



STEWARDS

All His. All In.

NASHVILLE
FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

10 Strategic Initiatives

- Hub of Prayer and Spiritual Renewal
- Cultivating Vibrant Creative Community
- Activating our Deacons
for Connection and Support
- Deep Discipleship and Biblically
Focused Growth
- Enhancing our Team to Carry
the Vision for Nashville
- College and Young Adult Ministry
- Faith and Work Ministry
- City Engagement
- Global Missions
- Radical Generosity

**These 10 Strategic Initiatives
are intended to guide our
ministry goals from 2025-2035.**

These are broken up into several
segments with “Revive” kicking
off the plan from 2024-26.



OUR VISION:

**We exist to help connect Jesus to people,
people to community, and community to mission.**

Two-Year (2024-2026) Strategic Initiatives for "Revive"

Our two-year strategic ministry plan is built around a vision for spiritual renewal, deep discipleship, and community transformation. A deeply revived city requires a deeply revived church, simply a collection of deeply revived people. It starts with each of us turning and returning our entire selves to God and asking him to make us whole.

In 2026, we are continuing to emphasize:

- **Developing a Culture of Prayer:** Prayer is the foundation of spiritual awakening.
- **Building a College and Young Adult Ministry:** We are passionate about reaching the next generation.
- **Engaging the City:** Our vision is to see Nashville transformed by the gospel.
- **Equipping Our Deacons for Future Development:** To better serve our church and city.
- **Staffing for the Future:** We want to ensure our staff is equipped and aligned with the church's vision and strategy.



CONTENTS

Series Introduction.....	7
Auguts 16/ Stewards of Time	10
August 23 / Stewards of Talent	14
August 30 / Stewards of Treasure.....	18
September 6/Stewards of Truth	22
Afterward	26
Appendix 1.....	27
Appendix 2.....	29
Appendix 3.....	31
Appendix 4.....	32
Preview.....	34

PASTORAL LETTER

Dear Nashville First family,

God has demonstrated great care, kindness, and power in sustaining our church for 206 years. In 1820, a handful of believers constituted a congregation on this ground, and for two centuries, hands we never held carried it — through war and cholera, through busts and booms and hollowed-out decades, through every season this city has known. We are all, in different ways, carrying the trust of those who have gone before us and what God has placed into our individual and collective hands. We are but a chapter in a story that God started writing long before we arrived on the scene and, if His kindness continues to sustain us, the chapter will continue after our individual roles are complete. We are participants in a legacy that is much bigger than any one of us but also needs each of us to do our part. To help us capture the wonder and mystery of it all, we are gathering around this theme of “stewards” in the month of August. Focusing our minds, aligning our hearts, and ensuring we are prepared to do the good works which God has carefully ordered for us (Ephesians 2:8-10).

We are meditating on the four great trusts that each of us is called to manage individually. As God would have it, His church has always existed as both an institution and an organism, as a gathered and structured entity and at the same time individuals under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. We will reflect on the critically important facts of Time, Talent, Treasure, Truth, and consider how we are doing as short-term managers of these eternally important realities. We will ask what God has placed in our hands, and what He intends to do through hands like ours. Let me say plainly what I will say from the pulpit: this is not a giving campaign. There is no ask attached to this series. This is



something better and harder. It is an invitation to see everything you have — your hours, your gifts, your dollars, your convictions — as entrusted, not owned. *All His. All in.*

Spend time with this booklet across the month. Write in it. Take it to your Bible study, your table, your porch. May it become a repository of your communion with King Jesus. I am praying it becomes the location of encounter where you learn to hear, trust, and obey what God is saying, by His Word and Spirit, to you individually and to His church corporately. And on September 6, we will pick up trowels together and launch into our study in the book of Nehemiah. The Lord has been our dwelling place in all generations. He is not finished building His church. Our great history isn't finished.

Grateful,
Thomas



STEWARDS

All His. All In.

Series Introduction — What Is a Steward?

Forget what you own. The question of your life is “What has God placed in your hands?”

