

Stewardship of Your Worries

God's Plan for Stewardship

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As we continue Stewardship Month, we're going to hear a testimony from Doc Smith and I hope that you are encouraged and blessed by it.

A large part of my personal life other than my family has been devoted to my local church and the counseling ministry. That became the focus of my retirement years. It was my plan to continue this as long as I would be physically able but God had other plans. Sixty years ago I promised to love my wife, Leona, for better, for worse, in sickness or in health until we're separated by death. This promise took up huge significance in the last couple of years when it became obvious she was having significant physical problems which were affecting many of her skills. An irregular heartbeat and a temporary heart stoppage permanently damaged some of the memory functions of her brain. She needed my time to help her with her daily life. If I was going to love her as I promised and as Christ loved the church, I needed to set aside everything to have the time for the ministry. To accomplish this, I needed to discontinue all the ministries in the church: deacon, counseling ministry and significant reduction in ABF leadership and teaching time. It meant moving from the center of church ministry activity to the edge of the activities. Also, moving from being one who participated in serving to be one who is being served by others who participate in serving.

There were some difficulties in these transitions but those were outweighed by the fact that I was pleasing God in my new ministry to my wife who is my top human priority. As long as I am growing in my obedience, God's goal and ministry changes for me is not to stop or reduce ministry but to redirect and enhance it. This is what is happening in my ministry to my wife. To serve the King of kings by ministering to one of his servants is a privilege. It's not that I have to serve Leona, but rather I get to serve her. Responsibility and duty are accomplished through the delight of privilege.

One of my goals in retirement was to spend more time with Leona. God has helped with me that by giving me a ministry to her that accomplishes that goal. My time is spent in our home providing a number of the home-life activities she accomplished in previous years. God has moved me to a new and better ministry so I do not see these changes as sacrificial and the damage to her brain, God preserved the sweet loving part. It's very

pleasant to minister to her. She frequently says the words, "Thank you." The love of our children for her has been demonstrated by many helpful ways during this new era of our lives. When they were young, I guided them. Now they are providing guidance for us. Many of you have provided help and encouragement to us for which we thank God and you.

In the process, I am learning some important lessons. One of the most important is how I have failed over the years of my life to really love my wife as Christ loves his bride, the church. I am doing many things for her because of her physical limitations but I should have been doing them previously because of my love for Christ and for her. Because of brain damage, she does not remember something I may ask her to do. If she doesn't do it, I am learning to quietly do it for her without complaining or impatience because she literally does not remember it. How I regret that I have not responded that way out of love for Christ and her in all our previous years. There are many other of these kind of lessons that I am learning.

One of my major goals in my ministry to Leona which should have been a clear goal all of my life is that when she leaves this life, she knows that she has been loved by me as Christ loved the church. We do know that in the not too distant future, we will both enter eternity to spend time with our Savior and each other forever. In the meantime, we do not know what he has planned for us but I do know that according to Philippians 2:13 it is God who works in me to give me the motivation and ability to please God. As Paul encouraged the Ephesians in 1:19, I want to work on utilizing the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe according to the working of his great might. The Psalmist in 73:26 provides me with the encouragement that when my heart and my flesh fail, God is the strength of my heart and all I need now and forever. In the process, I want to wait and trust on him because of what Isaiah 40:31 says, that "They who wait on him shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, that they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint."

Aren't Doc and Leona a marvelous gift to this church family? What a tremendous picture of stewardship and of the strength of our Lord to help us remain faithful. So, thank you Doc and Leona for sharing with us.

Would you agree with me this morning that if you wanted to, there are a lot of things to worry about in this day and age? Is that a fair statement? For example, I saw an email this week that suggested that the way that we as a church are structuring our health care benefits for our employees was going to be deemed illegal beginning January 1, 2014. So that sent me into a bit of a frenzy, contacting the persons who organized this area of our ministry just to be sure that we are in compliance with the law, of course. And as it turns out, what I was initially told by someone from outside of our church was urban legend. But whatever you think about the Affordable Care Act, it certainly makes the future of our health care system a cause for concern or maybe even worry.

