

First Christian Church (Lawrence, KS)

Dr. Barry M. Foster

August 28, 2022

The Stewardship of Our Life Together

“For Want of a Nail”

Romans 12:3-8 (NIV)

3 For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. 4 For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, 5 so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. 6 We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; 7 if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; 8 if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

1 Corinthians 12:12-27 (NIV)

12 Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. 14 Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

15 Now if the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? 18 But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. 19 If they were all one part, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

21 The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” 22 On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, 24 while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts

that lacked it, 25 so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. 26 If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

27 Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

[Slide 1] *Opening*

Good morning church! We're continuing with part two of the introduction to this new series, "*The Stewardship of Our Life Together*": a look at our church and its ministries, opportunities, and where we are right now as a church family. As I mentioned last week, this is a different kind of sermon series than I usually present. Typically, when I prepare a sermon series, it's organized around a book of the Bible, or a portion of a book, or an important theological topic, as I did with the question of suffering and evil, or your relationships with God.

[Slide 2]

By the way, if you're new to our church, or have just started watching us online, all of the sermons and sermon series from the past three years are available to you on our church website. You can go to www.fcclawrence.org > Sermons > Archived Sermons to find links to the recording of each message along with the PowerPoint slides and a copy of the sermon notes. Check out those archived messages for some helpful instruction in biblical theology and for an easy way to give you a sense of what God has been saying to us in our recent history. I suppose it could also give you a better sense of what this preacher guy thinks, if that matters to you.

I also told you last week that I was going to attempt something that is difficult for me—at least, it doesn't come naturally: I'm going to try to be practical. Emphasis on the "try" part—and I will freely admit that what I consider "practical" may not match with what someone else thinks is "practical." But the truth is that one of the most practical tools you can have in your tool belt is a good concept.

[Slide 3]

If you don't have a clear understanding of what a wall is supposed to look like or what it needs to be sturdy, your attempt to follow the practical instructions of the guy on the Youtube video may not turn out as well as you hoped. Here's some evidence of that on the screen. If you're looking for help to build a life as a follower of Christ, then learning some solid biblical concepts is a very practical matter, provided, of course, that you then follow through with applying them to your actual day-to-day life.

[Slide 4] *Review*

So, let's begin with a very practical review of last week's key points.

In this series, we're looking at our church, at what it means for us to be stewards of our common life together as a church body. A steward is someone who manages the property and resources of someone else who is the owner. Acts 20:28 reminds us that Jesus is the owner of the church—the pastor doesn't own the church, it doesn't belong to the elders or the trustees or even to the congregation; it belongs to God. All of us are stewards of this church. That means that we are all answerable to God for what happens here, for the resources and facilities we use, for the faith that has been passed down to us, for the opportunities we have to proclaim the gospel and to live it out, and for the people who make up this portion of the body of Christ.

So, before we go any further, ask yourself this question: *“Do I think of the church as part of my responsibility to God? Do I think of myself as answerable to God for what happens—or what doesn't happen—at First Christian Church? Do I think that God actually cares about what I contribute to the life of this church and to the kingdom of God?”*

[Slide 5]

Last week we also saw that both Peter and Paul, the two most prominent of the apostles, considered that teaching about the common, shared life of each congregation was part of the fundamental, commonly agreed upon pool of apostolic teaching that every Christian needed to understand. Both of them, in their letters to churches they had not yet visited, wrote about the importance of our life together. That common life of worship, fellowship, service, what we do when we gather together and what we do for one another, is a crucial aspect of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. Our life together as a Christian family is central to who we are—even though we continue to have our own individual lives, with connections to other family, friends, work associates, neighbors. But our gathering together, on a regular basis, reinforces the spiritual connection we share as believers, and enables us to go out into the world where we live, to be an influence for the kingdom of God wherever we go.

[Slide 6]

Let's not forget, either, the most important point from last week's message—not today, and not ever: *“you matter.”* Whether you feel like it or not, whether you are living up to what you should do or not, you matter. This past week I spoke with one of our older members who can't make it to church, and misses you all very much, by the way. And I could see in her face and hear in her voice her sense that she didn't matter; she used to matter, but she doesn't now. I

want you all to know that you matter—you matter to God, you matter to me, and you matter to us all, not because of what you do or could do or used to do, but because you are beloved by God and a part of us.

[Slide 7] *“No man is an island”*

I ended last time by emphasizing that each of us has something we contribute to the whole. Both Peter and Paul in their respective letters made this point very clear. Each of us brings something to the table, something that the rest of us need. John Donne (1572-1631), Dean of St. Paul’s Cathedral in London, wrote a famous poem that makes this point from the negative side:

[Slide 8]

*No man is an island,
Entire of itself;
Every man is a piece of the continent,
A part of the main.
If a clod be washed away by the sea,
Europe is the less,
As well as if a promontory were:
As well as if a manor of thy friend's
Or of thine own.*

No matter how small you think you are, how weak your faith, how limited your abilities, how inconsequential your life—without you, something is lost, something that we need to fulfill the assignment we have from God.

