**Capitol Hill Baptist Church**

**Stewarding Health, Wealth, and Happiness**

**Week 12**

**Stewarding Our Skills**

**PRAYER**

**Introduction**

Good morning and welcome to the second-to-last class in the stewardship core seminar. We started by looking at the stewardship of money, viewed through Jesus’ parable of the talents in Matthew 25. The point is not your money—as if God needs your money. The point is what your handling of money says about the glory and goodness of the Master, of God. Does that stewardship evidence risk-taking obedience? That is, does it evidence faith? Then we took that sample principle and applied it to different gifts God’s given us other than money. Health, rest, time—and today one last one, skill.

What does God think of your skills—your capabilities, your capacity? His skill’s a lot better than yours. So does he value what you can do? And if so, why?

In a moment, I’ll answer that question. But first, I’d like to get off on the right foot by thinking through what’s distinctly *Christian* about this conversation. **How should a Christian think differently about their skills than someone who doesn’t follow Jesus?** [Wait for answers]

And what are the stakes in getting this right? First, joy. Unless we understand how skill fits into stewardship, we won’t understand joy as God designed us for. Conversely, I think a lot of frustration we experience in this life about the limitations of our skills and capacity comes from misunderstanding what stewardship really means. And second, treasure. What we do in this life matters for the next—and much of that comes down to our skills.

To get started, I want frame everything we talk about today with one passage: 1 Peter 4:10-11. You’ll see it there in your handout.

“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

Four observations from that passage that will form the outline of our class. First, your skills come from God. No surprise if you’ve been with us for the first 11 weeks of this class—but that idea shows up again in this verse. Second, he gave you those skills to show off his glory—verse 11. Third, your skills are a stewardship—given by God for God. And fourth, skills are for service to others.

**I. Skills Come From God**

As each has *received* a gift. From whom? God, of course. Another way of stating a verse that’s come up repeatedly: “What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?” (1 Cor. 4:7).

But wait just a second, you say. That may be true for some things—like innate intelligence. But other skills are things I worked really hard at. My jump shot…that’s thousands of hours of practice. I went to *school* to learn how to weld. My writing skills were years in the making. What do you mean they came from God?

Well, who gave you the opportunity to get that education? Who gave you the ability, and the time, to practice that jump shot? Where did you get the desire to perform in the first place? God, God, God, God. Let me walk you through three important implications of this:

1. God delights in your skill. Think of Proverbs 22:29 that we quoted a few weeks ago. “Do you see a man skillful in his work? He will stand before kings; he will not stand before obscure men.” You feel the delight, the pride of the author in that verse. Or in Exodus, God gives skill to his people so that his tabernacle might be crafted with skill. Or Psalm 33:3, “Sing to him a new song; play *skillfully* on the strings.” God loves skill!
2. God gets the credit for your success. Think back to God’s warning to the Israelites in Deuteronomy as they got ready to enter the Promised Land. “Beware lest you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.’ You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day.” Not *my* power, but God who *gives* me power.

There’s a joy that comes from skills well-used that’s good, right, and God-honoring. But how often do we boast about things we have no right to boast about? “If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?” That’s a really hard lesson to learn!

1. Third, your lack of skill is also from God. If he’s the one who gave, he’s also the one who decided not to give you what you lack. That’s true of your capabilities; that’s also true of your capacities. What you can do and how much you can do it are limits fixed by God, and those limits are good! Now, you have a responsibility and a joy before God to strategically work to expand both of those. Both your capability and your capacity—that’s how he’s designed you. And we should not confuse rest in God’s sovereignty with the lazy rest of the sluggard. But those caveats not withstanding, your limits are from God just as much as your skills. “The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places” – Psalm 16:6.

Now, what if you really believed that all skill comes from God? Let me turn that into a question for you. **What difference did that make in your life this last week? Or what difference do you *wish* it had made?** Think about it for a moment: implications for you personally of this truth.

