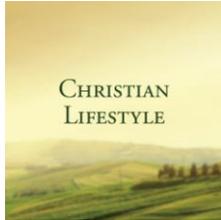


1Peter 4:8-11

*Above all, maintain constant love for one another for love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaining. Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.*



How might you describe a Christian Lifestyle?

What would that look like to you?

Sometimes when I get stuck on a sermon,  
I turn to Facebook for crowdsourcing.

So I asked,

“How would you describe a Christian lifestyle?

What would that look like?

What actions/disciplines/life changes  
would that involve?”

This month we’ve looked at Stewardship

as understood in a Biblical context

and its importance in the life

of the church as a whole;

but then that leads us to ask

how do we except stewardship

to look in our personal life?

Or **does** stewardship inform my lifestyle

or **does** it have any effect on our how we live?

What does a Christian lifestyle look like?

When folks responded online,

some of the responses

sounded familiar like,

“Treating others the way you wish to be treated.

Charity and kindness. Accepting all.”

“Good ole fashioned loving people.

And that means All people.”

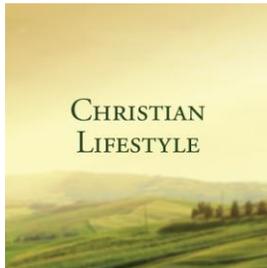
And then others might have been surprising;

“Sabbath. Rest with God.

Enjoy creation, family friends.  
Say thank you, a lot.  
Listen to God. Listen to each other.  
Use your prophetic, righteous voice.  
Use your loving gentle voice.  
Make space for others.”

Some were action oriented,  
“love, mercy, servanthood, justice.  
We’ll start there and see how it goes.”  
Several responses were tongue in cheek  
and could be summed up as,  
“Don’t be a jerk,” which quite frankly covers a lot.  
And then there is this,  
probably the best parody of Christian living...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=umLUKBlpyoY> (scene from Saved)



Interestingly, a friend who is a pastor in Atlanta, wrote:

(and keep in mind t  
his is in response to the question  
what is a Christian lifestyle)  
soccer on Sunday,  
disposable coffee cups,  
no time to rest,  
worship when it's not too inconvenient,  
general fear of the other while wearing a tshirt that says "love",  
shrinking charitable giving,  
not differentiable from the "American lifestyle",  
judgment,  
homogeneous communities.  
(she continues) I resemble some of these,  
so the critique is not just finger pointing.

But you asked  
what a Christian lifestyle looks like –  
not what it should look like?”

--I resemble that too, and offer it as a loving critique.

But perhaps my favorite was the response  
that came from my favorite professor from college  
who quoted John Wesley,  
“Do all you can. By all the means you can.  
In all the ways you can.  
In all the places you can.  
At all times you can.  
To all people you can.  
As long as ever you can.”

That right there might say it best  
as to what a Christian lifestyle looks like.  
Because the more I think about it,  
the more I’m realizing that stewardship living  
is the in and out seasons  
of sacrifice and grace.  
The further we go up and in—  
to borrow a CS Lewis phrase  
that he uses to describe  
the welcome into God’s kingdom,  
‘come further up and in!’  
the further up and in we go  
into mystery of our common lives  
tied together in our innate spirituality  
and belonging to God  
the more I see our lifestyle calling us to be  
stewards who live in the midst  
of sacrifice and grace.

Living a Christian, stewardship lifestyle  
would transform us **from**,  
as my friend pointed out,  
from looking just like the American lifestyle  
because our lives would be  
grounded in Christ who completely lived  
under the banner of sacrifice and grace.

So to look more meaningfully  
at our lifestyle of Christian stewardship  
means to examine seriously  
**our worship; our service;  
our disciplines; and our love.**



## Worship

The other morning a friend and preschool mom  
stopped in my office.

We were just causally chatting about things  
and she brought up  
that they were looking for a new church home.

Ever since I have known this family,

they have been a part of a home church movement.

But, her church has decided to take a break.

They are taking some time  
to assess what they want to do  
and who they want to be  
and while they will still gather and fellowship,  
they are disbanding and trying other things.

I can't tell you how much I admire that.

To be willing to try something new,  
watch it grow, watch it shrink,  
watch it flourish and watch it  
with enough discernment  
to know when it was time to let it die.

Sounds like the natural rhythm  
of a sacrifice and grace,  
and I admire that.

This family has one daughter in our preschool

and one in the TK program at Corinth

and she commented on how pleased  
they were here at FPC, at the preschool.

"There is a **big difference** between the car line  
and the drop off here," she said.

"It just isn't the same, and if we hadn't been here  
I don't know that we would have ever noticed.

When you drop off here,

you get out of your car

and feel the ground under your feet.

You bump into your neighbors  
and notice that Emily's little one  
has a runny nose and a cough.

You see a mom who is pregnant  
and can ask how far along she is

while holding the door for Ryan's 4 year old  
who is racing to get in the door,  
first.

You don't get that  
with the car line drop off."

I tell you all that because

I think it has a connection

to our gathering for worship.

