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Sermon 9 September 2021

Title: HHH 3 (Stewardship of Ourselves)

- Good morning church family, it is so good to be with you all today—we are glad that you have taken the time to join us and to worship with us today—we welcome those who are joining us at our Sunday Brunch here in Largs and those who are joining us online from all over the world—wherever you are, we're glad you're here.
- I hope that your week has been as good as the week that Pastor Tasha and I have had—we have enjoyed some good visits with members of the LargsNaz congregation this week, and we had a very productive and pleasant meeting with the church board on Wednesday, that morning we also had a very moving and Spirit-filled prayer meeting—we were also part of a good meeting of the Largs Churches Together this week, we made some exciting plans for the coming months—but the highlight of my week, I think, had to be when Pastor Tasha and I were treated by some dear friends in the congregation to a ride on the big ferris wheel that's been down by the prom for the past week or so—we rode it in the late afternoon on Wednesday, and it was a warm and beautiful clear day and we were able to look out at the most amazing views of this beautiful place that we are so blessed to call home—so if you get a chance when the weather is nice, you might want to treat yourself to a ride on the wheel as well.
- And speaking of wheels, Pastor Tasha and I have now got our date set for when we'll take the driving license theory test—we'll be taking it at the end of October—and we should have had all this done by now but COVID sort of put the brakes on our plans—but our test date is set now and so we have been very intentionally and steadily working through the material that we'll be tested on—all the stuff in this little Highway Code book—and there's an app on our phones that we use to study—and there's a lot to learn because there are a lot of

differences between driving in America and driving here in the UK—there are the obvious things like driving on the other side of the road and knowing how to use a roundabout, and then there are little differences like spelling the word “tire” with a y

- But I think the most surprising thing that I have learned as I’ve been studying has had to do with the wildlife here in Scotland—now back in South Carolina whenever you were driving on an Interstate highway or even a little back road it was not unusual to see a “deer crossing” marked with a sign like this—and that sign tells you that you’re in an area where deer are likely to cross the road—we have a lot of deer in the South that live in the woods and when you’re driving, especially at night you’ll see one, or maybe several, beside the road—and you have to be careful because hitting a deer is a serious thing—it can damage your car and cause injury and even death—so a deer crossing lets you know to be alert because there are deer in the area
- Now I haven’t read anything about deer crossings yet, but I have discovered that here in the UK, there are zebra crossings—I guess y’all call them ZEH-bra crossings, and not just that but there are also pelican crossings and puffin crossings, and even toucan crossings—and I had no idea that there was such diversity-- such exotic wildlife in this country, and I just can’t wait til we start driving and we get to see some of these animals—back in the states you’d have to go to a zoo to see anything like that—what a fascinating country this is!
- Now all joking aside, we do know what a zebra crossing is—but we didn’t really before we started studying for our driving test.
- One thing I’ve noticed, though, as we’ve read and taken practice tests is that the study material isn’t just about the rules of the road—it’s not just about what you’re supposed to do or not do as you drive your car—but there’s also quite a bit about how to take care of your car—about maintenance that needs to be done so that the brakes, and the tyres and the engine and the windscreen wipers—all the various parts of all the various systems of the car stay in good working order so that your car lasts as long as possible and so that it is always

ready to do what you need it to do—so that it runs well and doesn't break down unexpectedly

- And it really is a blessing to have a car—if God has blessed you with the opportunity to have a vehicle, then you really ought to take care of it, because really, taking care of your car is a kind of stewardship—it's taking care of what you have and not wasting it—that's what good stewardship is
- In our church's Vision Statement, it's there in your listening guide, we use that idea of "good stewardship" to talk about health—we say that health "includes good stewardship of ourselves."
- Today is the third sermon in our series on Hospitality, Health, and Holiness, in which we're revisiting the three areas of focus in our church's Vision Statement. Last week we talked about Hospitality—Christian Hospitality, and next week we'll take a look at the health of our environment, creation care, before we conclude the series with a sermon on holiness.
- But today we're going to talk about Health—good stewardship of ourselves—
- Now good stewardship of anything—of a car or our finances or any resource, asks this simple question--it says "I have these resources—what is the best way to make them last and to do as much as possible with them to accomplish what they were entrusted to me for?"
- And so Good stewardship of ourselves says—"when I look at myself as a resource provided by God to accomplish His purposes, what is the best way to do as much as possible with myself in the time that I am given to accomplish what I have been given myself for? How do I ensure that my life—my self-- is not wasted?"
- And today I want to look at 3 passages of scripture that give us some insight into what stewardship of ourselves is all about—the first will be from the Gospel of Luke, chapter 10, the second from Paul's letter to the Romans, chapter 12, and then we'll return to Luke's Gospel, chapter 14.
- But before we can talk about what stewardship of ourselves means, we need to talk a little bit about what our SELF means—what do we mean when we say

“ourselves”? What is that, exactly?

