

## Living Out Your Faith in Everyday Life - Gen 12:2

Gen 12:2 is one of the most critical verses in all of the Bible. It lays down the terms and conditions upon which God establishes his covenant relationship with each of us.

“I will make you a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.” Memorize this verse. God has blessed us to be a blessing.

Why is this verse so important? It is the very first words God spoke to Abraham. To me, it is sort of a preamble laying down God’s vision for our covenant relationship with Him. In other words, “God has blessed us to be a blessing” is the common purpose that is shared by all of God’s people. If you ever wonder what your purpose in life might be, here it is in one verse! God has blessed you with all you have and all you are so you can be a blessing to Him and to others.

Many people may disagree with this statement. They may believe all successes or achievements are simply self-made. To a certain degree there is some validity in this opinion. We know the lazy will never succeed. It takes work and effort to develop the skills and knowledge necessary for success. Malcolm Gladwell, author of the book “Outliers,” researched and identified what he thought were the common traits unique to all successful people from Bill Gates to the Beatles. What he found in each and every case of those who reached the pinnacle of their profession, was the successful people spent no less than 10,000 hours honing their skill and knowledge. This is proof of the old adage: “Luck favors the prepared.”

But this is not all. Gladwell also discovered there are other contributing factors totally beyond the control of the successful, enabling them to prosper: the right circumstances, significant relationships, perfect timing. Without the good fortune of these particular events, chances are these individuals would never have become as successful.

Gladwell’s point is no matter how successful we are, we did not do it alone. In a different way, God said the same thing thousands of years ago. DEUT 8:17 *“You may say to yourself, ‘My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me. But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth.’”*

Think for a moment...where exactly do you think your gifts and abilities come from? Simply genetics? Purely hard work? If it’s genetics why can’t anyone in Celine Dion’s family sing like her? If it is hard work, then every basketball

player, through tremendous and equal effort, should be able to play like Michael Jordan.

No, what we have, something we all acknowledge, is they have a special gift no number of genes or effort can fully duplicate.

Thus, our role in the game of life is described in this manner, "We are not the sole creators of anything. We are procreators. We take what God gives us, our gifts, talents, resources, and we use them to make something useful, beneficial, and a blessing to others." Yes, only God can create the apple, but he has given the great ability to make a mean apple pie!

I refer to all we enjoy and benefit from in life, that which comes either directly or indirectly from God - our time, talent, treasures, relationships, you name it, - as our wealth.

If I were to ask each of you to grade yourself, on a scale of 1-10, on how effective you are in using all of your wealth in one way or another to be a blessing to others, what kind of grade would you give? Maybe pretty low if we are honest with ourselves. Is it because we are selfish, lack desire, or that we are just merely negligent? To some degree this is true. But, I think there is a huge contributing factor to our underperformance, and it is our lack of innovation and creativity when it comes to utilizing our wealth as a blessing to others.

Here is an example of what I mean. In our gospel lesson for today, the Parable of the Shrewd Steward, it appears Jesus applauds the steward for his unethical behavior. After all, the steward was cooking the books to make himself look good to potential new employers. This is what I thought throughout most of my pastoral ministry and so I never preached on this lesson for fifteen years. But one day, I had an AH-AH moment when I read v. 8." *For the people of the world are shrewder in dealing with their own kind than are the children of the light.*"

Let me paraphrase that for you: *"The people of this world are far more creative, innovative, and resourceful in accomplishing their goals and purposes than are God's children in accomplishing His."*

Can you hear Jesus lament in these words? Why is it, he is asking, when it comes to getting what we want in life we become like geniuses in finding ways to accomplish our goals: creative financing, networking, out-of-the-box thinking. By hook or by crook we will find a way to get there! But when it comes to God's purposes we're suddenly unimaginative, rudimentary, and just plain trivial.

Let's challenge ourselves with some creative thinking as to how you and I can begin to live outside the box when it comes to using our wealth to be a blessing to God and others. Let's begin to evaluate our resources step-by-step as to how we might creatively employ them for the Glory of God:

## OUR FINANCES

Going back to Abraham, giving monetarily has always been essential for the support of God's work and assisting our neighbors. As we see during Jesus' time, it was no different. He and the disciples benefited from the financial support of a generous group of wealthy women.

Everything you see and enjoy at any church is the direct result of your financial support. Your financial support enables missionaries and charitable agencies around the world to go and do things you and I could never do on our own in nations around the world. Through our financial support we can bring great blessings to many places where you and I will never be able to go.

Do you know the vast majority of financial support comes to churches and agencies through cash gifts alone! What many of us do not realize is we are sitting on a vast store of untapped wealth. It is estimated that our oldest generation is sitting upon a trillion dollars of assets, made up of stocks, retirement plans, real estate, and business interests. Most is going to be transferred to the next generation through parent's estates. I am sure most of you realize the vast majority of your financial wealth is invested in these types of assets.

How many of you have thought about how you can use the assets God blessed you with to be a blessing to others? Often, when I share this with people, the one questions I get is, "how can we use these assets as a blessing to others when the vast majority of my assets are needed to provide for my retirement or must remain liquid?"