Much like it is easier and less time consuming  
to just drop off,

rather than walk your child in,

I know that staying home

or worshiping from home

is much less time consuming and easier.

It's hard to make the commitment

week after week to get everyone up

and in the door for worship

with a clean shirt.

And I will affirm that sometimes,

your family needs a break and rest,

and there are times

when you should go on a hike

—only you can really tell

what you and your family need.

But there's just something about

feeling that ground under your feet ,

you know that church carpet or rug,

ya know?

You get to sit with the retired IT business man

who has taken up a passion

for Habitat for Humanity on one side

and the 8 year old

who lost his first tooth last night

on the other.

Sure you can watch at home and watch online,

and sometimes you might need that too.

But you'll miss the feeling

we all get when we sing that song,

the one we know and all love deep in our bones.

You won't get to drink that fresh ground coffee

and eat those homemade cookies

and talk about how much

you yelled at the TV yesterday

during a Saturday of college football.

My point is that yes,  
you can and maybe sometimes do need  
those moments of worship  
that are more private.

But the sacrifice is making the commitment  
to show up week after week,  
as often as you are able;  
because we get the chance  
to practice being stewards of  
the manifold grace God gives us.

**Worship puts flesh and blood to our connections;  
it makes the word *neighbor, brother, sister* come alive.**

It can be one of the places  
we feel most connected to each other  
and therefore to God.  
Worship is the place  
where in the breaking of bread  
we come together  
and are re-membered as a God's people;  
when we break bread together  
we give witness to our brokenness,  
our suffering and ultimately  
our redemption,  
together.

And corporate worship  
is one of the most effective ways  
to face injustice and embrace mercy,  
together.

Walter Wink is a Biblical scholar  
who claims that to fight  
the powers and principalities,  
"it takes a communal witness to the light,  
truth and peace  
to overcome  
the corporate power of darkness,  
deception, and destruction in the world."<sup>1</sup>

So it is our collective witness to the light of Christ  
in our worship that will ultimately

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<sup>1</sup> Marjorie J. Thompson, *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life*. Westminster John Knox Press, 2005

shine through the darkness of evil.

A life of stewardship take seriously  
the importance of gathering for worship  
and sees the bond of Christian fellowship  
that allow us to practice incarnation,  
putting flesh and blood  
to our words and relationships.



### **Service**

Stewardship and service  
could be double mint twins,  
double the pleasure,  
double the fun.

I like to believe in my heart of hearts  
that everyone has good in them.  
I'm a person who wants to believe  
that in most situations  
people are going to look out for each other's  
well being and safety.

Which of course means I think  
that people are born  
with this connection to each other  
to help when there is need.

This means service to, with and for  
each other and our planet.

Our leaning, as Christians,  
toward a life of service  
has its roots in Christ  
who wraps a towel around his waist,  
bends down to wash our feet  
and says,  
"I am among you as one who serves."

It is no surprise that service  
is directly related to sacrifice.

One of the biggest ways  
we usually end up serving  
is when we give our time.

I can't think of things more important to us  
that we give  
other than money  
and our time.  
And money isn't until next week's sermon.

When our church goes on a mission trip,  
it is a sacrifice, a joyful sacrifice of time.  
When we are willing to sit and talk  
with a Sabbath Soup guest  
it is a suspension of our judgments  
and an extension of Christ's loving grace  
alive in us.

If we are willing to play in the Kairos band  
or sing in the choir  
or teach 2<sup>nd</sup> grade Sunday school  
or interview clients on our Good Samaritan days;  
each and everyone of those means a sacrifice our time.

Service for others, I hope  
comes naturally to most all people,  
even if they don't claim to be Christians.  
But again, grounded in Christ  
who came to serve  
means any act of service comes naturally  
and especially to Christians.

Our service is not a duty.  
Though [duty] is not an unworthy motive  
it is not the highest motive,  
nor is it adequate for Christian service.  
Because if duty were a motivation,  
then [we] would serve until [we] felt like  
we had fulfilled our duty  
but with no obligation  
to go beyond that point.

So the only motive  
we could have  
that is adequate for our service  
to each other and the world

is a personal love for Jesus Christ.”<sup>2</sup>

Part of the reason I think young adults  
don't go to church  
is that we've let a bad reputation  
take over.  
We live with the reputation that,  
church is irrelevant, stuffy,  
full of older people, uninformed,  
exclusive, and worried more about  
right doctrine than it is  
about right praxis.

But just think if all Christian churches  
were really serious about taking back  
that bad reputation and replacing it  
with one where the church  
was seen as one of the largest  
humanitarian organizations,  
known to be a place of sanctuary and aid;  
renown as a place where justice springs into action,  
where communities knew and trusted  
that coming together they'd face issues  
like racial division  
and economical disparity  
with clear visions  
and actions for better futures?

We might have young people and old people  
beating down the doors to get in  
if that were our reputation,  
a reputation of service.

I'm not saying that the church  
as an institution is only for these things,  
but this kind of Christian service  
only springs forth from a place that is grounded in  
an identity of stewardship  
and as said before  
a personal love of Christ.

