

Living The Christian Life Series:
Lesson 25: Developing the Biblical Techniques and The Crowns That
Accompany Them – Part 8 The Crown of Joy
(Developing Faithful Stewardship)

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Series Text: Romans 12:1 *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.*

Applicational Texts:

Philippians 4:1

Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the LORD, my dearly beloved.

I Thessalonians 2:19-20

¹⁹For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our LORD Jesus Christ at his coming? ²⁰For ye are our glory and joy.

Introduction:

We have examined acquiring the Crown of Righteousness by developing a spirit-controlled life. We have examined acquiring the Crown of Glory by developing spiritual maturity. And, we have examined acquiring the Crown of Life by developing the Faith/Rest Life. Now, we are positioned to examine acquiring the Crown of Joy by developing the technique of Faithful Stewardship and living out our designed ministry. The degree of our joy is determined by the faithfulness of our stewardship. We are not our own, we have been bought with a price and have been assigned a ministry. Our joy is dependent upon our discovery and performance of that ministry. The basis for our personal ministry is our spiritual gifting and submission to its designed use. That is the heart of our study here.

The church is designed to be an Equipping Center not just a Correctional Institution. Yes! One of the objectives for the local church and our admonition to attend its services is its role as a Correctional Institution. That is, it is structured to lead us to conversion, from sinner to saint, and to correct our behavior so we live the Christian life and experience the Joy God has designed for us – the preaching and teaching, the singing and

fellowship are designed to correct us and motivate us. But, the church is designed to be an Equipping Center and a Training Institution because we each have an assigned ministry to perform.

If our worship of God was the primary objective of the church, we would all be translated to Heaven immediately upon receiving Christ as Savior so we could join the Heavenly Choir. If correcting our behavior was the primary objective of the church, we would be changed in a moment in the twinkling of an eye and raptured into His presence upon Salvation. If Evangelism was the primary objective of the church, we would meet on street corners and in the doorways of honkytonks with bullhorns and tambourines. While worship and behavioral correction and evangelism are certainly part of the role of the church, the primary objective of the church is to equip each believer for his or her assigned ministry.

We are not left here to change our behavior, we are left here to serve, to live out our individually designated ministries. And the joy we experience and the crown we acquire will be in proportion to our understanding of our role, utilizing the equipping that the church is designed to provide, and living out that ministry. We are not all called to vocational ministry. We are not all called to bi-vocational ministry, but we are all called to ministry.

When I went to church camp as a kid and then as a leader, I witnessed hundreds of kids, in an emotional environment of spiritual conviction, dedicate themselves to become preachers or missionaries. And probably less than one in a thousand followed through with that fireside commitment. Why? Well the primary answer to that question is, because they were never called. God did not assign them the role of preacher or missionary. Those were the only options offered by the well-meaning but biblically ignorant church camp leaders.

None of those camp pastors offered an invitation for any of those kids to commit to serve God as an administrator, or as a teacher, or as a server, or as an encourager, or as a helper, or to share knowledge, or to share wisdom, or to show mercy, or to be a giver. Yet, that is the list of spiritual gifts and assigned ministries God has given to the church and all of us have at least one of these unique abilities, to enable us to live out our assigned ministry. But those camp pastors could not see beyond their traditional Sunday Services to see the ministries we are assigned to live out in our daily lives. We are Ambassadors for Christ! A person who represents a King in the court of another. We are Sojourners, citizens of the Kingdom of God, not living in our own country, but living along side the locals to do our King's business. The majority of Christians are not called to do the business of the King at church, we are appointed to do His business in our everyday life living alongside the locals in administration, teaching, serving, encouraging, helping, sharing knowledge, sharing wisdom, showing mercy, or in giving. Our purpose for going to church is to become better equipped to do our specifically assigned ministry as God directs us primarily through circumstances and divine appointments – appointments He designed us for and presents to us. Those poor kids were not called to be Preachers or Missionaries, they were called to live out their assigned ministries, and the church has

failed to teach them how to do that. Many of them have had a guilt complex for most of their lives because they didn't follow through with that commitment to be a preacher or missionary. But the tragedy is exasperated by their failure to understand the gifting God has given is exercised in as many different ways as there are differences in occupations and walks of life. They may or may not be living out God's specific assignment to them and not even know it.