OK. Flip open to the inside of your handout. Look at that chart to the right. For the rest of our time together, we’ll work through the outline on the left side of the handout. As we do that, I want you to be filling out the chart to the right. Think of three skills that God’s entrusted you with. You’ll see a hypothetical example there: ability to write clearly. Then, for each of them, write down how you’ve seen him bring glory to himself through each of those three. Or how he could. I want you to write down how each skill can serve others? And lastly, what good stewardship of each skill will look like over the next several years—which could include laying one or more of them aside. Then at the end we’ll talk this through So again—fill out this chart as we move through the next few points.

**II. Your Skills Exist to Glorify God**

So, back to our outline. If God gave you your skills, why did he give them to you? Well, as we saw in 1 Peter 4, to glorify himself. Look back to that passage on the front of your handout. Peter gives us two example of skills. We speak using God’s words. We serve using God’s strength. So that “in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.”

Now, in a Christian church, that’s a term we throw around a lot. “To the glory of God.” What does that actually mean? It means that God gave you the gifts he did—skills included—in order to show off how amazing he is. Remember that from the parable of the talents? The fate of the third servant showed that what mattered wasn’t so much the money the first servants made but what their faithfulness showed about the Master. They bet everything that he would be true to his word, and so their actions proclaimed that he was trustworthy and generous. What matters is not so much what you do as much as what doing it shows about the worth of our God. Here in 1 Peter 4, our words show off the wisdom of *his* words. Our strength shows off the power of *his* strength. As you use your skills as God intended, it should call attention not to you but to God!

It can be easy to feel like my time is my own. Even easier to feel like my body are my own, that my money is my own—I earned it after all, didn’t I? But maybe easiest of all is to think that my skills and capabilities are my own. They’re so intrinsic to my identity after all—and I worked hard for some of them. But far from being about displaying *my* worth, the skill God’s given me is for the purpose of displaying *his* worth. The skill God’s given you is for displaying *his* worth.

How’s that happen?

Let me give you three ways that our skills can show off the glory of God.

1. Your skill is God’s means of provision. As Martin Luther put it, we pray for our daily bread at night and in the morning the baker rises to bake it. When my wife as a doctor heals someone, would it be wrong for them to thank God instead of my wife? Of course not! That healing is from God; my wife’s skill was merely the means he used. The more skilled you are at your work, the more God can use you as his agent in his common grace ministry of provision for this world.
2. Your skill shows off God’s skill. How? Because he made it! He’s the one who gave it to you and so he takes delight as you use it. Imagine teaching a kid how to throw a perfect spiral. And as they figure it out and delight in doing it right, *you* take delight too. Not only because you taught them that skill but because when he discovers how fun it is to get it right, he’s now sharing in what *you* love. But of course when God delights in seeing us use the skill he’s given us, it’s not just “look how amazing *that* it” but “look how amazing *I* am” – the one who is the source of that skill. Which leads us to a third way your skill can show off the glory of God:
3. Your skill reveals God’s wisdom in creation. In a sense, skilled work is nothing more than a rediscovery of God’s good creation. Imagine the skilled scientist making a discovery and God sitting back with a smile on his face, “yes! I’ve been waiting for all of time for someone to figure that one out. Isn’t it amazing?” Or the artist discovering the beauty of arranging things just so. “So glad someone finally saw that…isn’t it amazing?” Our skills can be put to use to discover innovation or efficiency or beauty or delight or healing or any number of things. And in all this, we’re simply walking God’s footsteps after him. Delighting in a more beautiful way to assemble the pieces of this world he’s made. Discovering something he had in mind from day one. And so it shows off *his* wisdom and *his* goodness.

So not only is your skill *from* God (point 1) – it’s *for* God (point 2). Your capabilities and your capacity aren’t about showing off *your* worth but God’s. *You* are all about *him*.

***Any questions?***

**III. Your Skills Are a Stewardship**

So if skill is from God and for God, what role do you play? 1 Peter 4: “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as *good stewards* of God’s varied grace.” Think about that. What’s it mean to be a good steward of the grace God’s given you in the skills he’s entrusted to you? I’ll give you three basic categories for what it looks like to steward our skills well.