- There are several different models of the SELF—you know, they’re all really metaphors, just ways of saying “here’s one way of thinking about ourselves” here’s a representation of what we mean when we talk about ourselves—myself or yourself
- One very basic model says that ourselves are made up of a mental component and a physical component—and so we talk about mental health as something distinct from physical health—but we also know that those two components, the mental and the physical, are connected
- For instance, you may have heard Pastor Tasha and I talk about what’s called the “gut-brain axis” before
- And the gut-brain axis is just a way that science talks about the way what goes on in our guts, the microbial activity and the effects of what we eat, for instance, but also things like the exercise we get and the drugs we take—things that go on in our guts—affect our brains—the way we think and feel and even behave
- But this is a two-way street, because the brain can also have effects on the gut as well—when we’re under stress, or when we’re grieving, or when we’re happy, or if there is an imbalance of the neurotransmitters, those chemicals that our brains think and feel with, then the brain can have an effect on the gut
- But talking about the connection between the gut and the brain is really a way of talking about the connection between the body and the mind, so we could call it the mind-body axis—and there is nothing so awfully new about the fact that the body—what you do with it, and what you put into it, or if it is affected by disease-- the body can have an effect on the mind—when you’re sick you may not think clearly, or a brisk walk along the beach may help you to think clearly, or when kids eat a ton of sugar—or when you do—you may feel like you’re bouncing off the walls—AND in the same way, your mind affects your body—people who live with chronic pain can use mental exercises to control it--when you are stressed, your stomach hurts—when you’re scared your heart beats faster—when we grieve, our heart actually hurts (and people die from broken-

heart syndrome—it is a real thing—grief can kill you)—stage-fright can make you throw up

- **And again, this is common sense, really, we all know that “you are what you eat,” and that “as a man thinketh, so he is”**
- And so, scientifically speaking, this is one model—one way of talking about ourselves—and it’s fine when we’re looking at ourselves scientifically or medically
- But this model is incomplete—from a Christian point of view—and from the point of view of many other traditions, because we are not just minds and bodies that interact—there is a third component—the spirit
- And because we--ourselves—are made up of mind, body and spirit, we can talk about the spiritual, the physical, and the mental components of ourselves—and these three interact—they do not exist in isolation
- Let me give you an example—imagine the Apostle Paul in prison—PHYSICALLY: he’s starved, beaten, filthy, he’s in poor physical condition; and MENTALLY—he’s in prison—he’s stressed, he’s aware that he has been beaten and could be killed—but SPIRITUALLY—he’s singing hymns, praising God, praying and writing letters to the church about the gospel of Jesus—and because of the effect of his SPIRITUAL condition upon his mental and physical condition he can rejoice ALWAYS, give thanks in every situation, and pray without ceasing.
- Our selves are SPIRITUAL, PHYSICAL and MENTAL—and those 3 aspects interact with each other
- And this is why—let’s look at the first passage of scripture for today, Luke 10, this is why Luke, the physician, writes that when Jesus tells the lawyer who asks him how to inherit eternal life—life that starts right now, not just after he’s dead, but life that is abundant starting NOW—Jesus doesn’t just say, well just believe, and you’ll get your ticket to heaven and nothing else will be expected of you—no, Jesus calls this man, and US, to discipleship that involves our entire selves, and so what is called the greatest commandment elsewhere is: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your

strength, and with all your mind; (that's the spiritual, the physical and the mental)

- and your neighbour as yourself." THAT's that radical CHRISTIAN HOSPITALITY we talked about last week –now I want you to think about something for a minute—most of the time when we read that, "love your neighbour as yourself" we think of it as one command—it's a given that you love yourself, so love your neighbour like that—but there are two commands there—love yourself, and love your neighbour like that—you have to love yourself in order for that to make any sense—and just as part of loving your neighbour is **taking care** of them—making sure they're fed, and clothed, and sheltered, and healthy—then part of loving yourself is **taking care of yourself**—so we can read that command as "take care of your neighbour as you take care of yourself"—and take care of yourself—get enough rest, eat well, keep yourself healthy in mind, body and spirit, and make sure others are just as well as you are
- 28 And so Jesus says to him, **do this, and you will live.**
- Do this and you will **LIVE.**
- And so our first point is that good stewardship of myself involves ALL OF ME—not **just** the spiritual side (not just belief and worship and prayer), not just the mental side (not just intellectual agreement and understanding and our emotions), not just the physical (those things we do or don't do with our bodies, our behaviours) but all three—God requires all three
- And IF we are to love the Lord with ALL our SPIRIT, MIND AND BODY, then good stewardship requires that we take care of our spiritual health (we pray, and worship, and study the scriptures) but we also keep our minds sharp and clear, we do those things that strengthen it, and avoid those things that weaken it—similarly with our bodies, we keep them as fit as we can in our circumstances, and we wear masks and follow the guidelines and get vaccines when there's a pandemic, not just to protect ourselves but to protect others—and we REST when we need to—before we need it, even—we do what we need to do to heal, to be restored when we need to—so that we, as John Wesley said, can do all the

