20:24 (ESV)

That is also the step we need to take to be fruitful and faithful. For all God’s children are to be His stewards.

The principle of stewardship began in the beginning with Adam. “The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.” Genesis 2:15 (ESV)
Adam was responsible for caring for the garden of Eden.

When Jesus came, He sent His disciples out to preach the good news and heal people. They were given a time frame to go into the various towns and then were to report back what fruit resulted.

We will also give an account of how we passed on the good news, how we loved and served like Jesus, how we extended God’s grace in a graceless world.

God expects a return on what He entrusts to us. Jesus told a parable about the kingdom of heaven in Matt 25. “The kingdom of heaven will be like a man going on a journey. Before this man goes on a journey he brings his servants together and entrusts them with work to do while he is gone. Because these servants belong to the master they are required to do work in his absence.”

Is Jesus your Savior? Then He is your Master. You owe Him your allegiance. Before the owner leaves, he gives his servants talents based on their abilities. Matthew 25:15 (ESV), “To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each **according to his ability**. Then he went away.”

A talent of silver or gold weighed up to 75 lbs. Each servant was entrusted with a large amount of money. To one he gave five talents, to another two talents. To the third servant he gave one.

The master gave each servant the appropriate amount based on their skill level. This was not a nock at the worth of the servants. Rather, it was an accurate assessment of their ability to accomplish what he required.

That is good news for believers. God does not expect you to be someone you are not. He knows your SHAPE- Spiritual gifts, heart, abilities, personality and experiences. God has given everyone a specific SHAPE.

We are held accountable to how we maximize the SHAPE God has given us. He will hold us accountable to doing the works He has prepared in advance for us to do.

The master in this parable didn't distribute talents for the servants to just hold on to them for safekeeping until he returned. He expected them to make a good profit while he was gone. Verse 19, "Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them." The master wanted to know what they did with the money he left with them. The servants would have to come clean and share how well they did.

We too will have to settle accounts with Jesus one day. 2 Corinthians 5:10 (ESV), "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil."

Everyone will stand before Jesus. Some will need to answer the first question: what did you do with Jesus Christ? Get that question answered now. Don't wait until the last minute to choose Christ.

For those who have a relationship with Jesus we will stand before Him dealing with the second question. "What did you do with the talents I gave you?"

Judgment day awaits each of us. In order to be ready we need to know what we will be judged on? The answer is found in this parable. **We will be judged based on our return on investment.**

Verse 20, "And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here, I have made five talents more...²² And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, 'Master, you

delivered to me two talents; here, I have made two talents more... ²⁴ He also who had received the one talent came forward..." All he had was the one talent- no return on investment.

God expects results. To be given talents and not earn anything from them is sinful and can be described as wasting your life.

Listen carefully, **there will be no valid excuses before the Judge.**

The servant with one talent gave excuses for not investing. "Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, ²⁵ so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours."

But the master didn't accept his excuses. He said in verse 26, "You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? ²⁷ Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest."

What kind of excuses do we use not to obey God's commands to share the gospel, to serve and love the body and the outside world, to reproduce?

I am just too busy... Nope, wrong priorities.

I am too shy to share the good news with others. Nope, God gave you His Holy Spirit and He promised to speak through you. God gave you the gospel that is the power for salvation.

I didn't know that I had to give an account to you Lord. Nope, God gave you His Word- written down for you to read. And He is speaking to you today so you have no excuse to say you didn't know.

Because there are no valid excuses and there is no one else to blame for our failure to give Him a return on His investment we need to take **complete ownership** over our **talents**. I am ultimately responsible for the talents God has entrusted to me. It is up to me (with God's generous power and resources) to give Him a return on His investment. We need to do what the 5 and 2 talent servants did- they went right to work to earn for their master.

Jesus wants us to be fruitful and faithful; He wants to reward us. Listen to this description of the Lord's return. Revelation 22:12 (NLT), "Look, I am coming soon, bringing my reward with me to repay all people according to their deeds." What is Jesus bringing with Him at His return? His rewards to hand out. He is so excited to give rewards to those who have been fruitful and faithful.

Let's own our responsibility as stewards of God's grace to extend it to others.

The third action to be fruitful and faithful is to:

Recognize your potential.