Then there is the on again, off again talks with Iran this week about the possibility of their regime eventually possessing a nuclear weapon and what could be done to prevent that. Well, when you combine that notion with what they've already openly and repeatedly said about how they would love to destroy the nation of Israel, you wonder how many more years it will be before people like them will have access to a nuclear weapon and then how those weapons could potentially be used around the world. You could worry about that.

Then, closer to home, all of these cultural indicators where pronouncements are being made from the business community and from the education community and from the politicians and the media about how they don't even want the voters of Indiana to have the privilege of weighing in on what should constitute marriage in our state which is a rather elitist position when you think about it. How hypocritical for open-minded people to want to suppress the people's right to vote. But you just pause and wonder about the condition of the culture that is going to be transferred to our children and our grandchildren. That could make you reach for the Maalox, I think.

Or, there is what the economists are saying about the level of our national debt and while the Fed board is continuing to keep the rates artificially low, which is good if you owe money, I suppose, not so good if you're trying to earn interest on your savings, but as long as the rates are kept low, our national debt is one kind of a problem. But do you realize that if the rates are returned to regular levels, the impact that would have on our nation's budget would be catastrophic. Or, the article in today's paper about proposed legislation to control church operated day cares.

We're just facing relentless pressure to both silence our message, to control our ministries and that's honestly just a few examples that we could mention of possible reasons to worry. We haven't even started talking about everything that is facing you personally whether it be trials or difficulties, uncertainties, suffering but as I was saying, there is plenty to worry about if that's the way you want to live. But contrast that to the testimonies that we've heard this month from Kevin and Sarah Brown and from Tim and Leslie Peeples and from Rachel Hefner and today from Doc Smith. The Browns and our church family could be consumed with worry because of Kevin's cancer if we wanted to be. Or, the Peeples could have said absolutely not to any serving opportunities with children or with teens because of all the potential worries that go along with ministering to young people in this culture or any culture. Or, Rachel Hefner could have responded to the death of her father when she was still in high school by going into a cocoon of doubt and anxiety and all sorts of self-destructive choices to try to ease her pain. Or, Doc Smith could see the uncertainty that comes with his current life situation as a reason to worry and fret about what might happen in the upcoming days.

And yet these stories that we have heard this month and hundreds of others that could also be told, have you noticed they've been characterized by anything but worry. Not because people are making light of their circumstances. That's not happening. A fair amount of this has been real, it's been raw and it should have been. But still, each one has found a way to view their situation as a stewardship, as a trust that's given to them by a

sovereign and a powerful God so they are rejoicing while they're suffering. They are trusting God while they are suffering. They sound a lot like the Psalmist who said, "Weeping may last for the night but," thank God for that, "but a shout of joy comes in the morning." As a result, they have ministered to each one of us. I really think these testimonies have been Hebrews 10:24-25 in action, "Let us consider how to stimulate one another," that's what's happening, "to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together," I'm glad I heard every one of them, "as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another," that's what they've been doing, "and all the more as you see the day drawing near."

Another way you could say this is: I believe there really is an apologetic value, a witnessing value, to a life that has learned how to overcome worry. Do you believe that? Remember, the Apostle Peter said, "But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence." That verse is placed right in the middle of his book. Well, why in the world would anyone ask another person about the reason for the hope that is in them? Lots of answers to that question but one of them is: because of the obvious way you have learned to overcome worry. Which leads to a question, doesn't it? When is the last time that anyone had reason to ask you that question? The question, how are you able to have such joyful confident hope in the midst of the uncertain times in which we're living? I think many of us would say, "I've not given others nearly enough reasons to ask that question as I could have."

