

Balanced and Blessed: 2. Reading the Fine Print
1 Chronicles 29:10-14
November 13, 2016
Pastor Steve Richards

A few summers ago, Dick took me fishing on Lake Michigan. I'd rarely ever been fishing and had never been on Lake Michigan, and what I remember Dick telling me is that if I began feeling seasick, I should keep my eye on the horizon. As long as I kept my focus there I would be okay. The only problem was the day we went fishing it was cloudy and foggy and impossible to see where the water stopped and the sky began and sure enough, I reached a point where I felt bad enough that going over the edge of the boat seemed an inviting alternative to being in the boat. It was a moment of extreme gratitude when he decided to bring me back to shore. This is a series in which we are looking at the importance of being balanced and blessed. Being in a place where the different elements of our lives are in the correct proportions to enjoy happiness. Last week, we looked at the three laws of balance. The first is having a Reference Point- like the horizon when you're in a boat. To balance something you need a proper reference point. At the end of last week's message, I offered the proper reference point for our personal finances. We need to know where the money goes. And throughout the week, many of you told me "Pastor Steve, I'm keeping track." And to keep track, we need a system. In our home we use Quicken. You may have another system, but we all need one. It's a reference point.

The second law of balance is making constant corrections. My hand is making constant correction as I keep my eye on the reference point at the top of the pole. And the third law is having a clear objective. That day on Lake Michigan, it was staying in the boat. For a gymnast, it's staying on the balance beam. It's staying on the log to cross the stream. It's keeping the pole vertical. We've got to know what we want to accomplish.

This morning, I want us to consider our objective when it comes to money. What's the one thing you are trying to accomplish with your money? Maybe it's to provide for you family – and that's great, but that alone is not enough to stay balanced. You could go crazy providing everything your family wants and not have room for anything else. That's not balance. Or maybe your objective is to make all the money you can – and that's important, but it's only part of balance. If that's your only focus, you will miss out on other things. That's not balance. You could make a lot of money and not manage it well. Your relationships could be a mess. Or maybe your objective is to save as much as possible. You're all about saving, saving, saving – and chances are you're not that fun to live with! Saving is part of being balanced but only one part of balance. You could master saving but earning is an issue or giving is hard for you – and because you're all about saving, your family has to beg for everything. Or maybe your objective is to spend – maybe that's your passion. Who couldn't use a little retail therapy! You walk into Home Depot for a light bulb and \$200 later you are pushing a cart full of stuff to the car. You know how to spend, but that's not balance.

When we turn to scripture, we learn there is one thing that should drive us. One thing that should be true north on our compass of life. What is the clearest objective for my finances, my lifestyle, my business? There is one thing. When we find this one thing, it's liberating. It might feel threatening at first, but it is a good thing. Remember God doesn't want from you, God wants for you. In the book of 1 Chronicles we find a story about David. He lived 1000 BC, but what he found still works 3000 years later. David was the king of Israel. He's at a place in his life where all of his enemies have been defeated, all of the battles won, and Israel is at peace and prosperity. The nation of Israel is the envy of all the other nations around them. Even today this is remembered as the moment when Israel was at its greatest.

