


Stewardship

To describe a product's success, newspapers sometimes state, "If all the (type of item) ever sold were lined up end-to-end, they'd reach from the earth to the moon and back." Sometimes, this line is long enough to reach the moon multiple times. It's an easy way to help readers imagine the large quantities involved.

There's no way of knowing how far all the donations given by Christians would reach if lined up. Of course, it isn't necessary to measure them in terms of reaching to the moon and back.

Instead, think about reaching needy families across the world with donations to a livestock program. Think about reaching students across the country with scholarships to help them go to college. Think about reaching the hungry in a nearby city with sandwiches made in your church's kitchen. Think about reaching the hearts of people sitting in the pews around you with musical or dramatic performances.


Finally, think of how the church has reached out to you, in one way or in many. Then try to think of other ways you can help others with your time, talent or treasure. Could you give time to help shut-ins maintain their property? A check to help finance a church's expansion? A homemade dessert, afghan, or bookends to be sold at a church bake sale and bazaar? A can of soup for a food drive, or hat and mittens for a clothing one?

God has reached out to us, giving us time, talent, and treasure. Now, it's our responsibility to use those things to reach out as far as we can to others. 



Almost everyone is familiar with how jigsaw puzzles work. You form a picture by assembling pieces that are cut so that they only fit together in one way. However, there's another type of puzzle, one in which all the pieces are the same shape, usually square. These pieces can fit together in an almost unlimited number of ways. It's necessary to focus on what the entire picture is to finish the puzzle.

In a way, stewardship of treasure is like the second type of puzzle. There are many different places we can put it. Money will "fit" anywhere. However, the right picture can only be formed if we put our funds where God wants them to be.

What does this mean for Christians? For most of us, it means budgeting carefully. Thinking before buying impulsively. Most of all, it means trying to improve the lives of others and our own by giving back to God more of what he so graciously provides us. 

Who flew the kite?

*"I did," said the wind.
"I did," said the string.
"I did," said the paper.
"I did," said the boy.*

In reality, ALL flew the kite. Each had its own part to play. Whether you are on the front lines of ministry, in the main office, or providing financial support and prayer, together you are ALL winning people to Christ. Just like the kite, if one part fails, all fail.



Integrity, as a stewardship response, is to be prepared to make the right decision in all that we do. This is a simple idea which helps us to move beyond the societal temptation of doing the right thing just to stay on the "right side of the law." Our relationship with God requires us to move to a higher level. Often, people of integrity will live up to the faith response of doing the right thing even when no one is looking because they are challenged not only to be good but to be like Christ.




Tom, I'm happy to see you giving some time to the church," said old Sam Elder. "I wish some others would do as well."

"It's not easy," responded Tom Newlywed. "Between my job, my studying and my setting up a new house-hold, I can only squeeze out a little time for our church. Yet time is what I want to offer it. It will be many years before I have money."

"Tom, you understand the principles of giving quite well," commented Sam. "Some of us give Money, some give Time and we even have a few that are talented. Together we make a strong church."

"I don't want to sound as though I were boasting," continued Tom, "but I have the satisfaction of giving all possible Time to the church. It's a good feeling to know I am doing all that I can."

"I know the feeling," advised Sam. "However, one problem in being a Christian is that you can never feel self-satisfied for very long. The Lord surrounds us with so much to be done. Even the Time we give is not equal in value." "Would you explain that value?" asked Tom.

"All of us tend to give Time at our convenience, whenever we can fit it into our busy schedules," explained Sam. "Yet the Time with the greatest value is that given when the church most needs it." 


Awesome Stewardship!

While watching the evening news the night of October 15, the tears flowed freely as I heard the following story of awesome stewardship:

A young sugar beet farmer, I believe in his 20's, had died from complications of an automobile accident. The day after the funeral, friends and family showed up at the home of his widow and child. This group arrived with nearly 100 trucks and all of the other equipment needed to harvest the sugar beets. They harvested 250 acres in 3 hours.