Well, if that's where you're at this morning, please open your Bible to 1 Peter 5. That's on page 183 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you if you need that this morning. We're in the process of concluding our verse-by-verse study of the book of 1 Peter that we've been doing all fall. In fact, next Sunday we're going to actually land this plane and I'll speak with you in a minute about what's planned for the month of December. We're also in the final days of Stewardship Month. I hope you now have sat down with your family and looked at this commitment brochure and talked and prayed about it. I hope you are planning to be at our Stewardship Celebration next Sunday night. You don't have to be a member of this church, even if you've just started coming, it's really our thanksgiving time to pause and thank God for all he's done among us this year. Also, to commit ourselves to this freshly minted five year Strategic Ministry Plan that we put together as a church family. So, it's really important so these themes of everything we're learning in 1 Peter and Stewardship Month are dovetailing well.

Last Sunday we talked about the stewardship of humility and how important it is to avoid these twin sins of rebellion and pride. I think for many of us that was a challenging topic, huh? Because we know wherever we are in the Christian life that there are vestiges of pride and rebellion that still need to be tamed for all of us. Would you agree? And you realize to not agree with that statement would be proud? Just in case you hadn't figured that out.

Pride and rebellion. Have you ever thought about the relationship between pride and rebellion and the issue of worry? Have you ever thought about how they fit together?

Well, Peter has. Peter has a lot. Let's listen in. We're going to start in chapter 5, verse 1, just to get a running start but we're really focusing on verses 6-8 this morning. Peter says,

“1 Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, 2 shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; 3 nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. 4 And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. 5 You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”

Now our verses for this morning,

“6 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, 7 casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you. 8 Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”

We're talking this morning about the stewardship of your worries and from these great verses of Scripture, let's think about three steps to handling worry in a way that positions us to witness well. Do you want to witness well? I mean, do you? And do you struggle with worry? Yeah, I'm afraid so. So, because of that, let's talk about what this passage says and how it can help us.

First of all, you have to humble yourself. That's how verse 6 starts, “Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God.” Now, remember the overall setting of this book: the context is suffering; episodes of suffering in your life and mine both large and small because Peter was a realist. And the fact of the matter is, because they were living under the wicked emperor, Nero, being a follower of Jesus Christ was becoming more and more difficult and more and more dangerous. That's why the recipients of this book are scattered in the first place. And how do the first verses of chapter 5 fit into that? Well, they and the various leaders of their church needed to be shepherded by the Apostle Peter in fulfillment to Christ's instruction to him some 30 years before on the Sea of Galilee, “Peter, feed my sheep. Shepherd persons in the midst of suffering.”

Well, that makes this book pretty easy to relate to, huh? Why? Because we live in a sin-cursed world, true, around sin-cursed people in a sin-cursed body which contains a sin-cursed heart. That's basically it. I mean, is it any wonder that suffering exists for each of us personally in all sorts of fashions and the potential, therefore, for worrying about what's happening now and what could happen in the days ahead was tremendous in Peter's day and it's tremendous in our day as well.

Peter says one of the approaches out of that way of life, a worrying life, is to humble yourself. Now, think about the logic of that very carefully because there's a flow of thought even from verse 5 to verse 6 because there's a transition from a noun to a verb. You say, what? Well, what we saw last week "clothe yourself with" something, "with humility." But now that's strengthened in the verse before us, "Therefore humble yourselves." In other words, this isn't just a characteristic you wear; it's not just a noun. It's a position you assume; it's something you do to yourself. Notice the reflexive nature of that: you have to, if you want to live for God, you have to humble yourself.

Now, what that means is in this context: voluntarily submitting yourself to God's plan and entrusting your situation even as you're suffering, to his resources, to his purposes and his timing. That was the point of the end of chapter 4, "Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God," here's what we do, "we shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right." See, humble yourselves. Isn't that what God is allowing Kevin and Sarah and Tim and Leslie and Rachel and Doc and Leona? Isn't that what God is allowing them to do and isn't that what they're choosing to do instead of being consumed by worry? Humble yourselves.

You might say, "Well, what was that under the mighty hand of God thing? What does that mean?" Are we talking about God crushing us under his destructive hand? Is this a picture, is this it? Like God crushing you? Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God where he just wants to crush you? Is that it? Friends, that would be a grossly distorted view of the way our heavenly Father relates to his children. Humble yourself under his mighty hand is not that.