[Slide 9] *“For the want of a nail”*

Let me use some lines from another famous poem to drive home the point a little deeper. The full version of this little poem can be found in various places; the version most often cited comes from the preface in Benjamin Franklin’s *Poor Richard’s Almanack* (published in 1758). But similar sayings and aphorisms can be found as early as the 13th century in France, and there are older versions of what Franklin published in his *Almanack* that go back to the 14th century. Here’s the long version:

*For the want of a nail the shoe was lost,
For the want of a shoe the horse was lost,
For the want of a horse the rider was lost,
For the want of a rider the battle was lost,
For the want of a battle the kingdom was lost,
And all for the want of a horseshoe-nail.*

[Slide 10]

The earliest appearance of this full version of the proverbial saying is linked to the story of the death of King Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth Field on August 22, 1458. Richard's horse became stuck in the mud, causing Richard to fall from his mount, which led to him being killed in the battle. William Shakespeare made this scene famous in *Richard III* (Act V, Scene 4), written *ca.* 1591, where Richard cries out: "*A Horse, A Horse, my Kingdom for a Horse!*"

The point of the proverb was not to depict with precise historical accuracy the cause of the death of King Richard III and the subsequent loss of the kingdom to his enemies. But like all proverbs, it was intended to capture a principle, a truth by which we may learn something vitally important for our lives. We don't normally think of a small nail as all that important. Go to any construction site and you'll find plenty of them laying around in the dirt where they've fallen. No one pays them much attention, especially not a solitary nail lying by itself somewhere. But a nail that is missing from a horseshoe can lead to that shoe coming loose, which can lead to a horse stumbling in the mud, and, as Richard discovered, when your horse goes down, the rider goes down with him, and every advantage that the horse had given you in battle is now gone. Without that advantage, a knight can lose his life and a battle can be lost. Losing one battle, if it's the determinative battle, can be the difference between winning or losing a war.

One small nail—the difference between victory and defeat.

[Slide 11]

What if we turned that around and thought about what the presence of one small thing might accomplish, when meshed together with other equally significant small things to form a powerful large thing? Paul certainly has that in mind when he said in Ephesians 4:16 that the whole body of Christ, when fitted together properly and benefitting from that which each member supplies, grows with a growth that is from God.

Think about that for a moment. A lot of people have ideas about what we need in order to grow as a church. Church growth consultants and ministry specialists have lots of ideas and programs designed to help your church grow. Paul says that what we need for the church to grow is each person giving what he or she can give; each of us serving in the area where God has designed us to fit; each of us helping to steward the life we share in Christ together so that the church grows up to be a temple—a place where God and people can meet. Without the contribution of each part, the church is diminished; but with each member bringing what he or she has been gifted to do, the whole church benefits, and the

church grows—in spiritual health, in understanding of the faith, in number, in Christlikeness, and in influence.

[Slide 12] *Paul's imagery of the body*

The two passages we heard this morning are both from letters written by the apostle Paul, a little more than a year apart. Each of these two passages uses this metaphor of the body to describe what it means to be the church. And each of the passages emphasizes the point that the church is made up of many different kinds of members. The diversity of gifts, abilities, types, and functions of the different members is what allows the body to maintain its health and to grow.

In each letter, Paul has a different situation that he is addressing, which affects how he uses this particular imagery. In the Roman church, there is a significant division between the Jewish and Gentile believers. In the Corinthian church, there are also problematic divisions, but they are primarily divisions that relate to social and economic status, or to cliques focused on allegiance to particular personalities. But to each of these churches, Paul sends a similar message: you need one another. In Rome, the Jewish believers and the Gentile believers need each other. They come from different cultures, but both groups are essential if the church is going to fulfill its mission to bring the knowledge of Christ to the world. In Corinth, the rich believers and the poor believers need each other; as do the free and the slaves, the weak and the strong. For the church to reach spiritual maturity, everyone must contribute what he or she is gifted to do.

[Slide 13]

In each of these two chapters, Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12, when speaking about this metaphor of the body, Paul lists a number of spiritual gifts. He has another small list in Ephesians 4. The lists of spiritual gifts are not exhaustive—we can see that from a comparison of the three chapters. But they are exemplary; they describe the kinds of gifts that we may find when we look at the people who make up the church. Some are apostles, some are prophets, some are leaders, some are givers, some are mercy-showers, and so on. All are needed. All are helpful and important in some way. All can contribute to the health and strength and growth of the body.

[Slide 14]

Each of these gifts, these abilities, special strengths, innate capacities or supernatural enablements, are the result of God's creative design and empowerment. That's why Peter refers to them as expressions of the manifold grace of God; they are God's gift to us, so that we might be God's gift to one another.

