

Sermon Title: **“My Stewardship Story”**

Bible: **Matthew 6:19-21, 24 & Philippians 4:12-13**

When: on Sunday, October 23, 2022

Where: about 30 people (plus YouTube streaming viewers) at Gilroy UMC

Opening Prayer

O Lord, thank you so much for calling us as your children, your servants, and your stewards. Please give us your generosity and your freedom. Let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock, and our Redeemer. Amen.

1. For Stewardship Campaign 2023

Today’s message is prepared for the Stewardship 2023 Campaign. Today, I will share my stewardship story. Part 2 about stewardship will be delivered in November. It will be about our church finances. You will see and meet many pastors. Some pastors do not talk about money. Some pastors talk about money. One of my dreams as a pastor is to become comfortable talking about money, because I truly believe that “for where [my] treasure is, there [my] heart will be also.” I also truly believe that “No one can serve two masters. [I] cannot serve [both] God and wealth.” I am not sure if you are thankful for me as your pastor, because I do talk about money. To talk about money is not easy, and sometimes very challenging. But I am so thankful to have you as my and our church, because I can share my stewardship story and talk about church finance, in front of God and the church.

2. Closet, Refrigerator, and the power of Money

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth” Do you like this Bible verse? Do you have your own closet? When I moved from a one bedroom apartment to a two bedroom apartment, I kind of begged my wife. “Can I have my own closet?” When Mihyun and I lived in a one bedroom apartment, I could not have my own closet, only a small part of the closet. In the two bedroom apartment, now that I have my own closet, I hang many of my clothes nicely, and enjoy my own closet. Is it okay to have my own closet? Does having my own closet go against this Bible verse, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth”?

Two thousand years ago, the refrigerator did not exist. At that time, people could not store any food. But I have a refrigerator and a freezer. So, I can store fruit, vegetables in the refrigerator, and some ice creams in the freezer. Does having food in my refrigerator or in a freezer go against the Bible verse, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth”?

Do you have any bank accounts? I have checking and savings accounts. I save some money for my pension and retirement too. That’s because I need to take care of my own daily life, my family, and my future retirement. This does not go against the Bible verse “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth,” right?

To have my own closet, to have a refrigerator and a freezer, and to have checking and saving accounts, and to prepare my pension for my retirement does not make me slave to money. But I know the importance of money and the power of money. I do not want to ignore money. Without money, we cannot live. With the help of money, I was able to have my own

closet, a refrigerator and a freezer. I can eat daily, watch TV, drive a car, and sleep at home.

But I do not want to be a slave to money.

3. Freedom from Money

“I can do all things through him who strengthens me.” This Bible verse is very famous. We can see this many places. Some sports players like to use this Bible verse for winning a game. But if we read the former verse, we can find a different meaning. It is from Paul’s letter to the Philippians Church. Paul said, “I know what it is to have little, and I know what is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need.” Then, Paul said, “I can do all things through him who strengthens me.” What did Paul talk about here? In my understanding, can I be satisfied without my own closet? Can I be thankful with my own closet? Regardless of my own closet, can I be satisfied, thankful, and even joyful? Can I be free from money when I am poor and when I am rich? What Paul said is to live by the strength of God, regardless of our financial situations, in any and all circumstances.

4. Tithe and Pledge

One of my hopes as a Christian is to have the freedom from money. So I give. I do my spiritual practice of giving. I build up my spiritual muscle of God’s generosity. My goal is to tithe. Tithing means 10% of my income. I try to give 10% of my income. So, when I submit the pledge form, I calculate my tithe amount, and write down that amount. It is like lifting weights. When I lift, I can feel the weight. Sometimes it is heavy. I do not want to hurt my

muscles. I need to find the right weight. But if I choose the lighter one, it cannot build up my muscles. To me, 10% of my income is the right one.

4. My Faith Community

Where do I give? As you know, I cannot see God. But we know where God is. Where is my faith community? Technically speaking, because I am an appointed pastor, my membership belongs to the Cal-Nev Annual Conference, not this church. But this church is my faith community. So, I give my tithe and offering to this church. Because I serve two churches, I give half of my tithe to each church equally.

When my wife Mihyun started to work and made money before, she asked me if she needed to give offerings. Even though Mihyun and I reported our tax together, I wanted Mihyun to build up her own spiritual muscle of generosity. As I have my own closet, Mihyun can have her own spiritual muscle! So, my answer was that it would be a great start to give. And it would be great to submit the pledge form, as it could be a goal. She also asked me if she needed to give a tithe, 10% of her income. I advised her to find the right amount according to her spiritual muscle. Her goal was not the tithe yet. But I am so thankful to exercise our spiritual muscles together with my wife. Where does she give? Her membership belongs to Gilroy UMC only, because there is no idea of double membership in the United Methodist Church. But, I asked her to give half of her offering to each church equally, because I regard both Gilroy and Hollister churches as being like twin children. You do not give to both churches. But where is your faith community?

This week, I will mail the pledge form to all church members. You can write down your pledged goal amount: per week, per month, or per year. And it says “I understand that my commitment may be increased or decreased as circumstances change.” When I am sick, I do not exercise. I spend my time, energy, and money on my healing. Please remember that this pledge form is just one of many spiritual practices, and just one of many ways to love our church. There are many other ways to do spiritual practices and to love our church. One of the membership vows is to faithfully participate in the life and the ministries of our church through our prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness. But when I go to the gym to exercise, it would be great to go together. I need someone to say “One more, Hwapyoung, you can do it!”

Closing Prayer

O Lord, we love you more than anything else. Please guide us to do our spiritual practice and build up our spiritual muscles. Please give us your strength, your freedom, and your generosity! In Jesus’ name. Amen.