What was Paul's status prior to Christ's appearing? Paul was a devout Jew. He was a Pharisee- the Jewish cream of the crop. He was rising up the ranks of Jewish leadership.

Paul would be the last person the Jews would pick to deliver the message of the gospel. He was one of them. He didn't believe in Jesus. But everything changed when He met Jesus.

It wasn't just a dramatic change to become a Christian. What God called Paul to do was so far from what he would ever pick for himself.

As a devout Jew and Pharisee, Paul had a strong hatred for Gentiles. They were ungodly. They were unclean. Many religious Jews started their day praying, 'Thank you God that I am a Jew and not a Gentile.'

The least likely of the disciples to be called to share the good news with the Gentiles would be Paul. But that is who God called as a steward of God's grace to the far off people- the Gentiles.

With God anything is possible. **God can use ordinary people in extraordinary ways.** We see this truth throughout the Bible.

Joseph was the youngest son of Jacob. He was spoiled and had a nice bright colored coat. God took this young man and raised him up as second in command in Egypt during a severe famine. God used Joseph to rescue the Israelites from starvation.

David was the youngest son of Jesse. He was a shepherd. But surrendered to God, David became the greatest king of Israel.

There are also myriad of stories of God using ordinary people all over the world. At age 4, Hudson Taylor proclaimed "When I am a man I mean to be a missionary and go to China." But as he got into his teens, he became skeptical and started living like the world. He was happy living his life. That was until God got his heart at age 17 and he gave himself over to Jesus.

Fast forward 51 years later, "Hudson Taylor was the most widely used missionary in China's history. During his 51 years of service there, his China Inland Mission established 20 mission stations, brought 849 missionaries to the field, trained 700 Chinese workers, and developed a witnessing Chinese church of 125,000. It has been said at least 35,000 people were his own converts. He baptized some 50,000.

2015 was the 150th anniversary of the mission that Hudson Taylor founded. In 1900, there were 100,000 Christians in China, and at the 150th anniversary, there were around 150,000,000 Chinese Christians. **God can use ordinary people in extraordinary ways.**

Howard Hendricks was a Dallas Theological Seminary Professor nicknamed “Prof.” He was greatly used in numerous Christian leaders, Pastors and missionaries over his 50 years of teaching and preaching.

Hendricks was born into a difficult situation. His parents divorced before he entered the world. He was placed in the home of his grandparents. Hendricks had a very rough upbringing in the streets of Philadelphia. He was heading in the wrong direction until a man from a small church nearby, named Walt, stopped by. Walt wanted desperately to reach young boys for Christ.

Hendricks wrote, “He (Walt) came down my street one day,” said Hendricks, “looking for boys for his Sunday school class. Well, anything that had ‘school’ in it was a bad-news item to me. Then he said, ‘Well, howd’ya like to play marbles?’ That was different. This tall drink o’water stooped down and whipped me in every game. I lost my marbles early in life,” he chuckles. But no matter where Walt was going, Howard Hendricks wanted to go. This man with barely **a sixth-grade education** loved boys in a way that drew them irresistibly to Jesus Christ. From that class of **thirteen boys twelve eventually entered Christian ministry.**” (<https://www.biola.edu/talbot/ce20/database/howard-g-hendricks>)
God can use ordinary people in extraordinary ways.

God can use you in extraordinary ways. The key is not to focus on yourself. It is not about how skilled you are. It is not about how smart you are. It is not about how extroverted or introverted you are. It is about how great your God is.

Don’t limit what God can do because of what you think are limitations. Don’t focus on what you are; rather focus on God. You may not become a Paul or a Hudson Taylor. But you can be a Walt. You can impact future generations. You can be fruitful and faithful.

It is God who provides what we need to be fruitful and effective for him. He gave us the talents. He gives us His Spirit. He provides the good works in advance. Our job is to trust Him and listen to His voice and follow Him into the things He has for us. If we do that, we are guaranteed to see a big return on God's investment. We are guaranteed to be considered faithful. We are guaranteed to hear "Well done good and faithful servant, enter into your rest."

Do you believe God can do that in your life? Trust Him. Step out in faith. He will do great things.

Let's pray

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