good we can for as long as we can as God gives us the ability—

- and did you know that John Wesley was so interested in teaching folks how to keep themselves physically and mentally healthy that he wrote a sort of medical handbook—called the Primitive Physick-- it's not so much a list of rules, dos and don't's—as it is a book of advice —it has advice about diet and exercise and treating disease and keeping healthy—now why would John Wesley take the time to write such a book?
- because John Wesley understood that as followers of Christ we are called to a ministry—**we have things to do—and we need to be fit to do them**— Not unlike a car that we need to take care of, and make sure its systems are in good working order so that it is reliable and works when we need it
- **we need to be READY to do what we are called to do—we need to get ready—spiritually, physically and mentally---and we need to stay ready—mentally, physically, and spiritually—and so good stewardship of ourselves involves ALL of ourselves—not just the spiritual, not just the physical, not just the mental—but God requires all 3.**
- Let's move on to our second point—the Apostle Paul writes about stewardship of ourselves in his Epistle to the Romans, Chapter 12, this is in your listening guide, and he says,
- I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.
- Let's stop right there—what is Paul saying? Present your BODIES—the word there is SOMA—it means body, the physical body—the flesh and bones that ARE you, the corpse that is left when you die—and Paul says we are to present this body as a LIVING sacrifice—you might want to write that down—not a dead sacrifice—a LIVING sacrifice, that LIVES and does things, and is kept holy and acceptable to God
- And Paul tells us that doing this—giving our BODIES to God's will is our **spiritual** service—other translations say “reasonable service” but that word

“service” is just another way of saying “WORSHIP”—so that offering our BODIES to God is a form of worship—

- And so, **here the SPIRITUAL AND THE PHYSICAL INTERACT**—and what does Paul tell us next?
- ² Do not be conformed to this world,^(a)—don’t do the stuff that the world does; don’t do what everybody else is doing;—**LIVE DIFFERENTLY**—
- In Phillipians 3 Paul tells us that ¹⁸ “many live as enemies of the cross of Christ . . . ¹⁹ Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things.
- their god is the belly- their appetites—they worship, they live for, their appetites—and their end is destruction—they do not **LAST**—they are **WASTED**—
- I remember back when I was a teenager, my friends would sometimes say to me—friends who indulged in certain mind altering substances—**MAN, I got so wasted this past weekend--** if that’s not a description of **POOR STEWARDSHIP** of one’s self I don’t know what is—**WASTED--**
- **but we are called to live differently--- we are called to live differently**
- So **PAUL** has mentioned the **PHYSICAL**—present your **BODY** as a **LIVING SACRIFICE**, and the **SPIRITUAL**—your spiritual worship—**we can probably predict what’s coming NEXT**—look at verse 2
- Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the **renewing of your minds**, so that you may **discern** what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.
- And here is the **MENTAL** component—be transformed by the **RENEWING** of your **MINDS**—
- and I want you to really get a hold of what Paul says next here—now remember that Paul comes from the tradition of the Pharisees, where regulations and laws about what to **EAT**, and how to **BEHAVE**, and who to associate with, and how to keep yourself **CLEAN**, are **WRITTEN DOWN** and enforced by religious leaders and experts in the **LAW**—