“The earth is the LORD’s and the fullness thereof” (Psalm 24:1). That settles the title deed forever. What remains is the trust: God places real things in real hands. Hours. Gifts. Dollars. Truth. God is sovereign, and He has given us actual responsibility. He gives real authority and keeps total ownership. He calls this arrangement stewardship. A steward holds everything and owns nothing. There are three words that get tangled in the church, and this month unties and unites them.

- **Stewardship is the office** —
who you are before what God owns.
- **Generosity is the affection** —
how the hand learns to sit open.
- **Giving is the act** —
the moments the open hand releases.

The world runs that stack upward: perform the act, fake the affection, and claim the office. It is exhausting, because it is backward. Grace straightens things out and makes it run smooth: the Father makes sons, sons grow open hands, open hands give.

The Bible’s whole plot turns on two verbs: God gives, and we grasp. In the garden, God hands the man and the woman a world — every tree but one — and the woman “took of its fruit and ate” (Genesis 3:6). In the wilderness, the devil offers the second Adam all the kingdoms without a cross, and Christ refuses the shortcut the first Adam took; he “did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped” (Philippians 2:6). In the vineyard, Jesus tells of tenants who forgot they were tenants and killed the son to seize the inheritance (Luke 20). God is the great giver. We are supposed to be people who gratefully receive and steward. In our worst way, we grasp after what

belongs to God. Grace can enter in and rewrite the story of our lives. Every human heart lives somewhere in that story.

In the ancient world, a steward managed an estate another man's son would inherit. In the Father's house, the stewards are the sons. We'll unpack this idea across the next four weeks together. This principle is illustrated in the story Jesus told in Luke 15 of a gracious father with two prodigal sons. The younger brother's "lostness" is familiar: running far from God, dismissing the love of the father with wild living and no regard. The elder brother's lostness is just as bad: always around the house, keeping the record clean and appearances up, and furiously angry with the father. In that story, Jesus tells us how the father responded to the frustrated older brother, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours" (Luke 15:31). That is why the failed stewards of Scripture all share one root — not laziness, but a false portrait of the Master. "I knew you to be a hard man," said the servant who buried his trust, "so I was afraid" (Matthew 25:24–25). Bad theology, then fear, then a clenched hand.

So here is how this month works. Each week we will look first at the Master before we ever look at our hands. See Him rightly — the Father who opens His hand and satisfies the desire of every living thing (Psalm 145:16) — and the hands follow.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This is written to be used flexibly in a variety of settings. With this broad aim, the study guide material will inevitably struggle in one form or another. That being said, here are three uses:

In a Bible Study group. Each week's questions are key to the anchor text, not to the sermon — so your group works identically whether you meet before Sunday or after it. A disciple is someone who is constantly growing in his or her ability to hear, trust, and obey what God is saying by His Word and by His Spirit. These notes are intended to help you grow as a disciple. So, read the portion of Scripture, work through the questions in order, and: hear, trust, obey.

Every day, one question. We take up an ancient practice called “end of day examen,” and it takes ten seconds: *Today, with what God placed in my hands — was I an owner, a burier, or a steward?* The owner grasps it. The burier hides it, afraid. The steward tends it with an open hand, because he knows whose it is — and whose he is.

[illegible]



WEEK ONE - August 16

STEWARDS OF TIME

PSALM 90

INTRODUCTION

Forget time management. Moses never asked God to help him get more done.

Pharaoh wants your bricks counted. Moses prays your days counted — “teach us to number our days” — and the difference between those two prayers is the difference between a schedule and a life. Time management, as helpful as it is for optimizing your everyday life, promises you can beat the clock. Time is not the enemy. It is a gift entrusted to us to be managed well. God distributes time to everyone with perfect equality. Think about it: nobody, however rich, has ever bought a twenty-fifth hour. The only question is whether your numbered days will be spent or invested. Psalm 90 teaches a beautiful truth: the man who knows his days are counted stops spending them like loose change.

GOD AND TIME

Before Psalm 90 asks God for anything, it gives you an address: “Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations” (v. 1). The psalm we read at gravesides opens with a home. This is the only psalm of Moses, prayed at a generational threshold — one generation dying in the wilderness, another about to cross over — and Moses does not begin with the brevity of man. He begins with the eternity of God: “from everlasting to everlasting you are God” (v. 2). The Master of your minutes is not rushing you. He was here before the mountains; He will establish work that outlives you (v. 17); and in “the fullness of time” (Galatians 4:4) He sent His Son — who was never hurried, never idle, and who prayed at the end, “I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do” (John 17:4). Unhurried, unhindered, finished. That is the Face over your calendar.