Each person in the body of Christ is a gift. Do you think of the people around you as gifts? Do you think of yourself as a gift? You are. You are a gift: someone specially endowed by God to be a manifestation of God's grace—a way to make God's nature and ways evident for all to see. You are someone God created to express himself to the rest of us; you are someone in whom God can make himself known through your unique personality and what you are gifted and able to do. You are someone God wants to use because there is someone else who needs who you are and what you can do, and God intends to use you to help reach that person. Some specific person needs who you are and what you do; and we all need who you are and what you can do if we're going to become the church that God intended FCC to become.

[Slide 15]

Paul's imagery in 1 Corinthians is particularly vivid. *“If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be?”* If we were all the same, all gifted exactly the same, all similarly designed to be good at the same thing, we would be seriously handicapped. That's why we're different, and why we need one another.

[Slide 16]

I know that there's a few of you out there who are Chiefs fans. Where's Jean Bonner? She'll be wearing her Chiefs red starting next week, I imagine. I don't blame any of you for being Chiefs fans—I know you can't help yourselves. But think about your team for a moment. You've got a superstar half-billion dollar quarterback and arguably the best tight end in the game today. They helped me win my fantasy league last year, so I appreciate them a lot! But I'm here to tell you something—as great as Pat Mahomes and Travis Kelce are, if the Chiefs don't fix their defense this year, they're not going to win the Super Bowl. You may not know the names of anyone in the Kansas City secondary, but if they aren't a lot better than whoever was back there last year, Pat Mahomes can't take this team where you want them to go.

[Slide 17]

It's the same in the church, folks. God's putting together a team called the church. And it takes everyone doing their part for us to be the people God made us to be, to fulfill the mission he's given us. And each of those parts matters, because the whole body has to be functioning well, not just the lead pastor or the worship musicians or the church administrator. We're all different, each of us with our different abilities and tendencies, strengths and weaknesses, quirks and

peculiarities; but together, we make up a unique body, this congregation, which God intends to use to show himself to the world in Lawrence, Kansas.

Let's look at this same idea from a slightly different angle, shall we? Every healthy organization needs different types of people to succeed. And God has put different kinds of people here to meet those organizational needs. Just like your family, we're not all the same—by God's design. So, here's one way to look at the different kinds of people that every healthy organization needs—that we need, here at FCC.

[Slide 18] *Different types of people every church needs*

(1) First, we have the “*Minders.*” These are your idea people, the men and women who live in their heads, who are focused on the world of ideas and concepts. They love to dream about “what ifs”; they are ponder-ers. They're the people who help design creative solutions for problems, who love to think about policies, who are always asking questions: Where are we going? Why do we do what we do? Should we do something different? Is this the best way to do this? Is this ethical? And so on.

[Slide 19]

(2) Second, we have the “*Finders.*” These are your sales people, the evangelists. They are the people who go out and bring people in, who promote your message, who love to talk to strangers. They are the ones who see new opportunities that others don't see, new possibilities that no one else has considered. They're the ones who are constantly pushing us outward, so that we don't get stuck in yesterday. They're also the ones who can find resources that are needed, often from surprising sources (because they're “out there,” looking for opportunities). I always think of the James Garner character in “*The Great Escape*”—the “Scrounger.” He was a “*Finder.*”

I'm going to brag on Judy Chadwick for a moment. Not only is she a great pianist and a wonderful member of the worship team. But she's a “*Finder.*” She does a very simple, easy thing—she takes bread that we get from Panera, the leftover, didn't-sell-today bread, and gives it to her neighbors, along with a bulletin from the Sunday service, and invites them to come to church or talks to them about Jesus. I don't know if any of them will ever come—but Jesus is using her and our church is bit more like Jesus because of what she is doing.

[Slide 20]

(3) Third are the “*Binders.*” These are what Bill Self calls “glue guys.” They're your connectors and networkers. *Binders* are the people who are the relational glue that helps everyone stay connected. They love talking to everyone;

they love fellowship hour more than anything else in church. Not just because they get to talk to people, but because when they talk to people they connect with them. *Binders* are key people because they're always looking to bring people together; they love doing events (though they can sometimes be terrible at planning them). My dear friend, Bob Mendelsohn, whom you may remember from his Easter message this year, is a *Binder*. Actually, he's kind of a *Binder-Finder-Minder*. But the very first day that I met him in 1973, before I knew almost anything about him, he made a point to introduce me to the guy who lived on my floor at Oliver Hall, who became my best friend. He's a connector, he brings people together.

[Slide 21]

(4) "*Winders*" are the next group. These are your motivators, your encouragers, the people who are always exhorting and cheering and inspiring others. They're the "*you can do it!*" folks. It doesn't matter how hopeless the situation, they've got a cheery word and a song to get everyone working together toward the goal. And if times are tough, and getting tougher, and the only way ahead is a hard road—they'll be the ones giving the pep talk, the quiet encouraging word, or the loud, "*Let's roll!*" cry.

