

## Take My Life and Let It Be Consecrated

Sterling UMC

October 25, 2009

Malachi 3:10; 2 Corinthians 9:6-8; Romans 12:1

I recently received a humorous e-mail that lists famous hymns that supposedly go with particular occupations. For example, according to this e-mail:

- The dentist's hymn is: *Crown Him with Many Crowns*.
- The weatherman's hymn is: *There Shall Be Showers of Blessing*.
- The tailor's hymn is: *Holy, Holy, Holy*.
- The IRS Agent's hymn is: *I Surrender All*.
- The Gossip's hymn is: *Pass It On*.
- The Realtor's hymn is: *I've Got a Mansion Just Over the Hilltop*.

Well, in all seriousness many of these great hymns give us some great teaching opportunities.

Today as we finish this series on becoming a 5 Talent Church I am reminded of another great hymn that provides us with yet another teaching opportunity. You see, today—we are talking about STEWARDSHIP—and that hymn is: *Take My Life and Let it Be* by Frances Havergal.

Over the last several weeks we have explored what it means for us as a congregation to truly invest ourselves in the areas of worship, fellowship, missions, discipleship, and evangelism. Your response has each week has been amazing as you have indicated your desire to invest yourself in these vital areas. This commitment will bear a bountiful harvest in the life of our church.

SUMC is already a place of powerful and vibrant worship, but we want our *Worship* to be so creative, so inspiring, so comforting, so engaging that you can't wait to enter the Sanctuary on Sunday morning. We want people to love this church so much that they can't help but tell their friends about SUMC (*Evangelism*).

We have strong *Educational* programs, but we dream of a church full of children, youth and adults who are learning how to grow in their faith and discover how they can make a positive difference in the world! We see SUMC as a faith community, where everyone can openly share their joys and sorrows, a place where all generations are knit together not just by real friendship and enduring devotion (*Fellowship*).

We believe SUMC is called to be a body that generates vision, energy, and action for the good of all. We are gifted and called to be a beacon on a hill, a light to all people. We are truly beginning to embody what it means to be in *Mission* to reach out to those in need, and there are so many people still to reach.

This vision is not a dream but a real possibility. We are on our way to being a five talent church. The signs are everywhere. But the dream can only become a reality if we make one other commitment. And that commitment is expressed through the stewardship of your financial support.

These are challenging times to talk about stewardship. With the state of the economy we all want to hunker down and wait for the 'all clear' signal. And yet at a time when businesses are struggling, at a time when many other churches and non-profit organizations are faced with shortfalls and cutbacks, our giving as a congregation is the strongest it has been in at least the last 7 years. Your faithfulness and generosity as a congregation has been amazing. We are truly beginning to understand the concept of Christian stewardship. And so as we have set as our desire to truly become a 5 Talent church we are stepping out in faith and setting some very ambitious goals for ourselves as a congregation in the year to come.

And so this morning as we consider what that means for us as a congregation and as individuals I want to remind you of four important things about stewardship.

(1) Stewardship is a BIBLICAL thing.

I mean, the subject of GIVING has a CENTRAL place in the teachings of the Bible. Did you know that in God's written Word there are 1,565 references to GIVING or STEWARDSHIP?!

This made it very hard for me to limit my choice of texts for this mornings' message because there are indeed SO many to pick from—and, if we took the time to read these passages...we would see that Jesus had more to say about stewardship and money than any other subject including Heaven, Hell, salvation, and His 2nd coming!

In His Word, God tells us how to save our money, how to spend our money, how to manage our money, how to give our money, how to avoid debt. He warns us that money can be a harmful thing in that it can lead us to sin. Our Creator says that money and possessions can even take on a life of its own and in essence become a "god" that we worship.

So—to use a financial term—in His Word God has DEPOSITED a vast WEALTH of information about the way we are to relate to our funds—which means we can't completely teach the Bible...without addressing this issue.

This leads me to mention a SECOND thing.

(2) Stewardship is a FAITH thing.

You see, in His Word, over and over again God says that when we give to further His purposes, He will provide for our needs. In verse 8 of our text from 2 Corinthians Paul says, "God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work."

My favorite is in Matthew 6:31-33 where Jesus says, "Do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your Heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

So, when we refuse to be obedient stewards we are saying in essence that...well, that we don't trust God to do what He has said He will do in all these texts from His Word. We are choosing to trust ME to take care of ME instead of God.

Now...all of us struggle from time to time to allow God to be the source of our sufficiency. It is often difficult for us to learn to trust God with our lives. But we must learn this lesson because God IS trustworthy. He WILL meet our needs...and more. And please note—these texts don't include an exception in tough economic times. In other words, God's Word doesn't say, "Be sure to bring all the tithes into the storehouse except during recessions or economic downturns because you can't trust God to meet your needs when times are tough." No—the Bible says we can ALWAYS trust God to take care of us—and our GIVING is our way of stepping out in faith to embrace that belief.

I agree with R. G. LeTourneau, who once said, "I shovel out and God shovels in but God's shovel is always bigger." This reminds me of God's promise in our text from Malachi 3 where He says that if we "Bring all the tithes in the storehouse..." He will, "...throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that we will not have room enough for it." Now I am not saying that we should never GIVE to GET. I'm just saying that we can trust that as we give, God will meet our needs and He is better equipped to do this than we are on so many levels!