QUESTIONS

1. **Read Psalm 90:1–2 aloud.** Moses states God’s eternity before he mentions human brevity. What changes when you take the verses in that order — and what happens inside you when you reverse them?

2. **Verse 12 asks God to *teach* us to number our days,** as if the counting does not come naturally. Why doesn’t it? What do you personally use to avoid the count?

3. **The world says *manage your time*;** Moses prays number your days. Name one place in your actual week where the difference between those two would visibly show.

4. **In verses 13–17 the psalm turns from dust to petition:** satisfy us, gladden us, establish the work of our hands. What is Moses asking God to do here that no productivity system could ever deliver?

-
-
-
5. **Acts 13:36** says David, “**served the purpose of God in his own generation**” and then slept. You get one generation. What has God given you to do in it — and what are you carrying that He hasn’t?
-
-
-

AT HOME THIS WEEK

Daily in Luke — Jesus and the clock:

- **Monday: Luke 12:13–21.** The rich fool’s error is temporal before it is financial: he plans “many years”; God says “this night.”
- **Tuesday: Luke 12:35–48.** The faithful manager is defined by how he waits. Stewardship is a tense: between the master’s leaving and his return.
- **Wednesday: Luke 14:15–24.** Every excuse at the banquet is a calendar entry. What “let me first” is running your week?
- **Thursday: Luke 10:25–37.** The Samaritan’s greatness is interruptibility. The priest and Levite were not cruel; they were busy.
- **Friday: Luke 9:57–62.** “Let me first” again — and the hand on the plow. Following Jesus is a use of time before it is anything else.

The practice: Do Moses's math. If you live to eighty (or longer!), roughly count the Saturdays you have left, and write the number in this margin. Do not stop there — that is only half the psalm. Then read verse 17 over the number, and spend one deliberately unhurried hour this week with the people in your house: no phones, no agenda, nothing produced. Numbered days are for dwelling, not just doing.

Daily examen: Today — owner, burier, or steward?

[illegible]



WEEK TWO - August 23

STEWARDS OF TALENT

1 PETER 4:10-11

INTRODUCTION

Nashville is full of talented people who know exactly what to do with it: build the brand, grow the following, double the profits, and measure the reach. And underneath the hustle is a deep longing in our hearts. God does not mock our desire to make a difference, the longing to be seen, to matter, to hear that your one life added something. But notice what Peter does with that longing. Every believer has received a gift, he says — received, not achieved — that is a platform or opportunity to serve one another. Gifts, according to this verse, are serving trays that we are intended to use to bless our neighbors. God's grace is varied, many-colored, and no single life carries the whole spectrum. So, the way God has distributed gifts in the world means that you need the gifts and talents that other people possess — and people need yours. We cannot be complete on our own. Your church community needs you, and you need your church community. Bigger than this, God has created us to live and interact with the life of the world. You are one tile in a mosaic two thousand years wide.

GOD AND TALENTS

Jesus told a story about servants, stewards, who had an opportunity to invest what they had or to play it safe. The servant at the heart of Jesus' story buried his talent. He not only suffered from a lack of courage, but his first issue was also a bad picture of God; he needed better theology: "I knew you to be a hard man... so I was afraid" (Matthew 25:24-25). But look at the Master he serves. He entrusts staggering sums before a single word of instruction. He calibrates the trust to the servant — "to each according to his ability" — so nobody is set up to fail. He calls a fortune "a little." And when he settles accounts, he does not pay wages; he opens

a door: “Enter into the joy of your master” (Matthew 25:21). Not the joy he confers — the joy he has. Paul asks the only question that kills comparison: “What do you have that you did not receive?” (1 Corinthians 4:7). The ascended Christ gave the gifts (Ephesians 4:7–8), the Spirit assigned them, and the first-person Scripture ever describes as filled with the Spirit was not a preacher, but a craftsman named Bezalel (Exodus 31:1–5). This Master is not auditing you. He is inviting you.

