

**The Gifted, Faithful Steward of God -
GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER**

RBC Message, August 14, 2011

To borrow a quote the subject of our study today he said,

“I always look forward to introductions as opportunities to learn something about myself.”

I love studying and teaching from the Bible

For me, I really enjoy speaking about the characters of the Bible . . . or even of the men and women who have served in the ministry

So in preparing for our study of GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER, I struggled . . . because I wanted to make him someone he is not

If GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER were one of the Apostles . . . like Peter, James or John. . . my approach would be a simple one

If our study focused on Paul the Evangelist, or Billy Graham or someone else who was a giant IN the ministry . . . fine, I'm all over it

But we know GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER was not an Apostle or an evangelist nor even a member of the clergy

He was a very simple man

He never preached a sermon . . .

But the life that he lived, IS THE SERMON that we will study today

And there's the secret to the greatness of his life

There's the message for all us to take away this morning

GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER served God, without fanfare, decade after decade, from the humble station that God had assigned to him

He once wrote "that if we do not take Christ seriously in our every day life, all is a failure because it is an every day affair"

The title of our study comes from the writings of the Apostle Peter

God's word says

¹⁰ Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms. ¹¹ If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

1 Peter 4:10-11

What does it mean to be a “steward”

Here is one definition that I found to be quite appropriate:
“one who administers anything as the agent of another”

Parents are “stewards” of the lives and souls given to them for a season in strange containers called . . . children

Pastors are “stewards” of the Gospel . . . which they hold then give to others

In each instance, the faithful steward is holding something, and acting as an agent of someone else, for the benefit of others

All good stewards are good servants . . . but I suggest that the difference is that a steward has actual possession of something of value

If there ever was a “gifted, faithful steward” of the Almighty . . . it was George Washington Carver

Imagine being on a small farm, in the 1800’s, in rural Missouri

There is a young couple, they have children, they are slaves

One day, there is an accident on the farm, the father is dead

The young widow and her children are put on the auction block . . . they will be sold

The family is purchased, so that the widow can be a companion for the slave master’s wife

The slave master has a unique name

He’s called “Moses,” . . .

That “let my people go” kind of Moses

Moses Carver . . . is a man who lived up to his name

But in the fall of 1861, a terrible thing happened

The slave woman’s infant baby got really, really sick with the whooping cough

A terrible disease that caused coughing fits

It would be decades before a vaccine would be developed

And at that time, it was very likely to be fatal for infants

Yet the greater tragedy was that while that infant was barely holding on, . . .

The slave widow, her daughter and her sick baby are kidnapped by Confederate soldiers called “night raiders”

Slave master Moses was willing to pay a ransom for all of them

Through a bounty hunter, he offered his best horse . . . his very highly valued horse

This was the horse that was needed for the heavy work of the farm

The kidnappers kept the horse . . .

The kidnappers kept the slave woman and the slave woman’s daughter

But left on the ground the baby . . . the sickly, sickly baby

That baby was named “George” . . . after his father

So here he was . . . our George, an orphan before he could even walk

When he learned to talk, he stuttered

But not to worry, because a doctor told the family that because of his health, George would never live to see the age of 21

It was not until he was 10 years old that **George was given a full name**

By then, all slaves had been freed

He was finally given a full name . . . George Washington Carver

Carver . . . because that was the name of the family who raised him

Washington . . . because he was always so honest . . . like the 1st president

And when he received his name . . . he
prayed to God that he would live to bring
honor to such a fine name

On this side of history, we can say with
conviction, that God answered his prayer

Even by that young age of 10, plants thrived under the care of
GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER

He was called, the “plant doctor” by people from all over
his rural county in Missouri

More about young George in a moment . . .

As is our Pastor’s custom, in the interest of full disclosure, I will
advise that **the majority of the source material** for today’s
message comes from 3 books

Man’s Slave Becomes God’s Scientist, George Washington
Carver, by David Collins

George Washington Carver, His Life & Faith in His Own
Words, by William J. Federer

Heroes in Black History, True Stories from the lives of
Christian Heroes, by Dave and Neta Jackson

I deeply want to thank Pastor Mark not only for the privilege of standing before you today

By the way, . . . for those of you who do not know

Today is Pastor Mark Adams birthday

But I also want to thank Pastor Mark for his vision in bringing to our attention these giants of the faith as we have engaged in our studies on “Becoming . . . more like Christ”

These people of diverse backgrounds of every kind

Most people today have at least heard of the name of George Washington Carver

For any person of color like me,

Who grew up in an all Black neighborhood, . . .

and who attended mostly all Black schools

You surely heard of the name and knew something about the person

But it was confusing

There was George Washington

And George Washington Carver

There was Martin Luther

And there was Martin Luther King

But go into **any American city** and you can immediately tell if they have a sizeable African American population by learning about their high schools