You notice I said "to his children." That assumes something that Peter also assumes in this text. Let me just push the pause button and be sure we're on the same page: this assumes that there's been a definite time in your life where you've acknowledged your sin and placed your faith and trust in Christ. That's the only way you could assume a position of genuine biblical humility and it's the only way you're going to have the peace of God in your heart. That requires a spiritual transformation from the inside out and if you've not made that decision, we would invite you to make that right now, today.

But, this was written to people who are in that situation and Peter is reminding us that in Christ we're under the protective hand of God. That's the point. Now, think about that logically: humble yourselves under the protective hand of God. You say, "What does that mean? Protection?" Well, here it is: submitting yourself to God shields you from the natural consequences that come from the way of the transgressor. Did you know that? Proverbs 13:15 says, "The way of the transgressor is hard." So, if you move out from under the protective hand of God, if you say, "I'm not gonna humble myself but in pride and rebellion I'm going to do whatever I want," there are consequences built into that approach to life that are not particularly good.

By the way, that's a demonstration of God's grace as well. He wants to wake us up from our stupor if we're rebelling during a time of suffering. Wakes you up. Like the other day, do you remember when it started snowing the other day? Wasn't that pleasant? What

was it that preceded the snow? This cold, biting rain. Where were you when that cold, biting rain hit you? I'll tell you where I was: I was in the parking lot right out here, right in the middle, half way between the Community Center and the church. It woke me up, I'll tell you that. That woke me up like right now. Here's the point: if you run out from under the protective hand of God, the umbrella of protection that comes from submitting to him, there will be consequences intended to motivate you and me to come back under that umbrella.

But do you know a far better approach? For a Christian to never stray from under the protective umbrella to begin with which is the point: humble yourself, responding to occasions of suffering his way and in so doing you place yourself under his mighty hand of protection. If you're looking for a Bible Study to do this week, I would really encourage you to chase the phrase "hand of God" around in your Bible. It's delightful. It is beautiful to think about what it means to be under the mighty hand of God. Here's a passage you might enjoy, it's John 10:27, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand."

In Christ, it's possible to be under his protective hand. Or Psalm 17:7, "Wondrously show Your lovingkindness, O Savior of those who take refuge at Your right hand From those who rise up against them." You see, that's what we're doing in humbling ourselves. We're choosing to follow his will even while we're suffering. Do you see that? Even while you're suffering I still want to humble myself under God's hand. By the way, it's not some grudging thing. Please don't say, "Okay, if I have to humble myself under God's hand, okay." Seriously? Is that the best love you've got for God? There ought to be a delight to it, friend. Psalm 16, "You will make known to me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; In Your right hand," is what? "There are pleasures forever." The hand of God. Of course, that joy was secured when the only member of the Godhead who ever literally had hands, the Lord Jesus Christ, did what with them? He allowed those hands to be nailed to a cross so our sin could be forgiven. By his stripes, we have the ability to gain entrance to a relationship with him so we could even be under his mighty protective hand.

Now, there's something else about all this that is critical in this verse, it's believing that God will lift you up. That is what the passage says, "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time." Well, here's a question: when is the proper time? And I realize you might say, "Well, that will be when the Lord returns for his children." In other words, Peter was speaking eschatologically here; he was referring to the end times. And that certainly comes up a lot in this book but I actually don't think that's the point here. The phrase "in time, at the proper time" is *en kairos* and it literally means this: in time. It doesn't have anything to do with the end times, it means "on time," it means "in time." In other words, stay under God's protective hand. Humble yourself even when it's hard. So, get as close to that post on the umbrella as you can. Grab onto your Savior and choose to follow his will and you're under his mighty hand even when you're suffering and even when you're tempted to run away in your own pride

and rebellion. Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God and he will exalt you when he chooses to and it will be right on time. Right on time.