1. Pursue excellence. Listen to Paul in Colossians 3:23, speaking to bond-servants: “Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men…you are serving the Lord Christ.” Whatever you do, pursue it with excellence because ultimately you’re working for King Jesus! Pursue excellence as you cut the grass, as you prepare dinner at the Central Union Mission, as you change a diaper, as you argue that case, as you teach that Sunday school class. Sometimes it’s good to relax, to go slow. But there’s no room for us Christians to be slovenly, half-hearted, “well, I suppose that’s good enough” in how we use our skills. Stewardship is worship.
2. Invest in your skills. Like Paul learning to be a tentmaker so he could more effectively plant churches. Like so many other stewardships God’s given us, we can grow our skills.

Now, many people think of this as an over-educated city—which may well be true for a segment of our population. But I’d maintain that the priority of investing in your skills is *unusually* important here in Washington, DC. As I’ve watched our congregation over the past 20 years, I see two ways that people get paid in their jobs. Some of us get paid for our time; others get paid for our skill. And there are many, many DC jobs—I’d say especially in the political world—where your only asset is your willingness to do whatever it takes to get the job done. That’s no recipe for a balanced life. As I’ve said more provocatively to our college students before, you can either sell your skill or you can sell your soul. When you’re young, in your early twenties, most of us don’t have any marketable skills. So go ahead and sell your time. But as the years pass, wisdom would dictate that we develop a skill that others will pay for. That’s the ticket to affording DC without killing yourself in your job—whether you’re a plumber or a politician. Nothing about this advice that’s specific to any one strata of society. And don’t assume that education and skill are necessarily the same thing. Education can help build a skill set—but there are plenty of schools out there hawking degrees that don’t actually put you any closer to having a marketable skill set.

Now, speaking of education, let me take a brief detour and give some advice about the decision to pursue further education—which is a decision that many in a congregation as young as ours are likely to make. If you’re in that situation, let me give you three questions to ask:

1. Will this education improve my skill set across a broad set of responsibilities? Keep in mind that God has placed multiple responsibilities in your life: at work, in church, in your family, in your neighborhood. Education can help in all those areas. For example, my wife chose to train as a pediatrician instead of as a surgeon because she hoped one day to get married (which she did, thankfully) and to have kids (which we did). She figured that being a pediatrician would be good training for mom-hood (which it was). But she also knew that she might never get married, and that same training would be useful for making a living. Back when I was in business, I asked to be trained as one of our corporate speakers in part because I knew that would help me be a better teacher at church. Any time education can help improve your faithfulness in *multiple* areas of responsibility, it has special value for the Christian.
2. My second question about education might seem somewhat at odds with the first. And that is, how easy is it to get paid for the credential you’ll get. Some degrees (say, as a nurse or a CPA) are easy to value monetarily. Because simply having the credential has a measurable impact on your earning power. Others—like a degree in creative writing—may well improve the value of your mind (question #1) yet not easily translate into earning potential. I think the most practical relevance of this distinction is that we should be very reluctant to go into financial debt for a degree that doesn’t have clear financial value.
3. Which leads to a third question: for how long will this degree constrain my choices? I generally prefer to think of debt in terms of time and not money because of the nature of debt as a form of servitude (Proverbs 22:7) that we talked about a few weeks back. How long will it take to pay that back—or how long is your commitment to the military or your employer in place of debt? What’s the likelihood that God will change your circumstances during that time? (Like going overseas as a missionary or getting married.) Such that you might wish you hadn’t taken on that obligation? Obviously, the longer you’re constrained the more likely that your circumstances will change in that timeframe. And keep in mind that some opportunities for education carry implied time constraints beyond the time of the degree and the debt. For example, if you train as a nurse but never work as a nurse, you don’t have the full skill set. Very often, it’s education *plus* some quantity of experience that gives you the base-level skill set that you’re looking for.
4. OK – that was all in my second point within Roman numeral III, invest in your skills. But let me finish this section with one last implication of our skills being a stewardship. Sometimes you’ll need to decide when to lay aside some skills. A good steward says yes to some options and no to others. Think of Peter laying aside his skills as a fisherman to preach the gospel. That’s true of our money, our time—and it’s also true of our skills. We’re a young church, and this is a constant struggle especially for the young. When you were a teenager, many of you could afford to invest in pretty much every skill you had. So you were a musician, an athlete, a scholar, a McDonalds cook, a friend, and so forth. But your twenties can be a painful time of deciding to say goodbye to certain skills that you love. You’ve only got so much time. So you abandon your skills as an athlete, focusing in on music. Then abandon your love for the classics to focus in on jazz. And then you abandon pedagogy to focus on performance. And so forth. Here’s my advice: just because you *can* do something well doesn’t mean you *ought* to do it well. Don’t let God’s gifts become shackles. Look across all of your life. Choose which skills you think will allow you to best glorify him across all the responsibilities God’s given you. Invest in them, let the others lay fallow, and trust if you’ve made a wrong choice that really matters, God will make that clear. Your job as a Christian is that old U.S. Army slogan, “Be all you can be”—across all of your responsibilities. Sometimes that means laying skills aside.