QUESTIONS

1. Read 1 Peter 4:10–11. Peter assumes every believer has received a gift. Do you actually believe that about yourself? What has God put in your hands that you’ve been calling too small to count?

2. “Varied grace” means the mosaic needs many colors.

Where has comparison — someone else’s tile — kept you from laying your own?

3. In Matthew 25, the servant’s fear grew from his picture of the master (“a hard man”). Where does a hard-master theology show up in how you serve, volunteer, or hold back?

4. The parable's *talents* are money — enormous sums — and ability is only the allocation criterion. How does it change the story to realize the master entrusted his own wealth, not a personality test?

5. The reward is not a raise but a shared joy — the door the elder brother refused (Luke 15:28). What would it mean this week to serve *from* joy rather than for approval?

AT HOME THIS WEEK

Daily in Luke — Jesus and the gifted:

- **Monday: Luke 5:1–11.** Peter's greatest professional day ends with nets on the shore. Gifts get re-deployed, not retired.
- **Tuesday: Luke 5:27–32.** Levi leaves the tax booth — and immediately uses a tax-man's network to throw Jesus a banquet. Grace repurposes your skill set.
- **Wednesday: Luke 9:10–17.** "You give them something to eat." Little, placed in His hands, feeds thousands.
- **Thursday: Luke 19:11–27.** "Engage in business until I come." Waiting is never passive.
- **Friday: Luke 8:4–15.** Thorns choke; good soil bears fruit "with patience." Fruitfulness is faithfulness over time.

The practice: Deploy one named gift for one particular person this week — and tell no one. Not your Bible study, not social media, or a friend. The counterfeit this week is the platform; the cure is secrecy. Let the Father who sees in secret do the seeing.

Daily examen: Today — owner, burier, or steward?



WEEK THREE - August 30

STEWARDS OF TREASURE

MATTHEW 6:19–24

INTRODUCTION

Jesus talked about money constantly — and never once because heaven was short on funds. Read Matthew 6 closely, and you find no fundraising in it, only cardiology. “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” We usually assume the heart leads and the treasure follows. Jesus says the opposite: the treasure moves first, and the heart is dragged along behind it like a trailer. Which is why He takes money so seriously and needs it so little. Underneath our gripping is a longing He honors: the longing to be safe, to be provided for, to know there will be enough. The scarcity story says: therefore, grasp. Jesus tells the better and truer one: “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32). Safety was never in the barn.

GOD AND MONEY

Once, a king looked out from his cedar house, saw God’s ark in a tent, and resolved to build God a home. And God, with something like a smile, turned the offer around: you will build me a house? “The LORD will make you a house” (2 Samuel 7:11). David started that evening feeling like God’s benefactor and ended it seated, stunned, a receiver: “Who am I, O Lord GOD... that you have brought me thus far?” (7:18). This Master has no needs. He never has. When Israel later gave lavishly for the temple, David prayed the only honest giving prayer there is: “For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you” (1 Chronicles 29:14). Every gift is a return. And yet this needless God treasures costly love — David refused a free threshing floor: “I will not offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God that cost me nothing” (2 Samuel 24:24) — because cost is how hearts speak. Then the portrait completes itself at the cross: “though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that

you by his poverty might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9). The Master is not a collector. He is the Giver — and Jesus is the proof.

QUESTIONS

1. **Read Matthew 6:19–24.** Jesus says the heart follows the treasure, not the other way around. Where have you seen that direction proved in your own life — a heart towed somewhere by money already spent?

2. **Between “treasure” and “two masters” sit the strange verses about the eye (6:22–23).** What does what you look at — feeds, catalogs, listings, other people’s lives — have to do with what you end up treasuring?

3. **In 2 Samuel 7, David wants to do something for God and discovers God doing everything for him.** Why is that order — seated and stunned before serving — the only safe foundation for generosity?

4. Jesus named two money personalities: the spender chasing significance and the saver chasing security (Luke 12:22–34 — lilies for one, ravens for the other). Which are you, honestly — and what is the longing underneath it?

5. Nobody is asking you for anything this month. So deal with the freer, harder question: what would your hands look like open — and what, specifically, are they clenched around now?

