

How many of you have a “Time Share”? (If you have, I am sorry.... just kidding, I am sure you are maximizing your investment.)

Now, I don't have one, but I know that often companies use the common tactic of “listen to this presentation, and you will get a gift. No commitments, and you don't have to buy anything. But you know that the presentation is about selling you a Time Share. It is so tempting; I mean, you only have to listen to a presentation for an hour or so, and then you get your free whatever.

Perhaps this has happened to you. You were convinced that you had enough willpower to say “no” at the end, no matter what they would tell you. You knew there would be a push and pressure and a little guilt, but you were determined not to buckle because they were trying to get something out of you that we were not willing or able to give.

Unfortunately, I think many people think of “Stewardship” that way. We are unsure whether we may want to commit to something, whether it is our time, service, or any other resource. So, we brace ourselves for the hard sell, and we know there will be some stress related to it. But we are determined not to give something we are not willing or able to provide.

Let me say this with absolute confidence; that kind of thing is not “stewardship.” That might be “fundraising,” but it is not stewardship.

The distinction between fundraising and stewardship is that in fundraising, the whole point is to get you to do something today that you had no intention to do; to buy something, to participate in something, to cave in and say “yes,” when you really were trying to scream “NO!”

My point here is that stewardship is different from fundraising. Stewardship is a lifestyle, not a moment of weakness. Stewardship is about God's property, not our possessions. Stewardship is taking care of God's stuff, not protecting our stuff. Stewardship is not about buying a “Time Share” at a church, but seeing ourselves as part of the people that change the world by bringing a message of hope, love, and peace.

There is nothing wrong with fundraising, but that is not what we are doing as a church for our Stewardship Campaign because, as stewards, we don't pay for a service or benefit. Instead, we partner with God to join in what God is doing because we are part of this, this is our church, and we assume the responsibility for its success by committing through our prayers, presence, service, giving, and witness.

So, as you can see, stewardship is more than money. Stewardship is how we live out our calling as followers of Christ. Stewardship is what we do after we say that we believe. It is how we practice and make our faith visible.

For these reasons, I believe stewardship is at the heart of being a healthy church that grows and makes a difference in many people's lives because it is about disciples like you and I living in faith every day. This is the key to a successful future for New World.

In Peter 4:10, we find the following words that help us put this in context and frame it so we may know how God is calling us to respond,

Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. (NRSV)

This text speaks to me and challenges me regarding my stewardship of the grace God has bestowed upon me. It is not about something that I have to do, but that I get to do. It is a privilege to serve God and each one of you by channeling God's grace through the gifts and talents I have been given.

In the same way, I believe this text may speak to each of you to guide and direct us during our stewardship season.

In this verse, Peter speaks of the blessings that each one of us has received in Christ, encouraging us to share our blessings in the service of others.

This text challenges us to name our blessings and then "invest" in one another as we seek to be faithful stewards of all that God has gifted us.

Therefore, we are challenged to ask,

How can I channel the grace of God that I have experienced for the sake of my neighbor?

How do we use our God-given gifts—our talents, our time, and our resources?

My friends, God has great expectations for our church—powerful plans to bless our community and transform lives so they can find fulfillment, peace, and joy in God.

We are certainly not here as the body of Christ just to be a religious organization. We are not simply an institution. We are not just a facility. We are definitely not a business. None of these things is what God has called this church to be. We are called to make disciples of Jesus Christ to transform the world, live in faith every day, and join God in God's mission.

So, listen to this: God has plans for our church! And, they come alive in us!

My prayer is that each of us will respond appropriately to God's call as we "serve one another with whatever gift each of us has received."

I finish by reading from Ephesians 2:10,

He creates each of us by Christ Jesus to join him in the work he does, the good work he has gotten ready for us to do, work we had better be doing. (The Message)

Let's make our faith visible so others may come to faith too.