One day, David is all alone. He looks out from the palace, and it occurs to him: here I am living in this incredible palace in this incredible kingdom and God is still living in a tent. What he sees from his window is the Tabernacle. It was this giant tent that contained the Holy of Holies where the Ark of the Covenant was located. The Ark of the Covenant was a big box inlaid with gold that contained the commandments that Moses brought down the mountain. In the days, when the people of Israel were nomads, they carried the ark of covenant everywhere they went and at night, they put up the tent where the Ark of the Covenant was kept. This was the Tabernacle. When the people built the city of Jerusalem, the Tabernacle remained the place where the Ark of the Covenant was kept. But now David is saying it's time God had something more than a tent. David wants to build a Temple, and he starts making plans, but then God says, "David, this is a great idea, but you can't build it. I can't let you do it. The problem is you have too much blood on your hands. You have done some things in your past that I think disqualify you from building my Temple." To his credit, David didn't say, "That's not fair! You put me in this role. I never asked to be king. Look at all I've done for you." Instead, David says, "I'll let my son, Solomon, build the Temple, but I'm so passionate about this that I will get the architects and work on the building design and raise all the money so when Solomon is the king, everything will be ready." So that's what David did. He went into the nation's treasury and set aside money for this – and then he also went into his own personal storeroom and the Bible tells us he put aside hundreds of tons of gold and silver. In today's dollars, it is estimated that David's contribution was nearly a billion dollars. Then David brought together all of the major families of Israel and said, we are going to fund the construction of a house for our God. Most of you will never live to see its construction, but we are going to fund it. And the people got excited, and they gave. They gave wholeheartedly, not because they had to, but because they were doing something that had never been done before. And then David offers a prayer in which we learn how David understood his wealth and God's view of money. He gives us the one thing – the clear objective that three thousand years later is the clear objective that will make us balanced and blessed.

We are in 1 Chronicles 29:10. **Praise be to you, LORD, the God of our father Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Yours, LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor...** Whose? Remember, David is the king. It's not about David, it's God. God, this is all about you. Everything in life is ultimately about you. **for everything in heaven and earth is yours.** Everything! All the stuff we are setting aside to build your Temple is yours in the first place. **Yours, LORD, is the kingdom, you are exalted as head over all.** It all belongs to God. **Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things.** Not only does everything belong to God but it comes – wealth and honor – come from God. **In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all.** Anyone who accomplishes anything in life is because God gave the strength and the ability to do so. We don't accomplish anything by ourselves. Who gave you life? Who gave you strength and ability? Do you know anyone who got to the top of the company – anyone who accomplished great things? It's God who gave them the ability.

Not only does everything belong to God and come from God. Everything is provided by God: strength, honor, ability, talent, opportunity, creativity, determination. All those things that help us get to where we are in life. God has provided. **But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this?** We are thrilled with the privilege to give. **Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand.** If everything belongs to God and comes from God and is distributed by God, then what is the one thing that should drive all our financial decisions? Honor God. Honor God. Honor God... with everything.

When Amanda and I got married, we decided to tithe, or rather if you remember how I've told this story, Amanda decided. We were married, and I asked her how much we should give and she said, "We tithe." And remembering what the pastor who married us told me would be the key to a long marriage, I said, "Yes, dear." So every time we got a dollar, we gave God ten cents. Every time we got \$100, we gave God \$10, and when we got to \$10,000, I went "whoa" – that's a lot of money! And you know why I hesitated, because I thought, "that's my money." Here's the problem with tithing. If God gets 10%, then the other 90% is mine, and I can do anything I want with it. But there's nothing in the Bible that teaches that. God doesn't want your money. God wants your heart, but God knows our heart will follow our money. We are to honor God with all of it!

So, I've mentioned the car. You know about my car? A few months ago, I told the story how Amanda gave it to me. It was a gift. You might debate whether I deserved it, but she seemed to think so. Let's say you came up to me and asked to borrow it (remember this is a hypothetical example). You asked to borrow it and I say, sure! So I give you the key and you drive off. What percentage of my car do you think I'd want you to take care of? Just 90%? If you come back and the top is missing – you say, it's a convertible so it's not a problem. I took care of the rest of it. I took care of 90% of it! No, I'm expecting you to take care of ALL of it! I'm expecting you to honor the fact that I let you use my car, and how you treat my car says something about how you feel about me. That's how God feels. To stay balanced is to learn how to honor God with everything.

How do I honor God with everything? We hesitate because we're afraid if we let God, God will take everything. If God wanted everything, God doesn't have to wait for you to surrender it. God doesn't want your money. God doesn't want your money to take you. God doesn't want something from you. God wants something for you. And when we get to the point where we honor God with everything, that's freedom. More we hang on, the more stressed out we get. So, how do I honor God – where do I start? We start with this prayer: *Lord, show me how to honor you with everything I have. Show me how to honor you with everything I have.* If you let God, God will show you. Some of you – it's to give more; others, it's to save more; others it's to spend less. So my challenge to you this week is to ask God: How can I honor you?