I have titled our current study series " Living The Christian Life" and we are examining the Biblical Techniques For living that life and the crowns that accompany them. We have made a distinction between the diadem, a crown of authority, which is given us at salvation based upon the grace of God and the stephanos crowns which are given in recognition of achievement. There are four Stephanos Crowns that are going to be awarded Believers at the Judgment Seat of Christ following the Resurrection. We have studied three of these: *Developing The Spirit Controlled Life with its accompanying Crown of Righteousness*; *Developing Spiritual Maturity and its accompanying Crown of Glory*; *Developing The Faith Rest Life and its accompanying Crown of Life*.

We come now to the fourth technique for living the Christian life effectively, "Developing Faithful Stewardship and its Accompanying Crown of Joy." The Apostle Paul identified himself as the servant (doulos - slave) of Jesus Christ. There are a number of passages of Scripture that identify our freedom yet at the same time we have Paul telling us in I Corinthians 6:19-20

¹⁹What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? ²⁰For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

So, as we consider our stewardship, we ask the question, Are we slaves or are we free. In our previous studies of the Doctrine of Redemption we explored four Greek words associated with redemption which help us understand the paradox.

Let me quickly summarize these four Greek words. "Agorasthete" means to purchase in the slave market (It is translated "bought.") "Lutrosetai" means to pay the ransom needed to set us free. (It is translated "redeemed.") "Apolutrohsis" emphasizes deliverance as a result of payment. (It is translated "redemption.") "Exagorasen" means to purchase a slave and set him free in such a way that he will never be put in the slave market again. (It is translated "redemption.")

So Jesus Christ is our redeemer, He redeemed us from the slave market. We were born there as a result of the imputed sin of Adam and could not free ourselves (Only a free man could make a purchase from the slave market).

Jesus Christ purchased our freedom from the Penalty and the Power of Sin, and one day we will be free from the Presence of Sin. The purchase price was His Own blood which He shed for us.

He freed us in such a way that we could never be forcibly enslaved again. The blood of Jesus Christ keeps on cleansing us from all iniquity. Free - Eternally Free! Free – Free Indeed! Yet the Apostle Paul identified himself as a slave (doulos) of our Lord Jesus Christ and declares that we are not our own but have been bought with at price.

God revealed this grace principle in the Law when He brought the Children of Israel out of bondage to the Egyptians.

Deuteronomy 15:12-18

¹² And if thy brother, an Hebrew man, or an Hebrew woman, be sold unto thee, and serve thee six years; then in the seventh year thou shalt let him go free from thee. ¹³ And when thou sendest him out free from thee, thou shalt not let him go away empty: ¹⁴ Thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of thy winepress: of that wherewith the LORD thy God hath blessed thee thou shalt give unto him. ¹⁵ And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee: therefore I command thee this thing to day. ¹⁶ And it shall be, if he say unto thee, I will not go away from thee; because he loveth thee and thine house, because he is well with thee; ¹⁷ Then thou shalt take an aul, and thrust it through his ear unto the door, and he shall be thy servant for ever. And also unto thy maidservant thou shalt do likewise. ¹⁸ It shall not seem hard unto thee, when thou sendest him away free from thee; for he hath been worth a double hired servant to thee, in serving thee six years: and the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all that thou doest.

Then, we harmonize that with what Jesus said,

John 15:15

Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his LORD doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.

The word "servant" is translated from the Greek word 'doulos' - slave, From now on I do not call you slaves but friends. Jesus went on to say; If the son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed! So we have been set free from the penalty and power of sin and are the volunteer bond slaves of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Our management of that stewardship determines the extent of our Crown of Joy.

