

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church  
Paul Gunn, Pastor

The Stewardship of Words  
Matthew 12:33-37  
November 1, 2015

## **INTRODUCTION**

I'm going to begin a short series called "Total Life Stewardship." It's pretty typical for churches, especially Southern Baptist churches, to talk about stewardship during the month of November as we prepare for a new financial year and as we're in the month of Thanksgiving.

In sermons about stewardship, we almost always hear about money, and that's part of it. We will talk about time, talent, and treasure. Now, it would be easy for us to create a little scorecard helping people determine their grades in these areas, but little scorecards can give us a false sense of security. A person could say, "Well, I'm giving. I'm tithing of my time, talent, and treasure, and, therefore, I'm okay." These false senses of security tend to help people believe that they've got a first-class ticket to heaven because they've scored well. But total life stewardship goes beyond time, talent, and treasure. It goes into all areas of life. Like a friend told me, if you tithe 10% of your income, God still expects you to be good steward of the other 90%. It's not a tax that you pay to God so that you can do whatever you want with the other 90%.

Total life stewardship goes beyond time, talent, and treasure. It really encompasses all areas of a person's life. Total life stewardship includes a person's diet. It includes a person's health and decisions that a person must make on a daily basis. It includes life goals and decisions. As believers, I want us to begin thinking in terms of total life stewardship.

Today's message is titled "The Stewardship of Words." God expects us to be good stewards with all that he's given us, and while I will preach about money in the future because the money thing is part of it, there are more fundamental areas of stewardship that I will cover first.

The format of my message this morning is a little different than my other messages. I've got one point to the message this morning because I want everybody to remember this one point.

## **TOTAL LIFE STEWARDSHIP BEGINS WITH THE STEWARDSHIP OF WORDS.**

### **EXPLANATION**

Words are the most common denominator among all of us. Almost all of our interactions with each other involve some type of words. My transactions at the store, at the restaurant, at work, my interactions with my wife, my kids, my neighbors, at school, at church...wherever I go, words are involved. We tend to speak what we think. Occasionally, a person might think one thing and say something differently, but, in all reality, that takes planning.

If I plan to say something good, even though my thoughts are not lining up with my words, that takes planning. Our default reaction is to say what we think. We're not able to plan all the time what we're about to say. So, what's in the heart, what's in the mind, comes out as words 99.9% of the time.

I believe that if we are good stewards of words then the rest of total life stewardship will line up because our words communicate what our hearts and minds are thinking.

With words, we build up. With words, we tear down, and the Bible has a whole lot to say about words. We could find quite a few messages just on the power of words and what the Bible says about words. But I've chosen this one passage in Matthew chapter 12 to read to you this morning. In this passage Jesus was having one of his common and famous confrontations with the Pharisees.

### **SCRIPTURE** Matthew 12:33-37

*“Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. <sup>34</sup> You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. <sup>35</sup> A good*

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*man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. <sup>36</sup> But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken. <sup>37</sup> For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.”*

The word justified can also mean acquitted. So, let me read it that way, “For by your words, you will be acquitted, and by your words, you will be condemned.” What Jesus says here is that our words determine our destiny. Our words have eternal consequences.

## **ILLUSTRATION**

In my travels with the Airforce, I've had to visit one particular Air Force Base many times. The rooms at this base are okay; they're not barracks. They're pretty nice rooms but nothing to write home to mom about. For those of you who've not been to a base in a long time or maybe never, when you need a room, you go to the lodging office. You go into a lobby that looks just like a lobby of a small hotel. There's somebody behind the counter that says, “May I help you” You say that you need a room, and they ask for your ID, and they ask if you're there on official business or if you're a veteran traveling, and they tell you if space is available.

The people who work in these hotel lobbies, that run these facilities, are regular civilian people just like you. They wear regular street clothes or a uniform like a hotel uniform. They're not military personnel. After my first stay at this one particular base, the woman behind the counter asked me if I would fill out a survey. I've always made it a point to give high marks on surveys unless I have a reason not to. There's really no reason for any of us to unload all of life's frustrations on an eight-question survey. We've probably all done it at some time or other, but I decided a long time ago, when I saw how surveys can have a direct impact on someone else's job, I decided to give high marks on a survey unless I had a reason not to. So, on the survey, I just wrote that the room was clean and comfortable. I gave high marks, and I just made a comment about how exceptionally friendly the office staff was. I wrote my name on the survey because I'm not too crazy about anonymous surveys. If I'm going to say something positive or negative, I'll just put my name there. I gave it to the woman and made a statement that I thought

everything was great. She said, “Sometimes people can be really mean on these surveys.”

A year or so later I went back to the base, and when I checked in, a woman behind the counter asked for my name. She pulled up my name on the computer and then she nodded and did this, “Hmm.” I didn't know what she meant by that. She gave me the key and sent me to my room. I put my keycard into the door, and the door opened. I realized that this room was a bit nicer than the previous room. I'm not real picky about this type of thing; it doesn't really matter to me. When I checked out, she asked again if I would take a survey. Again, I gave high marks, and I handwrote some nice comments. Again, I signed my name.

