

**"Stewardship as Response"**

**Scripture Passages:** 1) **Genesis 12:1-4**  
2) **Jeremiah 1:4-10**  
3) **Matthew 4:18-22**

**Stewardship as Response:** We have been talking about stewardship. We began with the notion that stewardship is our response to our true identity as God's children. Our understanding about who we are forms a significant part of our life's foundation. When we understand our identity as a child of God that shapes how we live out our lives.

Along with our identity we also find ourselves responding to God's outpouring of gifts: the gifts of grace, love, and salvation. We have reflected on a series of powerful stories where we watched as God's grace, love, and salvation were poured out. Those gifts are for us as well. Those gifts are for everyone. The question is, are we open to receiving them? If we are, then when we experience those amazing gifts we can't help but live our lives in response to them. God's grace, love, and salvation will transform us.

Stewardship is response. But what does response look like? We are going to be delving into that for the next three weeks. What does response look like in our daily lives and in our life together as a community of people? What do you think?

**Hearing God's Call:** I think Biblically our response has to do with the notion of call. So far this morning we have read the call of Abram and the call of Jeremiah. Listen to one more story of call. **Read Matthew 4:18-22.**

**Invited to Respond:** God invites us to respond to our identity as God's children, and to God's tremendous gifts of grace, love, and salvation. God does not make us respond. God does not use guilt, shame or fear to manipulate us into responding. God gives us free choice. We choose whether to respond. We choose whether to respond to the invitation. It is just like Jesus' parable about the wedding banquet. Invitations were sent but many chose not to respond.

**Who is Invited:** So who is invited to respond? Everyone is invited. All are called. Abram was seventy-five when he heard the call to leave his homeland and begin a new life. Jeremiah was a young person, not yet considered an adult. No matter our age, no matter our ethnic background, no matter our social class, no matter our political leanings, no matter our body type, no matter our work history, or educational background, we are all called. Everyone in this room is called. Everyone. Will we respond?

You may remember one of the first things I did when I came here was I put at the top of the bulletin and the top of the letter head the statement, Ministers: the people of First Presbyterian Church. Everyone is called into ministry. Everyone is called to a life of response. This was one of the slogans of the Reformation five hundred years ago, "The priesthood of all believers." This continues to be a tremendous issue in the life of Christ's Body. Will we respond to God's call? Will we choose God? God has chosen us, but will we choose God?

**What Does the Response Look Like:** So what can we expect if we choose to respond to God's invitation?

For Abram it meant heading off into the unknown, trusting in God's faithfulness along the way. He gathered his immediate family plus a few others, then left country and tradition for something completely unknown. He wasn't alone on the journey but it was breaking all new

ground.

For Jeremiah it meant confronting the injustice and the power systems of his day. Jeremiah was a lone voice in the wilderness pointing out the brokenness of his culture.

For the disciples it meant leaving jobs and family to begin a new career. The disciples were not alone in this change they had the gift of each other as they followed God's call, but their lives changed dramatically.

In each of these call situations the changes made were significant. So why would we take these kind of radical steps? Why does responding to God need to be so all encompassing? What's in it for us?

**Blessing Others Becomes a Blessing:** I think the reasons for living a life of response to God, are stated profoundly in Abram's call. God tells Abram that he will be a blessing to the world and in turn will be blessed. When we follow God, when we respond to God's grace, love, and salvation we become a blessing to the world, and as we bless others it becomes a blessing to ourselves. It is so simple and so profoundly true, but for some reason we have a hard time living it. We all know this from our own lives. We feel the most blessed when we are blessing others. Nothing particularly earth shattering about that news. However it rings powerfully true in our gut, in our heart, and in our mind. And yet we struggle living it out. Isn't that mind boggling?

**Blessing Looks Like:** So what exactly does blessing look like? I think the two primary aspects of blessing are described in the call of Jeremiah and the call of the disciples.

Jeremiah is called to be a blessing by caring for the least of these, by standing up for those in need, by being a voice for those who are voiceless. From Genesis to Revelation one of the primary ways we bless others is by caring for people in need, and by fighting injustice within our societies. We respond to God's grace, love and salvation by offering grace, love and salvation to the world. We all know the truth of this. As we care for others it blesses us.

The second way we bless others is by pointing people to God, by helping people take their spiritual health seriously, by helping people see the blessing that comes from following the way of Jesus, by encouraging people to become Disciples of Christ. Our lives are blessed as we nurture our relationship with God. We bless others as we help them draw closer to their Creator. Jesus challenged the disciples to go out and become fishers of people. Jesus calls us to the same challenge because spiritual health blesses everyone.

So we respond to God's gifts by blessing those around us. We bless people by caring for their needs and helping them nurture their relationship with God. As we bless others we bless ourselves and we bless our world. We are all called to this ministry of blessing.

**Conclusion:** Stewardship is response. Today Christ invites us to the table, to be blessed so we can be a blessing. We are all invited. We are all called. The question is will we respond? What holds us back? Why not live our lives in ways that bless the world, that address the needs of those around us and points people to the God who aches to be in relationship with us.

This way of life, this way of response is just as radical today as it was for Abram, for Jeremiah, for the Disciples. To live this way is to leave much behind. To live this way is to go against the flow of our culture. To live this way often means going a different direction than even our own families.

Abram, Jeremiah, and the Disciples chose this life of response and blessing. The reason we are here today is because generations before us have chosen the life of response and blessing. Now it is our time. Whether we are old or young or somewhere in between we are all called. We all have gifts given by God so that we can be a blessing. Will we join this cloud of witnesses? Stewardship is response. Let us choose this life of response. Amen.