You have to be willing to take what you have and open your hand. Most of us when it comes to God and money, it is – (clenched hand) here God if you can get a dollar away from me, you can have it. Have you ever opened your hand and said, God it's all yours. God doesn't want your money, but your heart. God, show me...

Last summer, I turned 60 years old. I'm not a young man anymore. The older we get, the less opportunity we have. Some of us have more yesterdays than tomorrows. One day, my time will be up and other people will take what I've kept – will they honor God with it? Will they know that's what I did with everything? This week, let's pray the prayer – God, show me. Show me how to honor you with everything.

Grow, Pray, Study for Week of November 13, 2016

Weekly Prayer: Lord God, you have poured blessing upon blessing into our lives. The air that we breathe and the breath that we take are reminders of your life-giving presence. Help us to live lives where your Spirit is the guiding force within us. Draw us all closer together. Soften our hearts and help us to be humble, caring, loving servants. Give us the courage and resolve to trust you in spite of everything else. Amen.

Monday, November 14

Scripture: Psalm 112:1-9

Praise the LORD! Those who honor the LORD, who adore God's commandments, are truly happy! Their descendants will be strong throughout the land. The offspring of those who do right will be blessed; wealth and riches will be in their houses. Their righteousness stands forever. They shine in the dark for others who do right. They are merciful, compassionate, and righteous. Those who lend generously are good people— as are those who conduct their affairs with justice. Yes, these sorts of people will never be shaken; the righteous will be remembered forever! They won't be frightened at bad news. Their hearts are steady, trusting in the LORD. Their hearts are firm; they aren't afraid. In the end, they will witness their enemies' defeat. They give freely to those in need. Their righteousness stands forever. Their strength increases gloriously.

Observation: The psalmist said that to honor the Lord means being gracious, compassionate, and justice seeking people, freely giving of ourselves. Fear is one obstacle that can block us from being generous and compassionate. Those who honor the Lord, however, will have no fear of bad news. Their hearts are steadfast, trusting in the Lord. Their hearts are secure. What a privilege to live free from fear's debilitating effects!

Application: We have the testimony of millions of people who've served God through the centuries, and who testify that that kind of life is a gift. As you accept God's love, and reflect that love with gratitude by serving others, your life takes on purpose and meaning. You find fulfillment. When have you had the joy of sensing God blessing someone else through you?

Prayer: Lord God, I want my life to honor you. Fill me with your light, and let it shine through me in a generous, compassionate spirit that trusts you and is free from fear. Amen.

Tuesday, November 15

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 5:8-20

If you witness the poor being oppressed or the violation of what is just and right in some territory, don't be surprised because a high official watches over another, and yet others stand over them. But the land's yield should be for everyone if the field is cultivated. The money lover isn't satisfied with money; neither is the lover of wealth satisfied with income. This too is pointless. When good things flow, so do those who consume them. But what do owners benefit from such goods, except to feast their eyes on them? Sweet is the worker's sleep, whether there's a lot or little to eat; but the excess of the wealthy won't let them sleep. I have seen a sickening tragedy under the sun: people hoard their wealth to their own detriment. Then that wealth is lost in a bad business venture so that when they have children, they are left with nothing. Just as they came from their mother's womb naked, naked they'll return, ending up just like they started. All their hard work produces nothing—nothing they can take with them. This too is a sickening tragedy: they must pass on just as they arrived. What then do they gain from working so hard for wind? What's more, they constantly eat in darkness, with much aggravation, grief, and anger. This is the one good thing I've seen: it's appropriate for people to eat, drink, and find enjoyment in all their hard work under the sun during the brief lifetime that God gives them because that's their lot in life. Also, whenever God gives people wealth and riches and enables them to enjoy it, to accept their place in the world and to find pleasure in their hard work—all this is God's gift. Indeed, people shouldn't brood too much over the days of their lives because God gives an answer in their hearts' joy.