AT HOME THIS WEEK

Daily in Luke — Jesus and the ledger:

- **Monday — Luke 12:22–34.** Ravens and lilies: the Father feeds pests and dresses grass. “Fear not, little flock.”
- **Tuesday — Luke 16:19–31.** A rich man steps over Lazarus daily. Wealth’s danger is not possession but blindness.
- **Wednesday — Luke 18:18–30.** The one thing the ruler lacked was a lack. Sad is what almost-following looks like.
- **Thursday — Luke 19:1–10.** Salvation comes to Zacchaeus’s house, and his ledger converts on the spot. Grace loosens what law never could.
- **Friday — Luke 21:1–4.** Two coins outweigh the treasury. God measures gifts by what remains behind.



WEEK FOUR - September 6

STEWARDS OF TRUTH

2 TIMOTHY 1:12-14

INTRODUCTION

The world will gladly let you steward your time — there is an app for it. It will applaud you stewarding your talent and even your money. But steward a *truth you did not write*? Guard words handed down rather than assembled? That is something which is most intolerable in our cultural moment. We used to inherit religion; now we assemble it — a verse here, a vibe there, nothing that can contradict you and therefore nothing that can hold you. This new age remixed spirituality is based on a sincere longing in our hearts. People remix their faith because they are starving for a story big enough to live in. The shortage is just as real: a custom-built creed is a shaky hope when you arrive at your deathbed. Paul's word to Timothy is stranger and stronger than the temptation of curation: *guard the good deposit*. You may expound the pattern of sound words. You may not redraw it.

GOD AND TRUTH

Paul writes from a Roman dungeon, close to death, and gives Timothy the double deposit that holds this whole week. Deposit one: "I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me" (1:12) — Paul has banked his very soul with Christ. Deposit two: "guard the good deposit entrusted to you" (1:14). See the order, because the order is the gospel: we guard the truth because Christ guards us. Kept keepers. And the keeping is not white-knuckled — "by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us." Notice too that the deposit has a Face: Paul says whom, not merely what. The pattern of sound words is precious because it wraps a Person — the Way, the Truth, the Life. Guarding doctrine while losing Him is the Pharisees tithing mint and neglecting the love of God (Luke 11:42). This Master

hands you words strong enough to hand to your grandchildren —
“entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also”
(2 Timothy 2:2): Paul to Timothy to faithful ones to others also, four
generations in one verse — and he himself underwrites the whole chain.

QUESTIONS

1. **Read 2 Timothy 1:12–14.** Which comes first in the passage — Christ guarding what’s yours, or you guarding what’s His? Why does everything depend on that order?

2. **“Follow the pattern of the sound words” (1:13).** What is the difference between expounding a pattern and redrawing it? Where do you feel the pull to redraw?

3. **The remix age says assemble your own truth.** What is the genuine longing underneath that impulse — and where does the assembled version fail people you love?

-
4. **2 Timothy 2:2 holds four generations.** Trace your own chain: who handed the deposit to you? Whose hands are next? What, concretely, are you doing about the next link?

5. **On Sunday we will confess the Apostles' Creed together — words older than every building this church has met in.** What does it do to a person, and to a church, to say words they did not write and cannot edit?

AT HOME THIS WEEK

Daily in Luke — Jesus and the deposit of truth:

- **Monday — Luke 3:7–14.** John's test of true repentance is what happens to your hands: coats shared, honesty at the tax booth. Truth held rightly changes conduct.
- **Tuesday — Luke 11:37–44.** Tithed mint, neglected love. It is possible to guard the container and lose the treasure.
- **Wednesday — Luke 20:9–18.** The tenants reject messenger after messenger, then the son. The vineyard was never theirs.
- **Thursday — Luke 20:19–26.** "Whose likeness and inscription?" Render to Caesar his coin — and to God the thing that bears His image: you.
- **Friday — Luke 22:1–6.** Judas sells the Truth himself for silver — the anti-steward's final trade. Hold the contrast all weekend: what he sold, we get to guard.

The practice: Make a plan for family discipleship this year. When will you read the Bible? When will you pray as a family? Be stewards of the opportunity to know and love God's Word.