Talk about an awesome example of stewardship! These men and women had their own crops to harvest; yet they gave of their time, talent and treasure to help a friend and neighbor. Do you think this group knows the meaning of stewardship? Of course, they do.

After hearing this story, the first of many scriptures that comes to mind for me is Luke 6:38: "***Give and gifts will be given to you; a good measure, packed together, shaken down and overflowing, will be poured into your lap. For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you.***"

I do not believe these people gave to get back, but I do believe that they will "get back." 



A Blessing in Disguise

Frankly, tithing, giving 10% of one's income back to God, is strange. Let's be honest, God does not need one thing that we have. The bottom line is that God is the Creator and Owner of everything anyway. Why would God need anything from us?

Yet there it is in Malachi. God tells his people that they are robbing him. Yes! Robbing God. And if anyone wants to know how that is so, well God spells it out: "In your tithes and offerings," God says. Then the Lord gets even more specific: "Bring the full tithe into the storehouse," He says. (Malachi 3:10)

Obviously, God has a reason for wanting his people to tithe. It is to prove that we are serious about loving him, calling him our heavenly Father, and going about his business he has for us to do for him. Would you like to argue the point with God? Would you challenge God by telling God that you need the money more than he does? What is ten percent to God? He can take the entire bounty of earth away from us anytime he pleases.

Backing off...for another view

Maybe we need to back off and take another view of tithing. As demanding and even bizarre as we might think giving 10% is, what if there is an important purpose God has in mind for our tithe? What if, instead of it being a penalty, it turns out to really be a blessing?

For example, what if it is a way to show God in a concrete, sometimes sacrificial way, that we mean business about loving him and serving him as Lord of all? What if, in doing God's will as far as giving is concerned, we find the "windows of heaven" opened


(Continued on page 4)

Clap Your Hands

A Washington pastor, Rev. Charles Lewis, tells of a young couple who have a little boy who shows his joy constantly by clapping his hands. Put apple sauce before him and he claps. Put him down with his toys and he claps eagerly. Tell him the family is going to a mountain for a picnic and he breaks into applause.

This upbeat little boy brings to mind the words of Isaiah to the effect that "a little child shall lead them." (Isaiah 11:6) Certainly the happy lad could lead those who dwell in gloom and doom into a new and joyous lifestyle.

In I Timothy 4:4 St. Paul says: "**Everything created by God is good ... provided it is received with thanksgiving.**" The child knows that already. Receiving life "with thanksgiving" is the key to living victoriously. It starts with observing all of the good things which God bestows on us daily and receiving them with joy. That should prompt us to be handclappers, not handwringers.

If we do become grateful for God's overflowing goodness to us, the natural response on our part will surely be to become givers ourselves. We will begin to practice the stewardship of all that God has given us. In short, we will open our hands and hearts to serve the Lord. After all, handclappers spread their joy everywhere. 



People's lives as stewards take countless forms, according to their unique vocations and circumstances. Still, the fundamental pattern in every case is simple and changeless: "Serve one another through love... Bear one another's burdens, and so you will fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 5:13, 6:2).

This includes being stewards of the church, for, as we are told, the church of God is the household of God and it is essential to practice stewardship there. The life of a Christian steward, lived in imitation of the life of Christ, is challenging, even difficult in many ways; but both here and hereafter it is charged with intense joy.



What if, in doing God's will as far as giving is concerned, we find the "windows of heaven" opened and "overflowing blessings" have been showered upon us?

Continued from page 3...

A Blessing in Disguise...

and "overflowing blessings" have been showered upon us? After all, that is what we find God saying through Malachi, God's prophet, isn't it?

All I know is that it has happened for our family. Somehow we have been surprised how easy tithing is. We have learned to manage more carefully the remaining 90% of our income. But more than being blessed with sufficient income, we have the joy of doing our part to spread the good news of Christ and of helping suffering people here and abroad.

Admittedly, it may not make sense to you. It may sound quite bizarre. But if you try it, my hunch is that you'll find it a joyous blessing. Greater than you might ever imagine. 