Observation: The writer of Ecclesiastes observed human life closely and carefully. Verse 10 noted the painful irony that “those who love wealth are never satisfied with their income.” Verses 15-16 stated more poetically the same truth as the more prosaic English phrase “you can’t take it with you.” Perhaps most important, true joy and satisfaction in life come as God’s gift to us (verses 19-20).

Application: Ecclesiastes observed pointedly that “the abundance of the rich permits them no sleep” (verse 12). Have you ever had a sense that something you owned (or wanted to own) was taking over your life? What has helped you to avoid being owned by the things you own?

Prayer: Lord God, you have given me the gift of this Tuesday. Accept my thanks and praise, and go through this day with me, filling every moment of it with your steadfast love. Amen.

Wednesday, November 16

Scripture: Matthew 19:16-30

A man approached him and said, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to have eternal life?" Jesus said, "Why do you ask me about what is good? There's only one who is good. If you want to enter eternal life, keep the commandments." The man said, "Which ones?" Then Jesus said, "Don't commit murder. Don't commit adultery. Don't steal. Don't give false testimony. Honor your father and mother, and love your neighbor as you love yourself." The young man replied, "I've kept all these. What am I still missing?" Jesus said, "If you want to be complete, go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor. Then you will have treasure in heaven. And come follow me." But when the young man heard this, he went away saddened, because he had many possessions.

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "I assure you that it will be very hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. In fact, it's easier for a camel to squeeze through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter God's kingdom." When his disciples heard this, they were stunned. "Then who can be saved?" they asked. Jesus looked at them carefully and said, "It's impossible for human beings. But all things are possible for God." Then Peter replied, "Look, we've left everything and followed you. What will we have?" Jesus said to them, "I assure you who have followed me that, when everything is made new, when the Human One sits on his magnificent throne, you also will sit on twelve thrones overseeing the twelve tribes of Israel. And all who have left houses, brothers, sisters, father, mother, children, or farms because of my name will receive one hundred times more and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last. And many who are last will be first.

Observation: Jesus called this young man to be brave enough to reset his priorities. He wasn't able to do it. He went away sad, which suggests that he wanted to follow Jesus. He didn't do it, which showed that he wanted his earthly possessions even more. Like many people then (and now), Jesus' disciples thought earthly riches showed God's approval of a person. When Jesus said, "It is hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven," he shocked them. Very hard, but not impossible: "with God, all things are possible" (verse 26).

Application: This story asks a question many of us would rather not wrestle with: "Which of my possessions, if any, are so precious to me that, if I had to, I'd choose them over Jesus?" Courageously wrestling through that question can set you free! How will you strengthen your trust in God, and let God guide you in accurately valuing God's gift of eternal life, and faithfully using your earthly possessions for God's purposes?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you offer me heaven's riches. Give me a heart that can accurately assess the treasure of your kingdom, and value it properly against all other claims. Amen.

Thursday, November 17

Scripture: Luke 12:13-21

Someone from the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." Jesus said to him, "Man, who appointed me as judge or referee between you and your brother?" Then Jesus said to them, "Watch out! Guard yourself against all kinds of greed. After all, one's life isn't determined by one's possessions, even when someone is very wealthy." Then he told them a parable: "A certain rich man's land produced a bountiful crop. He said to himself, What will I do? I have no place to store my harvest! Then he thought, Here's what I'll do. I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. That's where I'll store all my grain and goods. I'll say to myself, You have stored up plenty of goods, enough for several years. Take it easy! Eat, drink, and enjoy yourself. But God said to him, 'Fool, tonight you will die. Now who will get the things you have prepared for yourself?' This is the way it will be for those who hoard things for themselves and aren't rich toward God."

Observation: Jesus stated a basic principle of his kingdom in verse 15: "life does not consist in an abundance of possessions." He followed up with a parable. It was a simple story – a rich man, reaping a large crop, thought of nothing but how to keep it all, adding it to his already overflowing supply. Absorbed with earthly wealth, he forgot that, when life ended, none of it would be of any use to him. Jesus knew better, and urged his hearers to become "rich toward God."