[Slide 22]

(5) Next we have the "*Reminders*." These people are really essential—they are the organizers who keep track of what is going on and make sure that things are in place so they can be found when needed. They are the communicators who help everyone in the organization stay on track. They are the historians who help us remember where we came from, what God did in the past, how he brought us to where we are today, and who he used to do that. They are the "law-keepers" who help us function in accordance with our own internal principles, the shared agreements that tell us who we are and how we have determined that we will function together. They are especially important—probably most important when we dislike what they tell us because it makes us work harder or go slower or stop to reconsider our course of action.

[Slide 23]

(6) Then we have the "*Kinders*." Everyone loves these people. These are your comforters, your mercy-showers, your overflowing-with-compassion-for-the-worst-repeat-offenders. These are the people who see the best in everyone, who are quick to overlook an offense, and slow to remember your past failures. They are the specialists in second chances (and third chances, and tenth, and hundredth). These are the folks who help us keep our soul when we're tempted to chase after

so-called “success.” They are the people who keep the oil of the love of God flowing throughout the church so that we don’t get cranky and spiritually rusty.

[Slide 24]

(7) And we cannot forget or minimize our seventh group—the “*Grinders*.” These are our Marthas, our workers, the people who have no desire to lead but who will help with anything. “*Just tell me what to do,*” they’ll say. Or you can simply tell them what the problem is—and they’ll figure out what to do. They love doing; maybe too much sometimes. It’s easy for “*Grinders*” to get busy doing projects and stay so busy that they forget about filling up their spiritual tanks. “*Grinders*” often don’t think they matter all that much. But nothing happens in the kingdom of God without them, nothing that lasts anyways. (Oh—by the way, prayer warriors and intercessors are often just “*Grinders*” of a different sort.)

[Slide 25]

“*Minders,*” “*Finders,*” “*Binders,*” “*Winders,*” “*Reminders,*” “*Kinders,*” “*Grinders.*” One or two of those groups probably describes who you are. And whichever group fits you, we need what you have to offer. The church is incomplete, diminished, less than fully functional, if you are not doing what God has gifted you to do to serve him and his kingdom in the place he has planted you. But when you offer yourself to him, to be who he made you to be and do what he created you to do, whether it is a little or a lot—the church is better because of it. And you are helping us steward what God has given his church.

[Slide 26]

There are two other groups I want to mention quickly as we close, two other types of people that are often a part of organizations and churches. The first is “*Blinders.*” These people might belong to the organization or the church, but they aren’t helping them fulfill the mission. “*Blinders*” are the folks who hinder every effort to change, who oppose every new idea. “*Blinders*” are the people who hide the truth when it doesn’t help their agenda, who cover up damage that needs to be repaired, who close doors to new opportunities and keep pressing needs from being known, so that the church is continually hemorrhaging. Sometimes they don’t realize what they’re doing; sometimes they’re quite intentional about it, usually so that they can retain power or influence or status. I don’t think we have any “*Blinders*” in our church, but if we do, they need to be lovingly corrected, helped to repent and change so that both they and the church can be better.

[Slide 27]

Unlike “*Blinders,*” the last group is quite important, essential really, to the life and health of the church. But I couldn’t find a rhyming name for them. I tried,

I really tried. I looked up websites for rhyming words—and I couldn't come up with one. But I don't want to leave them out just because we can't find an English word to fit the rhyme scheme—they're too vital to the health and life of the church. They are the “*Givers*.” Paul makes particular note of them in Romans, saying that those who are especially gifted at giving should give generously.

Talking about “*Givers*” really will require more time than we have left today. But let me make one important point before we close. Some people are gifted by God with a special love for giving and often, a special ability to give. If that's you, if you're a “*Giver*,” then I'm grateful for you, for all that you do to forward the work of the kingdom of God. And I'll simply remind you to check with God to see how he would direct your giving, to see what he considers generosity to look like in your life and your situation. If you're not a “*Giver*,” one of these with a special love for giving, or you're not sure if that's you or not, remember this—all of us are called to give. All of us are charged with supporting the kingdom of God with our finances, to love God with our strength by bringing our tithes and offerings from what we have earned to support God's work. At FCC, we won't badger you about how much you give or don't give or whether you give at all. We simply ask that you remember that following Jesus means that he is the Lord of your finances and you need to obey whatever he tells you to do.

[Slide 28]

Transition to communion

[Worship team, if you would begin making your way to the platform . . . ; those who are helping to serve communion please join me in the front . . .]

Benediction/Blessing

*[Lift your hearts to heaven, and your hands if you like . . .]
Invite people to receive prayer; mention membership*