Now, sometimes you run to the edge of your capabilities or your capacity. Your job or your parenting, for example, require more of you than you honestly can give. What do you do then? Well, you’ve got two choices. On the one hand, you can take limit as God’s guiding hand directing you to something else. On the other, you can fight your limits by improving your capability and your capacity. How do you know which is right? So hard to say! It’s good to ask first whether the responsibility in question is optional. For example, are we talking about your role as a father or your role as a test pilot? Clearly, one’s optional; the other isn’t. Then, it’s good to ask if there are idolatrous reasons that you’re clinging onto your desire to do something. That would shift the calculus toward moving to something else where you’re already sufficiently skilled. But absent that, you’re probably looking at an area of freedom where, with the counsel of others, you stay and reskill if you want—or move to something else if *that’s* what you want.

**Any questions?**

**IV. Your Skills Are For Service**

OK. To round out this class, let’s look at that last piece of our passage in 1 Peter 4. “As each has received a gift, use it to *serve one another*.”

That’s *not* how our world views your skills. It says that your skills are about you. They’re about building wealth, reputation, power, and happiness. But the Bible says that the true path to happiness is to be a servant—of Jesus ultimately and then of each other. Acts 20:35, “Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” True happiness lies not in *building* ourselves but in *spending* ourselves.

I think this is an important overlay on everything else we’ve talked about today. How do you decide which skills to invest in, which to lay aside? I hope your primary lens is not one of personal fulfillment but one of service. Which will equip you to best serve others—in your job, your family, your church, your neighborhood? Now, I’ll be honest, in God’s kindness there is often convergence between what we enjoy and how we can serve. I really enjoy teaching—and I’ll bet I serve you better as a result. Presumably, you can work as unto the Lord (Colossians 3) while doing anything. Yet it’s probably easiest to do that in an area you enjoy. All that taken into account, though, Scripture tells us that enjoyment isn’t the main point—the point is service.

So then…who owns your skills? God does. Why did he give them to you? To show off his glory and goodness. What is your role in regard to those skills? To use them for God’s purposes, as his steward. How do you do that? By using your skills in service to others.

**Conclusion**

I mentioned the chart off to the right early in the class. Hopefully you’ve already started filling it out. Just in case you didn’t—or if multitasking isn’t one of your skills—I’ll give you a minute to finish up.

**Can anyone share with us one of the rows in your chart? In addition to sharing what you wrote down, I want you to tell us how you might be thinking differently about that skill now that you’ve considered its main purposes as glorifying God through service to others. [get 3-4 responses.]**

Let me close with a verse that’s been a great comfort to me in many seasons of life over the years. 2 Timothy 2:20-21, on the very back of your handout.

**20**Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable.**21**Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.

Do you ever worry that you’re wasting your skills? That you’ll never hear those beautiful words, “well done, good and faithful servant?” Then listen carefully to Paul in 2 Timothy 2. Cleanse yourself from what is dishonorable. Pursue Jesus in faithfulness and holiness. And consider this promise: “he *will* be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master.” Praise the Lord for *his* faithfulness.

Close in prayer.