Daily examen: Today — owner, burier, or steward?

[illegible]

PASTORAL AFTERWORD

Four weeks, four trusts, one Master — and one door. When the master in Jesus' story settles accounts, he does not hand his faithful servant a paycheck. He hands him an invitation: "Enter into the joy of your master." Not the joy he confers. The joy he has. And one page of your Bible away stands the elder brother, at that same threshold, music on the other side, refusing to go in. Everything this month comes down to that doorway. Stewardship is never a program. It is the family posture of sons and daughters who know whose house this is, whose hands these are, and whose joy is waiting.

We have spent a summer learning to rejoice and a month learning to hold things with open hands. Now we are going to build. He is building. He is inviting. Let's go in.



STEWARDS

All His. All In.

The Office, the Affection, the Act

Many people begin to squirm when they hear the word *stewardship*. It feels like the money is at risk and some sort of high-pressure ask is on the way. That flinch is a learned behavior, and the church taught it. For decades, church leaders have reached for the word mostly when budgets needed help, until “stewardship season” came to mean “pledge drive” in the ears of everyone under the roof. But the recoil reveals something deeper than bad branding. It reveals a collapse of categories that ought to remain clear and distinct — three distinct realities crushed into one, and the one we kept was the only one we could count.

Untangle three categories and simplicity is recovered.

Stewardship is the *office*: who you are before what God owns. It is not an activity you schedule but an identity you wake up inside. “The earth is the LORD’s and the fullness thereof” (Psalm 24:1) — which makes every human being a manager of assets held in trust, whether we acknowledge the arrangement or not. And the office without the act is burial — the servant who held his master’s money so carefully that he did nothing with it at all, and heard the hardest words in the parable.

Generosity is the *affection*: how the hand learns to sit open. It is a disposition of the heart before it is a line in a budget, the family resemblance of a Father who “opens his hand” to satisfy every living thing (Psalm 145:16). Generosity without the office is waste, or worse — the manager in Luke 16 was lavishly open-handed with receivables that were never his.

Giving is the *act*: the datable, countable moments when the open hand releases something. Giving without generosity is performance — the Pharisees tithed their mint down to the leaf while neglecting the love of God (Luke 11:42).

The world’s error is not that it lacks these three categories. It is that it runs the stack upward. Perform the act, and maybe the feeling will follow; manufacture the feeling, and maybe you’ll become the kind of

person who has it. Every fundraising letter you have ever received is built on that architecture, and it is exhausting, because it is backwards.

Grace runs the stack down, the way it was always meant to be. God does not begin with your act or even your affection. He begins with your adoption: “Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours” (Luke 15:31). The Father makes sons. Sons, watching their Father’s open hand long enough, grow open hands of their own. And open hands, without being harangued into it, give. That is why this series spent four weeks painting the Master’s portrait before pressing any behavior: you cannot command an affection, and an act commanded without the affection curdles into duty.

Attention-Stewardship

Your attention is the only trust with a publicly traded market price. Nobody bids on your hours directly. Nobody auctions your talents. But your gaze — the raw seconds of your looking — is bought and sold every day by some of the largest companies in history. Decades ago, the economist Herbert Simon saw it coming: “a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention.” He was right, and an entire economy grew up around the shortage. Every infinite scroll, every autoplay video, every notification engineered to twitch in your pocket is a bid for the one asset you cannot get more of. The attention economy is one of the most lucrative markets in existence today.

Which means the strangest thing about our cultural moment is this: the advertising industry believes Jesus’ psychology more than most Christians do.

Look again at the center of Matthew 6. Between “where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (v. 21) and “no one can serve two masters” (v. 24), Jesus

sets two verses about — of all things — the eye: “The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light” (v. 22). Treasure, then the eye, then allegiance. Attention is the hinge of the passage. What you look at, long enough, you begin to treasure; what you treasure commands your heart; and what commands your heart is functionally your master. The algorithms did not invent that sequence. They monetized it.