Let me answer this question with a question: How many of you have made a charitable bequest in your will or trust to your church or favorite charity in thanksgiving for what God has provided you? In other words, have you ever thought about tithing on your estate? Do you know you can designate a percentage of your estate's value to charity? You can also designate your retirement account for charity. What many people don't realize about most retirement accounts is that if you pass them to your family, all those deferred taxes you never paid become due. Sometimes this tax can reach as high as 70% of the entire value. But if you bequest these assets to your church or

charity, 100% is given without any deferred taxes being due. This can multiply the blessing of your giving many times over.

I propose we can do far more than we ever thought possible through utilizing all of our financial resources to bless others, not just our cash.

## OUR POSSESSIONS

The Martha in our lesson is the same Martha who is related to Mary and Lazarus. The gospels teach us Jesus made at least three visits to Martha's home. One trip is raising his beloved friend Lazarus from the grave, the other two visits seem to be nothing more than enjoying friendship and hospitality. Jesus simply went to relax and renew himself. These friends care for him. They weren't takers, but life-givers who gave Jesus the key essentials to his personal well-being. Every day they offered Jesus ordinary friendship and hospitality.

We all need people like this in our lives. The question is can we be this kind of person for others? One way is to be like Martha and open our homes to friends and neighbors longing for a place to connect and enjoy life-giving hospitality. Many of you already do this, but you never think of it as ministry. It is ministry because it brings a great blessing to those you serve.

What other possessions do we have that can bring blessing? One of my favorite stories is about a Christian businessman who sold his company, enabling him to buy the boat of his dreams, a 75-foot yacht. Upon buying the boat he is suddenly overcome with what I call the *Christian* "buyers' blues." We all know "buyers' blues." They are the pure regret for something we bought. But this is a little different and stems more from guilt. The guilt that maybe I was too selfish by spending so much on myself.

The Christian businessman cannot shake this feeling and starts to wonder if maybe the Holy Spirit is telling him something. Not knowing whether it is him or the Holy Spirit creating these guilty feelings, he starts to pray about it. Days passed until one night, while praying, he gets this impression in his mind, "Use it for my glory ... Use it for my glory..."

Thinking that maybe God is asking him to use it to serve others, he decides to call the local YMCA. The next day he calls and speaks with the director, and humbly asks, "Would you ever have any need of a large boat in to take the inner-city children on the ocean to explore God's wonderful creation?" To his surprise, the Director enthusiastically replies, "We do!"

This is living out our faith with our possessions in everyday life.

## SKILLS & TALENTS

God specifically gifted craftsmen for the purpose of building his tabernacle. Churches, ministries, and charitable organizations prosper and thrive today not solely because of your financial contributions, but also because of your willingness to share your professional skills and talents.

What I want you to see and understand is God fully recognizes your skills and talents, no matter how simple you may think they are, are invaluable to him and are always capable of bringing blessing and benefit to Him and others, in both simple and profound ways.

So the question we need to ask is, “Lord can You show me how I can use my training, my expertise, my abilities to be of service to you?”

## HOBBIES

When David was growing up, I wonder how many times he asked “What good are all these harp lessons?” As we can see in God’s purposes, nothing is ever wasted. Nothing is ever without a redeeming purpose.

Even motorcycles.

A pastor friend I know decided for his mid-life crisis he was going to buy a Harley motorcycle! The big cruiser kind of Harley Davidson. After he bought it he began to realize that a lot of the members of his church, as well as non-church-going friends had motorcycles. So he formed a bike club so his non-church-going friends might meet his church-going friends and realize that we Christians are not a bunch of odd ducks. We can be genuinely nice people who value others.

My friend knew there were many people unfamiliar with the church and they will probably never walk through the front door on a Sunday morning. He decided to create a back door through which they could experience the grace and fellowship of God’s people. His hope was it might eventually lead them to the front door because they experienced the safety and friendliness of the church.

What can you use to befriend a non-church-friendly world to help them see and have a taste of a gracious God?

Do you remember the experience of Jesus on Palm Sunday? Jesus tells the disciples to go into town before Him. The disciples are told they would find a colt and were to tell the owner Jesus had need of it. The owner gives the colt to the disciples.

Have you ever thought about what happens to the donkey when Jesus was done? It more than likely went back to the original owner. Jesus only needed it for the moment. What do you think the owner did with the donkey after Jesus returned it? Did he kill it and stuff it and put it on his mantle with a sign that said, "Jesus rode here." No, the donkey went back to doing what it always did; carrying wood, and maybe even giving his kids a ride.

Each of us has some things in our life we might consider useless or as dumb as a donkey. But, whether we think it has great value is not the point. God can use all of our offerings for His glory.

Thus, it is simply our purpose to be stewards of our wealth, whatever it is: 1. to provide for our families, 2. to enjoy (both are stated purposes for wealth in the Bible) and, 3. always making them available for God to use as He has need. We do this by holding them loosely in our hands and being ready for the day when God comes calling to say, "I have need of your donkey, your boat, your house, your motorcycle, or whatever might be in the portfolio of your wealth."

So let us remember, even though God owns the whole world and all that is in it, he has entrusted to us the privilege of being able to use our wealth for our needs, as well as stewarding it for His purposes. But, what he wants to know from us is, are we willing to let him use it? If we do, He gives us a wonderful promise at the end of our passage ...

God says, *"Use your worldly wealth to make friends for yourself so that when it is gone you will be welcome into an eternal dwelling."*