I. The Crown of Joy:

The Crown of Joy is awarded on the basis of faithful stewardship, accomplished through the recognition and application of stewardship principles. In **Philippians 4:1** and **I Thessalonians 2:19-20** Paul tells us that the production of his ministry is the basis for His crown of joy. He indicates that the awarding of the Crown of Joy is based on our faithful stewardship concerning the ministry God has given us. All believers are appointed to the ministry, and we are all going to give an account of the stewardship regarding our ministry at the Judgment Seat of Christ following the

Rapture of the Church. We are not immediately taken to be in Heaven at because we have been appointed as stewards of God's Kingdom. This was clearly taught in Jesus' earthly ministry in the parables of the talents and the tares and substantiated throughout His teaching on stewardship. We are His stewards, managers of His estate. and have been given spiritual gifts to carry out our individual assignments. A review of our faithfulness as His stewards will occur at the Judgment Seat of Christ and we will be awarded the Crown of Joy in proportion to the degree of our faithfulness as His stewards.

Matthew 25:14-30

¹⁴ For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. ¹⁵ And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey. ¹⁶ Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. ¹⁷ And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. ¹⁸ But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money. ¹⁹ After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them. ²⁰ And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. ²¹ His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. ²² He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. ²³ His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. ²⁴ Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: ²⁵ And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. ²⁶ His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: ²⁷ Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. ²⁸ Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. ²⁹ For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. ³⁰ And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

II. Our Stewardship is Three-Fold.

Listen to the Apostle Paul as he addresses the believers at Galatia...

Galatians 2:20:

"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless, I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me."

Our Stewardship responsibilities are three fold; Stewardship of Time, Stewardship of Abilities, and Stewardship of Possessions. Our accountability to God is in regard to how we spend our time, how we use our abilities, and how we use our material assets.

Let's look at it...

1. We Are Stewards of Time:

A statement concerning time is a statement about priority. When you say, I don't have time. You are really saying, there were higher priorities...

Matthew 6:32-34 says:

³¹ Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? ³² (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. ³³ But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. ³⁴ Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

Notice the statement of verse 33, "... *But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you...*"

Our first priority is to be the kingdom of God and His righteousness (diakaiosunaen – means, that which conforms to the specifications of the plan.)

We do not all have the same numbers of days, months, and years to live but each of us has the same 24 hours in each day we do live and we are accountable to God as His stewards for the time He has given us.

Romans 13:11-14

¹¹ And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. ¹² The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. ¹³ Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. ¹⁴ But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.

Colossians 4:5

Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time.

Ephesians 5:15-17

15 See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, 16 Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. 17 Wherefore be ye not unwise but understanding what the will of the Lord is.

2. We Are Stewards of Spiritual Gifts and Assigned Ministry:

Romans 12:6-8 says:

"Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that showeth mercy, with cheerfulness."

We all have at least one spiritual gift and are accountable as stewards of our use of those gifts.

I Corinthians 12:4-18

⁴ Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵ And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. ⁶ And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. ⁷ But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. ⁸ For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; ⁹ To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; ¹⁰ To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: ¹¹ But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will. ¹² For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. ¹³ For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. ¹⁴ For the body is not one member, but many. ¹⁵ If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? ¹⁶ And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? ¹⁸ But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.

I Peter 4:10 says:

"As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."

The vast majority of Christians do not understand what their spiritual gifts are. They are at a sincere disadvantage in being proper stewards of their gifts if they don't know what gifts they have and don't understand how to use those gifts. Since we are going to give an account of our stewardship of those gifts, and since our "Crown of Joy" is dependent on how well we utilize our personal gifts, it behooves us investigate the gifts and their function.

Is there a difference between skills and gifts? Are talents the same as spiritual gifts? I'm a carpenter, What is my spiritual gift? I am a salesman, What is my spiritual gift? I have the Gift of Helps, How can I use my gift? Is there a longer list of spiritual gifts? How about sales, marketing, laborer, truck driver, mechanic, manager, nurse, cook, dishwasher, engineer, lawyers, electrician, plumber, etc... where do those fit in?