Application: Imagine that the farmer in this parable (or someone like him today) said to you, "My life seems kind of hollow and empty, in spite of all of the wealth I've built up. I'd like to find greater fulfillment—what do you think I should do?" How would you answer? What might a person do to become "rich toward God"?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, whenever my life ends, I want my greatest treasure to be stored up with you, not left behind for an auctioneer to dispose of. Guide me into the kind of life that is rich toward you. Amen.

Friday, November 18

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

What I mean is this: the one who sows a small number of seeds will also reap a small crop, and the one who sows a generous amount of seeds will also reap a generous crop. Everyone should give whatever they have decided in their heart. They shouldn't give with hesitation or because of pressure. God loves a cheerful giver. God has the power to provide you with more than enough of every kind of grace. That way, you will have everything you need always and in everything to provide more than enough for every kind of good work. As it is written, He scattered everywhere; he gave to the needy; his righteousness remains forever. The one who supplies seed for planting and bread for eating will supply and multiply your seed and will increase your crop, which is righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous in every way. Such generosity produces thanksgiving to God through us. Your ministry of this service to God's people isn't only fully meeting their needs but it is also multiplying in many expressions of thanksgiving to God. They will give honor to God for your obedience to your confession of Christ's gospel. They will do this because this service provides evidence of your obedience, and because of your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone. They will

also pray for you, and they will care deeply for you because of the outstanding grace that God has given to you. Thank God for his gift that words can't describe!

Observation: Paul, a traveling Christian preacher who owned, as far as we know, no real estate, no life insurance and no retirement plan, wrote those words! That does not mean it is wrong to want nice things or to have nice things. It does challenge us to rethink who the true owner is and what it means to be the manager.

Application: Since today is Friday, you're not likely to be in a setting where someone will pass an offering plate. In what ways can you find or create an opportunity to show a generous spirit today? What is one thing you can identify that shows God's great generosity toward you? How can focusing on God's generosity to you help you be more grateful and generous toward others?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, open my eyes to the ways you have blessed my life. May my heart sing as, out of your abundance, I seek to be your physical presence to the people around me. Amen.

Saturday, November 19

Scripture: John 13:3-17

Jesus knew the Father had given everything into his hands and that he had come from God and was returning to God. So he got up from the table and took off his robes. Picking up a linen towel, he tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a washbasin and began to wash the disciples' feet, drying them with the towel he was wearing. When Jesus came to Simon Peter, Peter said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus replied, "You don't understand what I'm doing now, but you will understand later." "No!" Peter said. "You will never wash my feet!" Jesus replied, "Unless I wash you, you won't have a place with me." Simon Peter said, "Lord, not only my feet but also my hands and my head!" Jesus responded, "Those who have bathed need only to have their feet washed, because they are completely clean. You disciples are clean, but not every one of you." He knew who would betray him. That's why he said, "Not every one of you is clean." After he washed the disciples' feet, he put on his robes and returned to his place at the table. He said to them, "Do you know what I've done for you? You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and you speak correctly, because I am. If I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you too must wash each other's feet. I have given you an example: Just as I have done, you also must do. I assure you, servants aren't greater than their master, nor are those who are sent greater than the one who sent them. Since you know these things, you will be happy if you do them.

Observation: What word or phrase speaks to you from this passage? On the night before he was crucified, Jesus gathered with his disciples and washed their feet. It was a shocking act; washing feet was slaves' work. Then Jesus told the disciples they were right to call him "Teacher" or "Lord." His lesson for them (and us) was that when he acted as a servant, he did it, not to abdicate leadership, but to redefine our ideas of glory and power. His life was guided by God's standards, not earthly ones.

Application: "Washing feet" was a practical act in a dusty land where people wore sandals. What are some practical ways you can serve another person that will tangibly make their life better? Who is God nudging you to bless with a concrete act of service?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, what an example of humility you gave us! Soften my heart, and make me willing to take up the towel as you did, to set my desires aside for the g