How we invest and spend our attention is a stewardship issue. We only have so much attention and it is an entrusted resource, finite and consequential, for which stewards give account. The biblical strategy for keeping our focus is not primarily defensive. Screen limits and grayscale settings have their place, but you cannot fast your way to a well-aimed soul. Scripture’s counsel is positive before it is protective: “Set your minds on things that are above” (Colossians 3:2) — the older translators memo-

“a wealth of
information creates
a poverty
of attention.”

— HERBERT SIMON

rably rendered it “set your affection” — and the psalmist prays not merely for less looking but for redirected looking: “Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things; and give me life in your ways” (Psalm 119:37). Attention is trained by what it is given, not just by what it is denied. “Beholding the glory of the Lord,” Paul says, we “are being transformed into the same image” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

You become what you behold. Attention economies know this well and they are banking on it. Now steward accordingly: decide, before the feed decides for you, what your eyes are for.

Enter Into The Joy

Two of Jesus' most famous stories end at the same door, and only one man goes through it. In Matthew 25, a master returns from his journey and settles accounts. To the servants who traded faithfully with his wealth, he does not offer a bonus, a raise, or a promotion, though he could have. He offers an entrance: "Enter into the joy of your master" (Matthew 25:21). Read it again. Not joy the master pays out. Joy the master possesses — the deep gladness of God himself — with the door propped open and a servant invited inside.

Now turn to Luke 15. A father has thrown a feast for a son who was dead and is alive. Music. Dancing. And out in the field stands the elder brother, arms crossed, at the identical threshold. His grievance is an employee's grievance, and he states it: "These many years I have *served* you... yet you never gave me a young goat" (Luke 15:29). Wages. Compensation. Accounts. He has lived in his father's house on staff. And the record says, "he was angry and refused to go in" (15:28).

Two parables. One doorway. On one side of it, faithful servants discover that the whole arrangement was never employment — that the master's settlement day ends not in payroll but in shared happiness. On the other side, a son who thought like a hired hand stands in the yard, owed everything, according to himself, and entering nothing. The father's answer to him is an entire theology of stewardship compressed in a single sentence: "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours" (15:31). You were never staff. It was always yours.

This is where a summer and a fall quietly become one story. Philippians taught us that joy can be learned — "I have learned, in whatever situation I am, to be content" — practiced in every season like a craft. STEWARDS has now told us where the craft leads: the end of faithful holding is not an audit passed, but a feast entered. And that is also why the next thing we do together is build. People build walls out of duty; they build them well, and sing while they do it, only out of joy. The door is open. The music has started. Enter into the joy of your master.

From Stewards to Builders

The book we open on September 6 begins in a palace, with a servant holding someone else's cup. Nehemiah is a cupbearer to the king of Persia — which is to say, a steward of the most guarded trust in the empire, the vessel a paranoid monarch drinks from. Every day of his working life, Nehemiah holds in his hands something precious that is not his. And when God decides to rebuild Jerusalem's walls, He does not reach for a general or a stonemason. He reaches for the steward. The man trained to hold another's cup becomes the man trusted to raise another's city. Alongside him stands Ezra, a scribe with a steward's résumé of his own: he "had set his heart to study the Law of the LORD, and to do it and to teach his statutes" (Ezra 7:10). Study, do, teach — a keeper of the deposit, sent to rebuild a people around it.

Which means this stewardship season we have just finished was never a detour before the Autumn. This was the training ground for what's ahead. The four trusts we studied about are all at work in the story ahead of us:

Time: the wall goes up in fifty-two days (Nehemiah 6:15) — numbered days, spent like a man who counted them, against ridicule and threat and the standing temptation to come down from the work.

Talent: read Nehemiah 3 slowly sometime, the least-skipped-worthy list in Scripture — goldsmiths and perfumers and priests and daughters, each family repairing the stretch of wall nearest their own house. Varied grace, laid tile by tile; a whole city rebuilt by nobody famous. We all have a role to play.

Treasure: when the wall stands, the people bind themselves to consecrated firstfruits with a vow that should hang over every church budget ever drafted: "We will not neglect the house of our God" (Nehemiah 10:39). And,

Truth: the climactic scene of the whole rebuild is not a ribbon-cutting but a reading — Ezra on a wooden platform, the Book open, every man and woman and child who could understand, listening from dawn until

midday, and then, of all things, a feast: “the joy of the LORD is your strength” (Nehemiah 8:10).