A year or so later, I returned. The woman pulled up my name on her computer screen, and, once again, I heard, “Hmm.” She turned away from the computer screen, and she went and talked to another staff member. They were back there chatting, and this is one of those times when I could hear my dad saying in my mind, “Son, there are times when it's best not to say anything.” So, I didn't ask if there was a problem. The woman gave me the key and, again, I wrote down some comments except this time I wrote, “Best staff ever. I've traveled to numerous bases, and this is, by far, the best lodging staff.” Let me just say, it pays to be generous with good words.

Years later, I went back to the base, and this time the family was with me. It was in the middle of the summer, and the kids were out of school. I figured by now that the computer information had cleared up. When I showed my ID, the woman looked for my reservation again. She nodded, and apparently, she spent some time reading something. Then she went and got the manager, and they stepped back into the back room and chatted. I got a room key, and I drove to the room which had its own private parking. The sign said, “Visiting General's Quarters.”

Apparently, there was some kind of code to take care of people who took care of the employees. I did not lie on any of the surveys. I merely told the truth and signed my name. I can only imagine the nasty anonymous surveys that these hard-working men and women get for things that are beyond their control. It pays to be generous with kind words.

I've got a nephew who is 19 years old. He graduated from high school just a few months ago, and he got a job replacing car and truck windshields. He is a very hard-working young man. He went to six weeks of training and drives a long way to work every day. After six weeks of training, he was sent out on his own to do the job. On Labor Day, I asked him how it was going. I asked him if people complained a lot. He said that someone complained to the company that he left fingerprints on the windshield, and he got a call about it.

## **APPLICATION**

Isn't it time that as an American society we grew up? I read an article last week that was so interesting. I just have to share it with you. There's a man named Trevor Blake who wrote a book about how to be successful in business, and he wrote this, "Being exposed to too much complaining can actually make you dumb. Research shows that exposure to 30 minutes or more of negativity, including viewing such material on TV, actually peels away the neurons in the brain's hippocampus. This is the part of your brain that you need for problem-solving." He went on to say that basically complaining turns your brain to mush. In the article someone asks, "But if you're running a company, don't you need to hear about anything that might be going wrong within the company?" Mr. Blake replied, "There's a big difference between bringing your attention to something that's awry, something that's gone wrong, and a complaint. Typically, people who are complaining don't want a solution. They just want you to join in the indignity of the whole thing. You can almost hear brains clink when six people get together and start saying, 'Isn't that terrible?'" He concludes this part of his article by saying, "This will damage your brain even if you're just passively listening."

What an incredible study! Thirty minutes or more of incessant complaining and negativity actually starts killing brain cells.

Once we take our last breath, we will never be able to speak another word on this earth. When I talk about the stewardship of words, I talk about it from this perspective. Before you were born God knew exactly the very number of words that you would speak your entire lifetime from the first word you spoke until your very last word. God knows the exact number of words, and he knows where the majority of those words went.

God knows whether the majority of those words went out into space where nobody heard them. He knows whether the majority of those words landed on ears that needed encouragement, and he knows whether those words went in the direction of negative, pessimistic complaining, putting folks down. We've only got a certain number of words from the time of our first breath until the time of our last breath. Let's be good stewards of those words because when you take your last breath, there will be no opportunity to go back and make up for misspoken words. After you are gone, you'll be remembered, and I will be remembered for the words that we spoke.

Words are indeed powerful. So, here's my question to you this morning. How is the stewardship of your words? What is the condition of the stewardship of your words? Go back to verse 37, “By your words, you will be justified or acquitted, and by your words, you will be condemned.” The scripture does not say “by your church membership, your church attendance, or your service to others, you'll be acquitted.” It says, “by your words.” That's the words of Jesus.

The sobering reality here is that our words do have eternal consequences. The interesting thing is that Jesus does not give us a word-for-word formula for acquittal. Why not? I'll tell you why because if Jesus had given a word-for-word formula for acquittal, then people would memorize those very words and go around saying them without meaning. People would do that because that's what people do. People would walk around saying the magic acquittal words.

Since words are merely the vocal expression of our minds, then our minds must be transformed. According to Romans chapter 12:2, being acquitted by your word starts with repentance. “God have mercy on me a sinner” is what the tax collector said, his words of acquittal, and he was condemned no more. Words of repentance to a holy God is a good starting point for all of us.

Romans 10:10 says, “For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.” If you have not been saved today, you need to be saved. You need to speak the words of repentance that come from your heart to the Lord.

There's something else that we must do with our words. To acquit us, not only do we ask God to forgive us, we must ask others to forgive us when we have wronged them. That's hard. It's difficult. Asking for forgiveness requires words. Then, responding with, "I forgive you" or "It's okay" requires words.

Let's remember that total life stewardship begins with the stewardship of words.