John MacArthur said this, this summarizes what I'm trying to say well, "If the foundational attitude for spiritual growth is submission, then humility is the footing to which the foundation is anchored." Now hear this: to become proudly rebellious, which is what we sometimes do when we're suffering, to fight against the Lord's purposes which we sometimes do when we're suffering, or judge his providence as unkind or unfair is to forfeit the sweet grace of his exaltation when the trial has fulfilled its purpose. It's the Lord Jesus himself who promised everyone who exalts himself will be humbled and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

I realize that you might say, "Okay, I'm trying to get my brain around that but make that practical." Let me try to do that: let's say you're in an unfair work situation right now so you are suffering in some way great or small right now. Well, what's the temptation? What's the temptation when you're struggling at work? Here's the answer: to move out from under God's protective hand in some act of pride or rebellion and respond to the situation in a way that is sinful and displeasing to God. Right? So, all of a sudden you're now gossiping about your boss even though you know it's wrong. Or, you're undermining that fellow employee at work who is making your life miserable even though you know that's wrong. Or, you're fretting and worrying about what might happen in the days ahead. I mean, the potential list of possible sinful responses is practically endless. You're running out from under God's protective hand in pride and rebellion in order to solve that problem on your own. I would also say this: that approach is devoid of any apologetic power. No one is going to ask you a reason for the hope that is in you if you respond that way.

But what about the person who says, "I'm going to humble myself even while I'm hurting at work? I'm going to stay close to Christ, the center of the umbrella. I'm going to stay close to his word even when it's hard. I'm going to humble myself even while I'm hurting and I'm going to choose to be God's kind of employee or God's kind of spouse or God's kind of parent or God's kind of neighbor, God's kind of friend, God's kind of church member. I'm going to remain under the mighty hand of God even when it's hard and I'll let God lift me up. I'll let God lift me up when and how he chooses."

Friend, I would just say if you're here this morning and you've moved out from under God's protective hand during an episode of suffering, it would be wise for you to repent and get back under the umbrella of his protection while you still have the opportunity to do so. If you would say, "Well, I'm trying but I'll tell you, that's hard." Remember this: God is never late but he's rarely early. He's got the on-time thing down to a science, do you know that? He will exalt you in good time.

Here's the thing, follow the logic of the text: if you can get there, if you choose to get there, if you ask Christ to help you get there, that sets you up perfectly for verse 7. That, friend, is what allows you to cast your anxiety on him. Think about this, you came to the church house to think, right? That would've been a good time for a, "Yes, Pastor Viars,

and we love you for motivating us to think.” Well, thank you. Thank you, I appreciate that. What is the relationship between verse 7 and verse 6? Here it is: if I’m submitting myself to God’s plan in this period of uncertainty and suffering, I don’t have to worry about the outcome of the situation. You see, we have the invitation. In fact, we have the command to “cast our anxiety on him.”

Back to that person who is enduring a challenging time at work. You don’t have to worry about whether that situation is ever going to change. You don’t have to try to manipulate the change right away. You don’t have to worry about whether the person who is being evil to you is going to get worse. You don’t have to start worrying about what might be done to you or said about you in the future, blah, blah, blah, blah. We need to get in the habit of saying to ourselves and to others around us regarding that issue, “Well, that’s the Lord’s concern. That’s the Lord’s concern. I have humbled myself under his mighty hand and I am casting my anxiety on him.” There it is. That’s the relationship between pride and rebellion/humility and the issue of worry. Humble yourself under his mighty protective hand and he’ll exalt you in due time and in the meantime, you cast your anxiety on him.

Now, I realize you might say, “Oh, this is such church talk. I mean Peter didn’t know nothing and he must’ve never suffered. He must’ve never been in a difficult situation. There is no way he did this in real life. If he had to work in that prison house of a job I have, he’d think differently.” Did you say prison house? Somebody in here said it. Think about Acts 12. I love this passage. Think about this, “Now about that time Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church in order to mistreat them.” The pagans do that, you know. “And he had James the brother of John put to death with a sword.” Think about that. “When he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also.” The writer of this book. “Now it was during the days of Unleavened Bread. When he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out before the people. So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God.” I wonder what Peter’s emotional state was?