There it is again — the door from Matthew 25, standing open in the rubble of Jerusalem. Stewards who enter the Master’s joy become builders, and builders sustained by that joy finish walls that fear said were impossible. So come back on September 13. Bring what the last four weeks put in your hands: your numbered days, your one square of the mosaic, your loosened grip, and the guarded deposit.

The question of STEWARDS was what has God placed in your hands?

The question of Ezra–Nehemiah is better: what is He calling you to build with your life?

PREVIEW: EZRA–NEHEMIAH

Faith for Building What God Is Calling You To Begins September 13

The next book of our life together opens with a steward. Nehemiah is a royal cupbearer — a palace official trusted with a king's very cup — and God turns him into a builder of walls. Ezra is a scribe who “had set his heart to study the Law of the LORD, and to do it and to teach” (Ezra 7:10). Study, do, teach: a steward of truth, sent to rebuild a people.

Everything we learn in STEWARDS walks straight into these books. Watch for it: numbered days (a wall raised in fifty-two of them), varied gifts (a whole city rebuilt family by family, each at their own stretch of wall), consecrated treasure (“we will not neglect the house of our God”), and the deposit of truth read aloud to every man, woman, and child who could understand. What has God put in your hands?

THE EXILIC & POST-EXILIC PERIOD

Old Testament Books in Historical Order

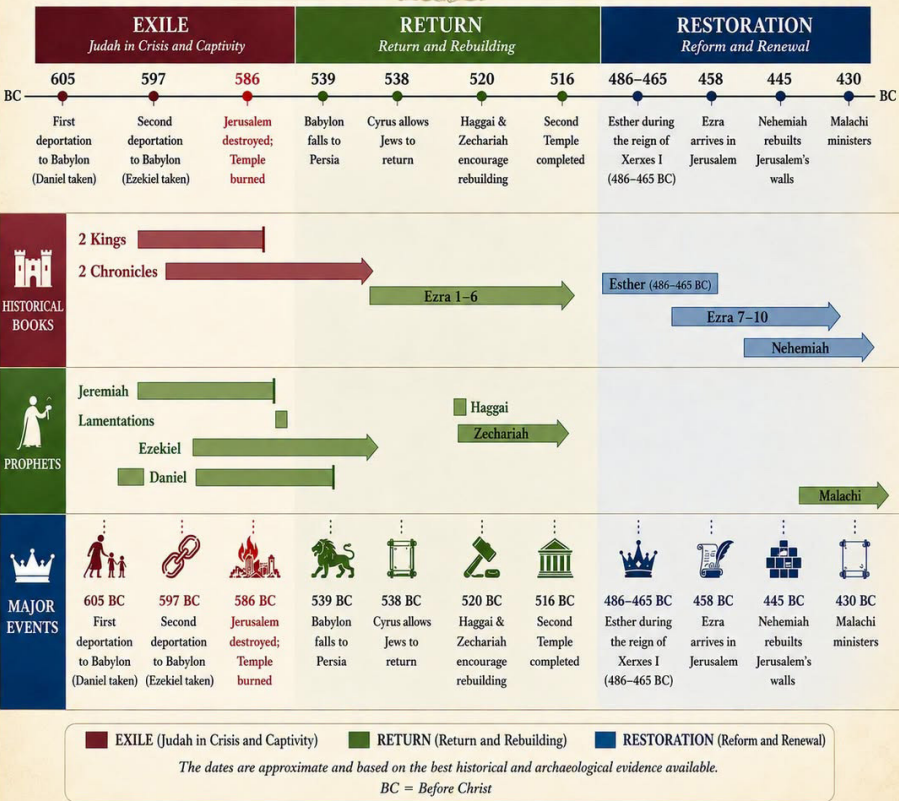


Chart from Kathy Howard



NASHVILLE
FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

*Today, with what God placed
in my hands — was I an owner,
a burier, or a steward?*

Stewards: All His. All In. Study Guide
was written by Nashville First's Senior Pastor Dr. Thomas West.
2026 All Rights Reserved.

Unless otherwise noted, printed Scripture passages
are from the English Standard Version (ESV).