

*TIM:* Good evening. We are Tim and Sarah Sandman. We joined Resurrection parish two years ago after moving to Dubuque from the state of Wyoming. When asked to speak on stewardship, we thought it would be difficult to find enough to say, but quickly learned it would be more difficult to pare it down. We realized we had to accept the request out of gratitude to God, no matter how uncomfortable it makes us.

We grew up in Geneva, Illinois but did not meet each other until after high school. Sarah attended Catholic schools all the way through college in South Bend, Indiana, whereas I attended public schools and completed college in Mt. Vernon, Iowa. After graduating 40 years ago, we were married and headed out on our journey to Wyoming for my job teaching elementary school. We didn't know a soul, and as it turned out didn't even have a place to live. This was our first lesson in trusting God. We were like so many young couples starting out, working hard to earn modest incomes, saving to buy a home and live our dreams.

I was not Catholic when we were first married. We attended Mass together each week and God began his work on our hearts. Early on, I joined the church, and we were moved by the Holy Spirit to begin to open our hearts to grow in stewardship. Upon reflection, we now realize that we are in no way the same persons we were then. God has steadily revealed over the years a deeper understanding of stewardship. First, what is a steward?

- The definition states: "... one who manages another's property, finances or other affairs."
- Stewardship is: "... careful & responsible management of something entrusted to one's care."

One steady part of our journey, however, has been a simple prayer attributed to St. Ignatius. We have prayed it all through our journey and share it with you now. It states better than any dictionary what stewardship means to us.

"Lord Jesus Christ, take all my freedom, my memory, my understanding, and my will. All that I have and cherish you have given me. I surrender it all to be guided by your will. Your love and your grace are wealth enough for me. Give me these, Lord Jesus, and I ask for nothing more. Amen."

*SARAH:* Our journey has not been easy. It is through the struggles that God has made us stronger. We are still struggling every day, and this has taught us that stewardship is an ongoing process, not something considered just once a year then forgotten as we go about our lives.

Early in our marriage, I lost both of my parents to cancer just a few years apart. Then midway through our marriage I was diagnosed with aggressive, advanced stage cancer myself. Through these experiences we reminded ourselves that none of us is guaranteed that we will live to see tomorrow. We depend on God for our next breath. Yet we become complacent in our busy lives and spiritually slothful. God can call us back gently, or he can send us a wakeup call. This was the case for us when we recently experienced a terrible car crash in which we were miraculously spared.

This brings us back to gratitude. As we speak today, our thoughts can apply not only to stewardship of our treasure, but of our time and talents as well. It is with gratitude that we

strive to be the best care takers of *all* we have been given. We are not thankful for these gifts for ourselves but thankful to God, the giver himself. Anyone can be a steward and take care of that with which they have been entrusted. But to be a good steward, we must consider *why*. If gratitude is why, then it helps us in our struggle to become better stewards and incorporate stewardship in not just the big steps but the little moments of our lives.

Remember the story from scripture in which Jesus speaks with the rich man? The man asks what he must do to inherit eternal life and then affirms that he already follows the commandments. Jesus replies that he lacks one thing and must go sell all that he has, give to the poor and come and follow him. The rich man goes away sad, as he has many possessions. Well, what we have learned in our lives is that every day we are asked like the rich man “do we live *for* our blessings, or do we live for the one that gives us all blessings?” It sounds simple, but the temptation is great. It is our human nature to remember the gifts and forget the giver. This is the challenge we face daily. We borrow a popular term and try to be more “mindful”. Being mindful helps us remember that all things are gifts, whether blessings or trials to help us to grow. Our Lord gives to us out of a pure love only He has for us. We strive to be mindful of the hand of God in all things, and to express our gratitude more consistently throughout each moment.

The gratitude that this has cultivated in our hearts overflows when we express it through sharing our blessings. And our desire to share frees us from the traps of ownership and brings us back to the path of stewardship. Everything we do or say should draw us closer to God. The action of giving then becomes an act of faith in an effort to bring glory to God.

The prayer from St. Ignatius reminds us all that we have and cherish God has given us. Scripture reminds us that to those to whom much is given, much will be required. We are humbled when we think of how much we have been given, especially our lives. Being mindful of this in the small moments of average days continues to be hard to do. Gratitude waxes and wanes as we live our lives. There are so many distractions and temptations in our world. Worry, fear and ingratitude can seep in. We forget that we are recipients of God’s blessings and begin to feel entitled and take them for granted. But God constantly calls us back to gently remind us along our journey. Saint Therese was thankful that Jesus had not allowed her to become attached to any created thing so that she could pour her strength and energy into him, the only perfect source of joy.

We believe we will have a moment like the “rich man” when our Lord Jesus asks us to give him our all. It is our prayer that our earthly practices of stewardship may help prepare us and allow us to choose him out of love without hesitation.

He has given us so much goodness and beauty in this world that there are moments when it is hard to imagine heaven will be better. In these moments, we remind ourselves, is this heaven? No . . . this is Iowa.