I won't claim to be so starry eyed

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas L. Are, My Gospel of Stewardship Lay Renewal Publications, Tucker, GA 1977

that I believe our service  
would solve every problem in the world,  
but goodness gracious  
it doesn't hurt to try.

There's a story about an old woman who,  
armed with only a broom,  
marched up Peachtree Street in Atlanta  
to meet General Sherman's troops.

Someone laughed and said,  
"You can't stop the Yankees with just a broom."  
"No," she replied, "but I can sure  
let them know whose side I'm on!"

In a world and culture  
that sees our bad rap,  
we have the opportunity  
to make Christian service our reputation  
a service that is grounded  
in real sacrifice and extends grace  
and perhaps then our communities and our world  
world would know whose side we are on.<sup>3</sup>



### **Disciplines**

This is the area of a stewardship lifestyle  
that I want to talk about the least.

Why?

Because I'm so bad at it.

When it comes to a regular spiritual discipline  
or to regular spiritual study  
for my own personal faith

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<sup>3</sup> ibid

...ugh.  
That's all I've got, an *ugh*.

Which I know isn't what you want to hear  
from your pastor,  
but maybe it will make you feel less guilty  
if this is the area you are lacking in too.

The witness  
of generations of Christians before us  
tells us the benefit and necessity  
for spiritual disciplines and spiritual study  
in our personal lives of faith.  
A life that is lived in stewardship  
with others requires this.

Sam Shumate told me this joke at Wednesday Night Supper;  
he quipped, "Do you think  
our congregation's biblical illiteracy  
is as bad as the church,  
whose minister stood up  
week after week saying,  
"And this morning's reading comes from St. Paul  
...to which Mr. Adams  
leaned over to Mrs. Adams and said,  
"I just don't get it.  
We aren't Lutheran,  
yet all of his scripture lessons  
come from Minnesota."

I'll let that just sink in.

You've heard our sermons  
and been to the retreats  
where we have talked  
about biblical literacy.  
At time in history  
when more of us can read than ever before,  
we have some of the worst biblical literacy.

I love Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel  
who has said that we read  
the holy words of Scripture  
and they sit on our heart.  
We keep them piled up on top of our hearts  
until one day our hearts break  
and the holy words fall inside.

Isn't that beautiful and true?

That's the thing;  
if we don't know these scriptures  
then what will happen to our hearts  
when they break?

What happens when there is a Las Vegas?  
What happens when there is a New Town?  
What happens when there is an Aleppo?  
What happens when there is a Ferguson?

What if there are no holy words to fall inside?

As stewards we are caregivers.

And while caregivers don't have to be experts,  
they aren't expected to be doctors and healers,  
caregivers know the importance of showing up.

And in showing up,  
you aren't expected to have all the answers,  
but you know you have something to offer.



I have a friend,  
who went to live  
in China for two years.  
Adjusting back to life here isn't easy.  
And she put this up on Instagram the other day,  
"Every now and then,  
you take yourself out to brunch on a Tuesday

just because you want to say,  
“Hey self, I love you.  
Stay strong, brave and compassionate.  
Work hard, play hard.  
You got this.”

Self love isn't selfish, ya'll—  
and here's her kicker,  
“You can't pour out  
if you're on empty, ya know?”  
#truth

Taking time, to cultivate  
a spiritual discipline or practice  
is what gives us the strength to show up,  
it is what gives us  
the wellspring of grace to pour out  
and the words and presence  
of what is holy that lives in our hearts.

Maybe that's why I know  
I want to be better at a spiritual discipline,  
because you can't pour anything  
out if you're on empty.  
Study and disciplines  
give us a way to be filled  
so that in our worship,  
in our service, in our lives,  
we speak the common language  
of God's love in Christ  
to each other and the world  
that desperately needs to hear the good news.



## Love

I don't know  
that I could say it any better  
than John Wesley already has;

maybe when he uses the verb do,  
it is like the same thing as saying love;

Love

“...all you can.  
By all the means you can.  
In all the ways you can.  
In all the places you can.  
At all times you can.  
To all people you can.  
As long as ever you can.”

Loving people is a sacrifice.

It is messy and it is dangerous.

In at least one instance love  
has gotten someone killed.

Actually there are more instances  
than we can count

where love will get you killed.

But there are just as many instances,  
maybe even more

that will prove  
that love is the only thing  
that will save you.

Love gives you life and meaning.

To be a steward,

you will be asked to love God, love people  
and didn't Jesus basically say  
that the same thing?

To have a stewardship lifestyle  
is to have a life of sacrifice and grace  
and when you put those two together,  
you get love.

Grace is the gift  
that gives us the freedom  
the energy,  
the willpower,  
the support,  
the peace,  
the challenge,  
the mandate  
and the honor  
to

serve and empower each other

by all means that we can,  
in all the ways that we can,  
in all the places that we are  
and at any time we can  
and to every single person we can.

That is a testament to manifold, abundant grace.

Now that puts some flesh and blood  
to our lifestyle.

That is love incarnate I think.