- But really understand what Paul is saying here—be transformed by the renewing of your mind—WHY? SO THAT **YOU MAY DISCERN WHAT IS THE WILL OF GOD—WHAT IS GOOD AND ACCEPTABLE AND PERFECT—**
- Paul is not saying be transformed and renewed in your mind so you can follow this list of do's and don'ts—he says be transformed so that YOU can DISCERN what God wants you to do, one step at a time, one day at a time—**Guided by the HOLY SPIRIT**—a LIVING sacrifice until your race is finished—**that's good stewardship of yourself**
- Now I want to make one more point about Good stewardship of ourselves—and it's this--Good stewardship of ourselves involves letting go (hear this now)—letting go of things that need to be let go of.
- You may recall that in our first sermon of this series we looked at the 14th Chapter of Luke, and right there at the beginning of that chapter we find the account of Jesus healing a man with dropsy—on the Sabbath, in front of a group of Pharisees and lawyers.
- And I want to return to those four verses, and unpack them just a bit more.
- Beginning with verse 1, Luke writes:
- 1 On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the sabbath, they were watching him closely. 2 Just then, in front of him, there was a man who had dropsy. 3 And Jesus asked the lawyers and Pharisees, “Is it lawful to cure people on the sabbath, or not?” 4 But they were silent. So Jesus took him and healed him, and sent him away.
- So Jesus and these Pharisees and lawyers--they're on the way to the house to eat together—and as they are going there--suddenly, just then, there is in front of Jesus a man with dropsy. A man who is ill, who is unwell. We mentioned a couple of weeks ago that we might say today that he has generalized edema—
- That is, Luke--the physician---is telling us that, as we would say back in South Carolina, this man is all swole up
- This man is swollen—he is retaining fluid—he can't get rid of it like he needs to—he's all swole up in his legs most likely, and his abdomen, throughout his

body-- he probably has trouble breathing, trouble getting around, his movement is restricted, he is bound up by what he is retaining-- he is in bondage--he is burdened by all the extra weight he's carrying,

- he most likely has trouble sleeping because when he lies down all that fluid he's retaining constricts his lungs and he feels like he's drowning, and so he can't rest—
- he is probably in constant pain, he aches—his skin is stretched, his circulation impaired--because he is retaining what he needs to get rid of—
- physically, in his body, he has the dropsy
- You know it occurs to me that you can be all swole up spiritually too— and mentally--you can have the spiritual dropsy—you can have the mental dropsy— when we retain that stuff we need to get rid of—bad habits—and apathy—and GRIEF--and laziness--and worry and stress—AND BUSY-NESS-- and uncertainty and insecurity—and anxiety and guilt and SIN and shame and resentment and grudges and addictions and pride and self-righteousness and bitterness and poor self-esteem and unforgiveness—we can be spiritually all swole up; all swole up mentally —in our mind and in our Spirit we can be “bound” and restricted and in pain and suffocated by that which we can't let go of—
- we can feel like we're drowning when we just need some rest—we need to let go of these burdens--spiritual dropsy, mental dropsy.
- Luke tells us this man has the dropsy.
- Now you'll remember that we are not told who this man is, or any other details about him, nor are we told that he SAYS anything.
- **All we know is that he is in need and he is in the PRESENCE of Jesus.**
- **All we know is that he is in need, and he is in the PRESENCE of Jesus.**
- And you'll remember that Luke tells us that Jesus **seizes this man, lays hold of him, aggressively takes him—grabs him, and heals him, and sets him free, releases him—**

- Now when Jesus asks the Pharisees if it's lawful or not to cure on the Sabbath, the word he uses is "*therapeusai*"—it's where we get the word therapy and therapeutic—it means to give therapy, to use natural elements in order to give treatment that heals a **physical** ailment—to care for a patient—it is what doctors do—but here, when Luke tells us that Jesus grabs this man and heals him, the word is *iasato*—a word that's used for SUPERNATURAL healing— healing that comes from God and healing that affects the whole person— healing that has PHYSICAL and MENTAL and SPIRITUAL effects---healing that is complete and whole
- To be healed of the dropsy is to be set free from the negative effects of retaining ALL that stuff that needs to be let go of, and I think we should understand that **in the physical and mental and spiritual sense**. This man is no longer burdened, bound, restricted, in pain, drowning—he is no longer all swole up
- He loses the weight he is burdened with—
- Losing weight physically when we need to is one way of getting healthy, but sometimes we may need to lose some spiritual weight, some mental weight too—those things that lay heavy on our minds and our spirits
- **Maybe you need to be in the presence of Jesus and have him grab hold of you and heal you, transform you, release you of your burdens, and set you free--**
- sometimes we let ourselves get burdened, weighed down, swole up, and coming into the presence of Jesus together can be a time to let go of those things we're retaining, those things we need to let go of, and let Jesus' presence bring healing so that we can be set free and leave refreshed and renewed.
- **Maybe you need some of that that today. Maybe you'd say, Lord, I need the power of your presence this morning**
- Let's pray together,

- Lord we come into your presence this morning longing for renewal, longing for your touch, longing for the power of your Spirit to breathe afresh and anew into our midst, into each one of us.
- And Lord we worship you by presenting our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to you, and we ask that you would transform us, renew our minds that we might not be conformed to the world, but that we might love you with all our heart, soul, mind and strength—spiritually, mentally and physically—and that we would love our neighbours as ourselves.
- We ask all these things in the powerful name of Jesus, Amen and amen