It was **the high schools** that gave the clues

If there was a Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, Paul Lawrence Dunbar, Benjamin Banneker or George Washington Carver high school, . . .then you knew

I attended Frederick Douglass HS in Baltimore

The Black HS for West Baltimore

Thurgood Marshall, Ethel Ennis, Cab Calloway, Dru Hill, Parren Mitchell all attended Douglass

Paul Lawrence Dunbar was the Black HS in East Baltimore with the reputation for athletics

Reggie Lewis, Sam Cassel, Tupac Shakur, Mugsy Bogues, Chief Judge Robert Bell

Appropriately, Carver was the school which came along years later, where students learned valuable trades and science

IS THERE ANYONE ELSE WHO ATTENDED AN ALL BLACK HS (PAUL JORDAN, GLADYS MCCLAIN)

In any of these schools which were designated for Blacks, it was expected that you would be taught the history of prominent African Americans

Yet, because of the decisions of the Supreme Court which threw God and Jesus out of the public schools, until now, I never knew of the deep religious character of this American hero

So this is a long way of me trying to show how grateful I am, not only for the fact that Pastor Mark assigned to me this worthy subject

But also that he provided me with the right materials

Materials that did not erase the spiritual motivations given by the Almighty in the life of George Washington Carver

I am already on record as making a **rather bold statement about the legacy of the African American**

My observation is that if any African American, we only need to look into his or her family history about 4-5 generations in order to find one common denominator

Poverty . . . a direct by-product of the institution called slavery

But there is another far more favorable by-product of that American tragedy

A strong, and nearly universal acceptance of the Gospel of Jesus Christ

It is a foundation upon which our faith system as a people group is built

If slavery destroyed the ability of the African American to trace his or her heritage back to the shores of West Africa

It is also responsible for a nearly monolithic faith foundation that we share

You won't find many African American Hindu's

Or Buddhists, Hare Kristnas, Mormons, or other religious groups

GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER is also a beneficiary of the same solid foundation

Little GEORGE also wanted to learn how to read . . . in a desperate way

But the white schools in his county would not enroll colored children

So imagine, at the age of 14, leaving your home . . . in order to get . . . an education

No family to move with, no friend to look in on you, no bankroll to finish the effort

Yet, God gave Little GEORGE a passion for education

And Little GEORGE would not let the obstacles of poverty, racism, or anything else defeat him

Little GEORGE said that he relied upon the word of God

Romans 8:35, 37

³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶ As it is written:

“For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”^[1]

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors
through him who loved us.

**Do any of us have the courage of this 14 year old boy, to
rely upon the Word of God in the face of countless
hardships?**

Hiding out in barns, doing odd jobs for a meal, having
no wardrobe to speak of, etc, etc

Little GEORGE walked to Neosha, Missouri

We’ve all heard these “half truths” offered by old people

You know the one about how they had to walk to
school 7 miles, uphill, both directions in the snow with
no shoes

Little GEORGE is the closest thing to being the living
truth of such; sadly our time together will allow us to
study such together

He was eventually taken in by former slaves who attended
the AME church

Who gave him a used Bible as a Christmas gift

He began to read his Bible every day

In about a year, and after learning everything he could in Neosha, Little GEORGE hitched a wagon ride to Ft. Scott, Kansas in order to learn some more

He got a job cooking for a wealthy family in order to pay for board, clothing and school

Then he saw a man get lynched in 1879, so he ran away

He ran to a city in Kansas to attend school, then to another, before finally finishing high school in a third town

But that thirst for learning was still there

He wasn't so little anymore, and GEORGE wanted to go to college

GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER was admitted to Highland College in Highland, Kansas

He spent his last dime to get there, trusting that God would see him through

The day he arrived on campus, he was called into the Dean's office

He was told in no uncertain terms, "get out" . . .

While they did not ask GEORGE if he was a Negro, they threw him out anyway

But GEORGE did not give up

He finally was able to get into college, Simpson College . . .
. at the tender age of 30

For nearly a month, he lived on a diet of beef suet, corn meal and prayer

Beef suet is animal fat, similar to lard, which cannot be digested unless it is cut into very small pieces

While at college GEORGE wrote that

“I remain your humble servant of God. I am learning to trust and realize the blessed results from trusting in Him every day.”

While in college, GEORGE did something that our college kids don't do enough he found a church to attend

In another letter he wrote,

“I realize that God has a great work for me to do and consequently I must be very careful on my health. . . . I am glad the outlook for the upbuilding of the kingdom of Christ is so good. We are having a great revival here. 40 seeking last night and 25 arose for prayers at the close of the service.”

GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER did not fall away from following God

Our hero eventually transferred to Iowa State College of Agriculture and Mechanical Arts

GEORGE opened a laundry service for other students in order to make money

He would wash their clothes . . . so that he could pay for school

He became a great artist. . . receiving Honorable Mention at the 1893 World's Fair for his painting called "The Yucca Plant"

While at Iowa State GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER wrote,

"Oh how I wish the people would awake up from their lethargy and come out soul and body for Christ. . . . let us pray that the Lord will completely guide us in all things, and that we may gladly be led by Him."

GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER earned a bachelor's degree, then a masters degree and became a faculty member at the college

Things were really looking up for him

His former professors moved on to high positions in the government, with a couple becoming the Secretary of Agriculture

He taught the children of famous and powerful people and was considered one of the brightest “up and coming” professors of his day

But in 1896, Professor CARVER’s life took a turn in a very different direction

He accepted the call to teach at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama which had opened 15 years earlier

Nowadays, two thoughts come to mind when the name Tuskegee is mentioned

The Tuskegee Airmen, the esteemed unit of African American pilots and support soldiers of World War II

And Tuskegee University, a historically Black university

Before it was a university, it was this Institute

The invitation to teach came from the legendary Booker T. Washington

It was a call based on the need to be of service to others

Here is what Booker T wrote

“Tuskegee institute seeks to provide education - a means for survival to those who attend.

Our students are poor, often starving. They travel miles of torn roads, across years of poverty. We teach them to read and write, but words cannot fill stomachs. They need to learn how to plant and harvest crops . . .

I cannot offer you money, position or fame. The first two you have. The last, from the place you now occupy, you will no doubt achieve.

These things I now ask you to give up. I offer you in their place - work - hard work - the challenge of bringing people from degradation, poverty and waste . . . to full manhood.”

Professor CARVER responded by saying “yes”

I “shall be glad to cooperate with you in doing all I can through Christ who strengtheneth me to better the condition of our people. . . . Providence permitting, I will be there in Nov.”

GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER has already shown to the world that God has gifted him . . . now he’s moving on to maturing into his role as “God’s steward”

He's holding knowledge that needs to be delivered in way that people can receive it

You should know, that the South had a king

His name was "cotton"

King Cotton was the cash crop of the South

People did not know how to grow anything else

And for every year that a farmer grew cotton, the ground would produce less the next year

To make things worse, there was a new threat to King Cotton

The notorious Boll Weevil was destroying everything

The Boll Weevil's major food source was the white ball of cotton

The Evil Boll Weevil was eating the South alive

Upon arriving at Tuskegee, Professor CARVER needed to set up a lab

The school had no money to buy equipment

So, he marched his students to the dump and the back alleys of Tuskegee

They collected: bottles, cooking pots, jar lids, wire, rusty lamps, china dishes, rubber, curtain rods and flatirons

They punched holes into pieces of tin to make strainers to test soil samples,

They labeled canning jars for chemicals, broken bottles were cut into beakers

An old ink bottle with a cork and string was made into a Bunsen burner

Keeping God first, Professor CARVER named his laboratory “God’s Little Workshop”

The very clear theme of Prof. Carver’s life is to do everything, everything to be a good steward of God

He credited divine inspiration for giving him the ideas of how to perform experiments

He gave a speech in NYC, where he said

“No books ever go into my laboratory. The thing I am to do and the way of doing it are revealed to me. I never have to grope for methods. The method is revealed to me the moment I am inspired to create something new. Without God to draw aside the curtain I would be helpless.”

Do we ask God enough, to reveal His Will to us, in everything we do?

He would lock himself in his lab.

He said that it was only when he was alone could he “draw close enough to God to discover His secrets”

When was the last time you “locked yourself in” someplace with God?

GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER not only taught his students who came to him. . . but all of the farmers he could get to

He taught them about the need to rotate their crops, that is planting different types of crops in different seasons so that the soil would be nourished

This method revolutionized Southern agriculture

And the Boll Weevil moved on . . .

If it wasn't cotton, the Evil Weevil didn't want it

GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER outfitted a lab on a wagon and he took his show on the road teaching his techniques

His **school on wheels** reached the farmers who had no way of reaching him

GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER considered the “school on wheels” his most important work

He taught people

Medical remedies from herbs and plants

How to brighten up their buildings with paints from color rich dirt

How to dry fruits and vegetables to feed families through the year

His “school on wheels” was so successful, that many more wagons were added

In 1918 the State of Alabama provided trucks for the school

As our Scripture verse states from 1 Peter 4:10:

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.

GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER lived this verse

One of GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER's biggest challenges came after he persuaded the first large group of farmers to grow something other than cotton

An angry farmer threatened him with serious bodily injury when his farm produced a large peanut crop . . .

But no one wanted to buy peanuts

Professor CARVER was crushed with guilt about the poverty he had inflicted upon this man who trusted him

So, Professor CARVER went into his prayer closet . . . and had a talk with God

He asked. . . "Dear God, why did you create this universe?"