So, remember this: GIVING—TITHING—STEWARDSHIP is a FAITH thing. It's professing our faith that God is Who He says He is—and will do what He says He will do.

Let me suggest something to you. If you've never tithed—and trust me—I have no idea who gives what around here. Whether you tithe or not is none of my business. It's between you and God. But listen—if you've never trusted God to meet your needs...give it a shot. Try it. Maybe 10% is too much for you—and that's okay. Start at 2% or 5%—but start at a level that requires you personally to trust God—and watch what He does. If He is faithful—and He will be—then gradually increase your giving to a full tithe. But give it a shot! See what God does when you trust Him. Experience the size of God's shovel!

So, we must study giving because it is a Biblical thing...it is a FAITH thing...and here's a third reason.

(3) Stewardship is an INVESTMENT thing.

You see, we can spend our money and our time in two ways—it can go for things that DON'T last—or for things that DO. And—even someone as ignorant as I am when it comes to stocks and investments knows that it's foolish to invest in the former instead of the latter. Wise people—good stewards—will invest their money—in things that last the longest. This is what Paul is getting at in 1st Timothy 6:17-19 when he says, "Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, Who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life."

If we are wise when it comes to our funds—if we are to be “right” on the money—we will invest in ETERNAL things. We’ll give to and do things that further God’s kingdom.

Years ago Ann Landers had an interesting letter in her column. It was from a girl who was writing about her uncle and aunt. She said, “My uncle was the tightest man I’ve ever known. All his life, every time he got paid he took \$20 out of his paycheck and put it under his mattress.”

“Then he got sick and was about to die. As he was dying he said to his wife, ‘I want you to promise me one thing.’ ‘Promise what?’ she asked. ‘I want you to promise me that when I’m dead you’ll take my money from under the mattress and put it in my casket so that I can take it all with me.’”

The girl’s letter went on with this story: “He died and his wife kept her promise. She went in and got all the money the day he died and went to the bank and deposited it. She then wrote out a check and put it in his casket.”

There’s a little principle that is called the Treasure Principle. You can’t take it with you but you can send it on ahead. When we live as this man in the story lived we have nothing to look forward to in the life to come. But when we spend our lives investing in the lives of others and in the work of the Kingdom of God we make investments in an account which will bring dividends in the life to come.

We must focus on ETERNAL things—things that further GOD’S kingdom! Stewardship is about investing in the things of God—the things that moth and rust do not corrupt and thieves do not break in and steal.

Here’s one final thing we must learn about stewardship:

(4) Stewardship is a TOTAL LIFE thing.

I mean, for the Christian, stewardship is MUCH more than your money—it is a doctrine that includes everything you are and have—every moment of every single day. And here’s where the hymn comes in. As I said, it’s author was Frances Havergal. At age 36 she testified that she had served the Lord for years...or rather THOUGHT she had...but she said she felt that something was missing in her Christian experience. Then one day in 1873, she received a little book called, *All For Jesus*, a book that stressed the importance of making Christ the King of every corner and cubicle of one’s life. After reading that book, she became a TRUE steward by making a fresh and COMPLETE consecration of herself to Jesus. Years later, when asked about this she said, “It was on Advent Sunday, December 2, 1873, when I first saw clearly the blessedness of true consecration. I saw it as a flash of electric light, and what you see you can never un-see. There must be full surrender before there can be full blessedness.”

This experience inspired her to write the words of a hymn—and it stresses the fact that to a good steward is to be a COMPLETE steward. We must give EVERYTHING to God. For example, Mrs. Havergal had a beautiful voice and frequently sang with the Philharmonic, but she realized that she must give her voice completely to Jesus and wrote, “Take my voice and let me sing, always only for my King.” From then on, she gave up secular concerts and devoted her singing exclusively to God. Havergal was also a very wealthy woman with lots of expensive jewelry but felt that should be

given to God and wrote the verse that says, "Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold." She donated it all to missions and wrote a friend saying, "I never packed a box with such pleasure."

When you look at the words you see how COMPLETE Havergal realized Biblical stewardship really is.

*Take my HANDS and let them move at the impulse of Thy love.*

*Take my FEET and let them be swift and beautiful for Thee.*

*Take my WILL and make it THINE. It shall be no longer mine.*

*Take my LOVE, my God I pour at Thy feet its treasure store.*

*Take my SELF and I will be ever, only ALL for Thee.*

You know about a half hour ago our ushers came forward and passed plates around this room and we put our monetary gifts in them and we called that time "THE OFFERING." But I think it would be more accurate to call that time "AN offering" because it is not the only time we give to God in worship. In fact, over the last several weeks at the end of each of our services we all had the opportunity to participate in an offering as we indicated our willingness to invest ourselves in 5 important areas of ministry. And now this morning we are called to respond by indicating our financial commitment to invest in the mission and ministry of our church for the coming year. And then as the benediction is spoken and you walk out of this service is another time of giving. Because really every moment of every day of our lives we are called to offer ourselves to God. Romans 12:1 (NIV) says, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship."

Well, this morning is God calling you to participate in this "OFFERING?" Is there part of your life—it could be the way you use your hands—your career...or the way you use your feet—the places you use them to go...or the way you use your MONEY...or the things you love—your affections...but is there part of your life that you need to GIVE to GOD? Is there some way you need to say to God right now, "...not my will but THINE be done?" If so then bow your head as we pray.