Let’s keep reading, “On the very night when Herod was about to bring him forward, Peter was,” what is it? “Sleeping between two soldiers.” Can you imagine some really good snoring going on? “Peter was sleeping between two soldiers bound with two chains, and guards in front of the door were watching over the prison. And behold, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared and a light shone in the cell; and he struck Peter’s side and woke him up, saying, ‘Get up quickly.’ And his chains fell off his hands.” Now, what was it that Peter said again? Casting all your care upon him even when your friends have been put to death with a sword and you’re next. And even when an angel comes to deliver you, you’re sleeping so soundly that the angel has to whack you good just to wake you up.

Can you imagine the angel? I mean, just think about this in your brain: angels are pretty powerful, right? And they’ve got the whole bright light thing going on intended to wake all God’s people up? So, when an angel shows up, generally speaking, there is a bit of

awe, fear, respect, right? So, the angel is sent to this prison and he goes, “Da da da da!” with the bright light thing and Peter does what? Keeps right on snoring. So you’re now in an angel’s shoes, although I’m not even sure that angels wear shoes. Anyway, put yourself in that position and you’ve done the “Da da da da!” and Peter is still snoring. So, what do you do as an angel? I don’t know, maybe he intensified the light. Maybe he tried it several times, who knows. “Da da da da! Da da da DA!” Who knows how many times he did that and finally what does the angel have to do? Yeah, whack Peter. By the way, with what does an angel even whack somebody with? The whole thing is just absolutely amazing.

But here’s the point: believing God really cares for you. I mean, that’s it: casting your anxiety on him because he cares for you. Friends, this is not just church talk. This is the power of God talk. This is the impact Christ stands ready to have on your life. Talk and it works. It works every day.

Some of you know that my wife, Chris, just had a second surgery. The Viars family is getting old, apparently, and so Chris had a second, that didn’t come out right. Maybe we should say, living with Steve Viars results in pain. Who knows. Anyway, my wife had to have a second surgery a couple of weeks ago and our son, Andrew, was pretty upset about that and rightfully so. I mean, we were all concerned. So, Chris went down to Drew’s bed; she heard that he was upset about that the night before she was going to have surgery and she just laid down with him and was talking to him about that a little bit. She said to him, “Well, honey, what’s the worse thing that could happen during Mommy’s surgery?” He said, “Well, you could die.” Which really got out what obviously he was thinking about and so Chris said, “Well, then what would happen?” He said, “Well, you’d go to heaven,” and they just started talking about the beauty of heaven and Drew has placed his faith and trust in Christ and so she was able just to help him cast his care on God knowing that God cares for him.

The next day we had the surgery and it went late into the night so we weren’t able to even see Drew before he went to bed. Our daughter was there serving him and so she put Drew to bed and then we got home late that night. That morning, I was going to take him through his regular school routine so I was down about 5:15 in the morning and just laid down next to him in the bed just to try to wake him up softly. I did and first words out of his mouth, “Is Mom okay?” First words. “Is Mom okay?” I said, “Son, she sure is.” Here’s what he yelled out, “Praise the Lord!” which tells me he was making that connection in his mind between the concern he had for his mother and casting all his care on him knowing that God cares for him as our son. Paul said it this way, “Be anxious for nothing but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your request be made known to God.” Do you hear this, “The peace of God which surpasses all comprehension will guard your heart and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

You see, friends, worry says God can’t be trusted and there is a turmoil of soul as a result. In fact, do you realize that’s what the word “anxiety” means. The word literally means “being torn apart because there’s no singular focus.” Yet, casting your anxiety on him results in the peace of God.

Now, here's a question: what's the relationship between humility and overcoming worry and stewardship? Look at this brochure we've had in your program for the last several weeks, would you? I'm encouraging you to sit down with your family to consider these matters together and then to tear off that form and put it in the envelope and leave it at the Welcome Center or bring it with you to the celebration next Sunday night. But why would we encourage you to consider growing in personal disciplines? Here's why: one of the reasons we study God's word and pray is because each day we want to humble ourselves under his mighty hand. Right? And we want to cast our anxiety on him before we would even leave our house and the spiritual disciplines and growing in our stewardship of the spiritual disciplines can actually help us accomplish what this text is saying.