The answer came back to him . . . "your little mind asks too much"

So he asked . . . "What was man made for?"

"You're still asking too much. Try once more."

"Dear Lord . . . why did you make the peanut?"

"Now you're asking questions your own size, and I can reveal the answers."

So, he ran to his lab . . . had his students bring in bushels of peanuts. . . and he went to work

He did not come out . . . for 6 days

He found marketable products from the peanut

Cooking oil, rubbing oil, soap, margarine and cosmetics

Hour after hour, for 6 days he prayed to God

“My Lord, stay with me and guide my hands”

He worked for days and nights on end

He found fats, sugars, starches and resins in the peanut

Inks, dyes, shoe polish, flour, candy . . . even shaving cream

When he finally staggered from his lab 6 days later . . . he had the financial and marketing answers that the entire economy of the South desperately needed

Mills for shelling and crushing peanuts sprang up across the South . . . and there a new king in the South

A Peanut King

Professor CARVER sought God's will for the best use of his gifts

And God answered his prayers

But wait, there's more

While GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER was a great professor, he also taught the Bible

Six people came to his office one evening and asked him to teach God's Word on Sunday evenings

He used maps, charts, plants, and geological specimens to illustrate Creation and the Bible

Within 3 months, attendance spiked to 114 people

GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER dedicated his life to helping the common man make a living

He broke the death grip that King Cotton had on life in the South

He developed 300 new products from the peanut

Milk, paper, and shampoo,

Metal polish, adhesives, and plastics just to name a few

GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER discovered peanut butter

But more importantly, GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER worked to develop a huge market for his peanut products

GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER never sought a patent for his peanut butter or his other food products

WHY? - because he believed that food products were gifts from God

Of his discoveries he said “God gave them to me. . . how can I sell them to someone else.”

He believed in Philippians 4:19

¹⁹ And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.

His day usually started at 4 am in a small garden by asking God what he should do that day

And then he would go and do it

Professor CARVER was awarded many, many honors by the likes of the Royal Society of London, The Sprinarn Medal for Distinguished Service, and several honorary doctorate degrees

He developed an oil and massage therapy for infantile paralysis and personally treated over 250 patients

It was the only successful treatment of its day

He spoke before Congress and was appointed to several high positions with the Dept of Agriculture

The great industrialist Henry Ford, of the Ford Motor Co., became a good friend and tried to hire Professor CARVER away from Tuskegee

He even built a school and a museum in honor of Professor CARVER

The great inventor Thomas Edison offered him a salary of over \$100,000, to come and work for him, . . . but Professor CARVER turned him down

That would be equal to almost \$1,000,000 in today's economy

Prof. CARVER was visited by Vice President Coolidge and President Franklin D. Roosevelt

He corresponded with and advised Mohandas Gandhi

The 1st national monument to an individual other than a US president was named in honor of GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER

A Polaris Missile Submarine was commissioned in his name

Countless public schools, college buildings and programs, libraries and parks, highways, state gardens, etc.

Yet, GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER was a man of great humility

He refused to take a raise in salary

When he died in 1943, he was receiving the same \$1500 per year salary for 40 years

40 years!!!

We're talking about the same salary that he had during the Great Depression

We're talking about the same salary he had during WWI

We're talking about the same salary he had during WWII

No raise . . . no cost of living adjustment . . . no promotion

Even then, the school treasurer was usually mad at Professor CARVER for not cashing his paychecks

And whatever he possessed, he left it all to the Tuskegee Institute

After receiving very high praise from a very high source, GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER wrote very clearly that

“I am not so good. I am just trying through Christ, to be a better man each day.”

Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall is reported as saying something to the effect that

“A man is not measured merely by the heights that he has achieved, but also by the depths from which he has come.”

GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER himself wrote, “The secret of my success? It is simple. It is found in the Bible, ‘In all thy ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct thy paths’”

How are we doing Redland . . . are we acknowledging Him in all things?

GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER lived as a “faithful steward”

A “gifted and faithful steward”

A true steward of God’s gifts in every sense

Through this study I have been reminded that God does not require us to be a Peter, James or John

We are not all called to be evangelists like Paul or Billy Graham

But we are called to live our lives as sermons for Him

God has gifted each of us . . . even the impoverished, sickly, stuttering, ex-slaves among us

All we have to be . . . are “faithful stewards” of whatever it is he has placed in our possession

It may be as something as simple . . . as a peanut

We are still called . . .to be faithful

The epitaph of GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER reads: “He could have added fortune to fame, but caring for neither, he found happiness and honor in helping the world.”

It permitted, I would add one more line . . .

“Well, thy gifted and faithful steward”

I’m going to ask a member of our pastoral staff to come forward, as I close us in prayer