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Genesis 1:26-28

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“Stewardship Basics” – probably the most scintillating, enthralling sermon series topic ever, right, Pastor Lew? Wrong.

There is nothing thrilling or exciting about “Stewardship Basics,” I’ll admit. And yet I’ll go so far as to say this. If you don’t get the basics of stewardship, you really don’t get how to live as a Christian.

I’m not saying that you’re not going to get to heaven if you don’t understand the basics of stewardship. But when it comes to our day-to-day Christian living – when it comes to your decision-by-decision discipleship lived out there in God’s real world -- stewardship basics are essential. They’re invaluable. Stewardship basics are mission-critical for Christians like us.

So here we go. We begin today on page 1 of the Bible. You can’t get more basic than that. Next week, Pastor Lew will cover page 2 of the Bible; and then, two weeks from today, Pastor Lineberger will cover the rest of the entire Bible and wrap it all up in a neat little bow.

But we begin today in the beginning. “God created the heavens and the earth.” Page 1 tells us that in six days, God – by his powerful Word – created, out of nothing, everything that exists. The sun, moon, stars, dry land, waters, – and yes, the porcupines, porpoises, pelicans, pine trees, planets; and on the sixth day, people, too.

We focus today on people. Day 6: God decides to make the first humans, verse 26 says, differently than he did anything else in all creation. He makes mankind, male and female, in his own image, in the image of God. So humans are the

crown of creation, the pinnacle of all that God created. Porcupines aren't running around in the image of God. Pelicans aren't flying around in God's likeness. But we are. People are made in God's image.

See, God creates this whole big, beautiful world; but then he doesn't walk away, and leave it to just keep spinning on its own. God plans, from the beginning, to keep interacting and intervening, to participate actively in his creation. But he decides, in his infinite wisdom, that he's going to utilize humanity to help make that happen. God creates humans – and humans alone -- in his image, so they can be God's managers of creation. Humans are to be the main instrument of God's interaction with this perfect new world that he has spoken into existence.

God says, "Let them (the humans) have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." God blesses the first humans, and tells them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth, and subdue it and have dominion over everything."

Humans, bearing the image of God, are to take care of God's creation, oversee it, administer all that God has made. God remains the owner, and we are the day-to-day managers of his creation.

Another word for manager? Steward. One of the basic, critical principles of Christian living is that we were created to be God's stewards. We humans were created with this high, lofty purpose and function. We were created to be caretakers of the rest of God's creation. To use it all for good. To make use of everything that's a part of this world and this life in ways that carry out God's will and God's desires.

Stewardship basics from page 1? God, the Creator, is the owner of everything in this world. But you and I are created to be God's stewards, and we manage the things of this world on his behalf.

So what does page 1 have to do with our everyday lives as Christians? I said earlier that if you don't get the basics of stewardship, you really don't get how to live as a Christian. See, every part of our everyday life is an opportunity to be a good steward, or a lousy one. Every interaction you have with any part of God's created world is a chance for you to be a good, faithful manager of the things God has put into your hands, or to be a lazy, unfaithful, self-centered manager.

Being a good steward for the Lord is not easy. Next week Pastor Lew is going to talk about the first stewardship crisis ever, from page 2 of the Bible, the story of Adam and Eve's fall into sin. But we wrestle with our own sinful urges every day, don't we? Human nature, since the fall, is self-centered, not God-centered. We worry more about our needs and our desires than we do about God's will. Sin causes us to hang on tightly to what we think are our possessions and our belongings, forgetting that God is the owner of everything and that we were created to be his stewards with everything.

If we don't get these stewardship basics from page 1, life gets out of whack real quickly. Even for Christians. We may believe in Jesus. We may confess our sins. We may receive his forgiveness, and be saved. We may die and go to heaven because of what Jesus did for us. But the kind of life God wants us to live here on earth in the meantime may end up being shallow, may end up off-kilter, may very well miss out on a huge part of its purpose and function.

You and I were created in God's image. We were created to be managers, stewards, of our own little sections of God's

awesome creation. So God is this day giving you a certain amount of time to spend, people to care for, money to utilize, decisions to make, talents to employ, nature to enjoy, ministry work to do. Whatever you do today, you can function as a faithful Christian steward, understanding and enjoying your high and lofty purpose in life as God's caretaker of all that's around you. Or, you can function as a believer in Christ who has no real idea of how God wants you to live.

Do you see what I mean? If we don't really get the basics of stewardship, we really don't get how to live as a Christian. But, thank God, his Word teaches us and reminds us that we were created to be his stewards. And Jesus, his living Word, today forgives us our sins and gives us spiritual food for the journey. Our Lord strengthens us for that daily battle against sin and self-will. And he promises us that help as, day by day, we live out what we were created to be. Created to be stewards. Amen.