What about all these serving opportunities on the back? Do you know what prevents some of God's people from serving faithfully? It's because the worries of the world have choked out their love for Christ. They are too worried about how they're going to get their next iPhone and whether or not they're going to be able to learn all of its features and they're messing around with all sorts of junk that is not going to stand the test of time. And when persons choose to serve Christ they're saying, "I'm trusting you, Lord. I'm trusting you with my time. I'm trusting you at the risk that comes with service. I want to cast my concern on you knowing that you care for me."

What about the financial piece? I believe that that's one of the clear ways – the thing about that is, it's the beauty of math. A lot of this is squishy, math is not. "Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God knowing that he'll exalt you in due time. Cast your anxiety on him knowing that he cares for you." And here's what giving does: it says, "Lord, I trust you. Lord, I acknowledge that everything I have comes from your good hand."

I remember when one of our deacons said to me, "You know, my wife and I believe we can do better with 90% of our income in God's blessing than 100% of our income without it." That's it and I realize, people ask me all the time, "What about amount? What about amount?" Ultimately, that's between you and the Lord but I'll tell you this: this church got to where it is because a whole lot of people, not a few, a lot, have said, "I'm going to start with tithing. I'm just going to start there and then I'm going to let that grow over time just like progressive sanctification happens in every area of my life."

Then there's all these special ministries that God has entrusted to us and we're so glad but we understand it's hard for our church to keep all that going so we want to give sacrificially to that. Right now in this Faith West campaign we've finished two years and we got the last one down. So, we want to encourage you to be faithful to that and if you're new, jump on and help us get that one across the line. But I realize for some that might be challenging. That's the point. That's the point at which we have to decide and stewardship can help us. Don't say, "I hate this brochure." You ought to hug this brochure and those who have talked to you about it. You ought to hug it because it can help you, I mean it, it can help you do 1 Peter 5:6-8. It can help us humble ourselves

under the mighty hand of our God believing he'll exalt us whenever he wants and in whatever way he wants and we'll cast our anxiety on him believing he cares for us.

Now, think about apologetics. Think about the witnessing value of this because we're coming into Christmas and good stewards who believe this passage can have a marvelous impact on this culture because, friends, we're talking about celebrating at Christmas time the birth of the Prince of Peace. You realize, there are many people in our culture, in our community, who wouldn't know the possibility of having a personal relationship with God that could give them peace that passes all understanding. We're going to start talking about that in two weeks; we're going to do a study on God's plan for the Messiah; a study of the prophecies in the Old Testament that many would not know about. Why not bring your friends to that? And we're launching Christmas for everyone. Again, an opportunity for us to give to those in need. We have our Living Nativity. Invite a friend. Plan to serve. We have a great musical plan and I'm so glad for our Worship Teams, all they're doing. Why wouldn't you bring your friends to that? Why wouldn't you take a risk and bring your friends to that? Our Christmas Eve services, our Christmas Sunday service on the 22nd. All of these ministries we're trying to do in our community.

The bottom line is: how many people who live and work right around us have never heard a compelling explanation of the gospel and the possibility of facing worry in an entirely new and different way? Let's be good stewards of Christmas.

What's at stake? We're going to talk about this, Lord willing, more next Sunday. What is at stake? Here's the answer: our adversary wants to devour you. Do you believe that? And if you're a Christian, he cannot rob your place in heaven but he can certainly devour you through pride and he can devour you through worry. What we're talking about this morning is that important which is why it's crucial for us to be sober and be on the alert.

I would encourage you: look for opportunities this week to humble yourself under the mighty hand of God believing that in due time he will exalt you and cast all your anxiety on him believing that he cares for you.

Let's stand together for prayer, shall we?