We will explore the spiritual gifts and their functions in our study in our next lesson in pursuit of effective stewardship. Every believer has at least one Spiritual gift and his or her life is designed for an effective function of the gifting, so each believer needs to understand his or hers and understand how to become effective stewards of their gifts. We will also explore the directive will of God in His manipulation of circumstances for us to exercise our gifts. He is directing our activities through circumstances; we need to recognize that direction and respond to it properly as good stewards.

But we are also stewards of our possessions....

3. We Are Stewards of Our Possessions:

Job 1:21 says:

"...naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

All that we have belongs to God. We, as His stewards, have been appointed to manage those things for Him. The bond slave did not own property but managed the property of another. We are stewards of the Kingdom of God. All we have is His. Our stewardship will be evaluated at the judgment seat of Christ, and we will be awarded the Crown of Joy based on our stewardship.

Israel had a different role and relationship with God than we do in the Church age. They were His chosen people for that time, and He had a material covenant with them and required a tithe from them. But in this Church Age we are His bond slaves and we own no property of our own. Don't be fooled by the fact that the deed to your property may be in your name and the vehicle titles list you as the owner, or that it is your name that appears on your checking account. It doesn't belong to you - it belongs to God and He has appointed you as its manager.

You don't owe God a tithe – a tenth. Everything in your possession is His and you are accountable for how you manage it along with your time and abilities and you will receive a Crown of Joy at the Judgment Seat of Christ that will be in proportion to your development of Faithful Stewardship. We will investigate it farther in the studies ahead of us.

Certainly a part of the proper stewardship of our possessions relates to our channeling part of the possessions we manage through the church because it is the structure through which we are to become equipped for ministry, and the church is designed to provide a structure for the ministry of the saints. And, while we have been redeemed from the Law, the principle of the tithe predates the Law which was received by Moses many years after Abraham exhibited the principle of tithing (Genesis 14). So, our tithe to the church is simply a means of channeling some of God's assets we have been given to manage into the structured organization He has established for equipping the saints for the work of ministry.

But let us not be confused, as bond slaves we are stewards of the Kingdom of God and His righteousness - our time, ability, and possessions all belong to Him and are entrusted to us to manage for the Kingdom. The Bible identifies us as a generation of priests and instructs us in the doctrine of the priesthood of the believer (I Peter 2:5, 9; Revelation 1:6; Revelation 5:10). As such, a primary function of our stewardship involves our own welfare and that of our dependents with the material things God provides.

I Timothy 5:18 says, *“For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward.”* However, it is obvious that if the ox eats all the corn and leaves nothing for its owner, it may be time to replace the ox. All that we have belongs to God, we manage it for his Kingdom and according to His righteousness-His plan-for our personal ministry. From a stay at home mom, to a mechanic, a plumber, a sales person, a laborer, or the CEO of a corporation our mission field becomes visible as we understand our gifting and become sensitive to God's direction through His manipulations or permissiveness of our circumstances – through His directive will, His permissive will, or His over ruling will we are to live out our the ministry God has designed for our lives and the degree of joy we experience and the crown of Joy we receive is in degree of compliance we exhibit to His will.

Conclusion:

The Crown of Joy is based on our Stewardship. We own nothing! We are stewards, managers - bond slaves of the Lord Jesus Christ. Our stewardship is three-fold: time, ability, and possessions How are we doing?

Next time we will examine how this relates to us through our gifting and the circumstances God orchestrates in our lives in which we will be held accountable at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

But it begins at Salvation:

- *For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God...*
- *The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life...*
- *With the heart man believes unto righteousness...*
- *But with the mouth confession is made unto salvation...*
- *For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved!*

*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God,
that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God,
which is your reasonable service.*

(Romans 12:1)