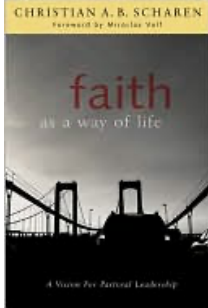


Faith Aflame: 360 Degrees

Stewardship Challenges



Session One – Part Two



In *Faith as a Way of Life*, Christian Scharen writes, “The Christian faith is a way of life lived in response to Jesus’ invitation to ‘follow me’ (Mark 8:34)...that life of faith lived in response to Jesus’ call is shaped according to a basic pattern: gathering in worship before God and scattering in witness and service for the sake of the world.” (pages 3-4)

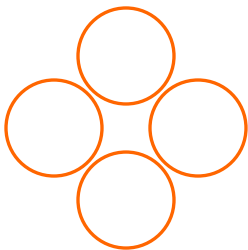
“Christian faith is a gift of God that entails dying to one way of life and rising to another lived not for ourselves, but for God...it is a way of life marked by the mysterious union with Christ described by Paul in these words: ‘it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me’” (Galatians 2:20)...Christian discipleship, and the life of the Christian ministry that serves such discipleship, is a way of life not for its own sake, as if sectarian purity were the goal, but for the sake of the world.” (page 4)

“One of the most pressing needs of pastoral ministry is to develop, sustain, and legitimize reflection on Christian faith not simply as a set of propositions to believe, commandments to obey, or rituals to perform, but as an orienting force that impacts every aspect of daily life.” (page 5)

Scharen then asks the question, “Do Christians practice faith as a way of life, and do pastoral leaders foster it in communities they lead?”

Compartmentalization

One of the major obstacles to faith as a way of life is compartmentalization.



Matthew 6:24

Compartmentalization is dividing one’s life into various competing parts. As a result we are fragmented and exhausted. Scharen quotes sociologist Robert Bellah who wrote, “We rush from work to family to school to recreation to church, if there is time for church, shifting gears and changing personalities, it would almost seem, each time we move from one context to another.... [W]e jump into our cars and rush from one impersonal location to another, always hoping we can find a little solace at the end of the day at ‘home.’ But at home most of us spend several hours in front of a television set watching things jump around from drama to comedy to sports, always interrupted by incessant advertisements, in a way even more chaotic than the rest of our lives.” (page 15)

- What are some of the compartments of our lives?
- What does this do to the life of the steward?

God’s Steward

Individualism**Romans 12:4-5**

Another major obstacle to faith as a way of life is individualism.

Scharen writes, “The problem remains that powerful American cultural traditions shape the way people in our culture talk about their lives. Whether called ‘personalism’ or ‘individualism’ of one sort or another, when such cultural traditions become a primary language, and faith a secondary language, we fall out of the practice of thinking and talking about our lives in ways that are explicitly shaped by faith. The verse is true: the primary language of individualism reorients faith so that it too becomes merely personal – a conversation between Jesus and me – or worse, a calculation about how much I need to do for God in order to receive a blessing in my life.” (pages 28-29)

Scharen describes two kinds of individualism: utilitarian and expressive.

Utilitarian:

“The utilitarian individual fundamentally sees human life in terms of the challenge to maximize self-interest...Today, the life course of many Americans is so profoundly captive to this utilitarian individualist vision that it is almost impossible for many to think in other terms. The American dream has become a consumer dream of accumulation – of status, money, and material things. Individuals sacrifice, work hard, and play by the rules to get ahead.” (pages 33-34)

- How does this kind of individualism impact the life of the steward?
- How does this kind of individualism impact the life of the congregation?

Expressive:

In describing expressive individualism, Scharen states, “this version of individualism sees human life as the task of expressing each person’s unique feelings and inner being.” A shift has occurred from people consciously deciding to live in a way that is good in itself, to freely choosing to do or experience something because “I like it.” (page 35)

- How does this kind of individualism impact the life of the steward?
- How does this kind of individualism impact the life of the congregation?

Prayer:

Almighty God, we belong to You. All that we have comes from You; family and friends, health, possessions and energy, leisure and abilities. Forgive us for letting the world shape us instead of being shaped by Your Word. Direct us to share in the blessings of giving and the happiness of receiving. We ask this in the name of Jesus, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.

