

Stewardship

HOW MANY "OPPORTUNITIES" HAVE YOU MISSED? THIS QUESTION RECALLS THE OLD ADAGE – "OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS BUT ONCE." Which always implied to me that openings occur rapidly and we'd better be ready to grasp them or we lose their potential advantages quickly.

I remember a dear friend of mine who was always able to see in every problem not an occasion for trouble, but a "golden opportunity." Look about your life right now and ask yourself: What opportunities am I overlooking or missing?

Easter, with its focus upon God's raising Christ to newness of life, says to us that God is not content to simply shrug his heavenly shoulders and say of us "Well, what could I have expected of such people." Rather, God chose a unique, new beginning that unleashed all manner of power and creative actions into this world. Once more not a defeat, but an occasion for growth! This is the recurring theme of the New Testament. Just at the point when we think all is lost and nothing is going to improve, God surprises us with a new opportunity.

The key, of course, is our response. Shall we be like those who are always ready and willing to join the large ranks of scoffers and the "I told you so" crowds? Or shall we say I see here a chance to grow with God. The tug of the "what might have been if only" idea is strong, but must be overcome by a good, large dosage of "what new opportunities do I see in today's

world." I am certain that God is working within the events of today and that God is always gracious and giving to use us as we respond faithfully. Like the proverbial bus, don't worry; if you missed the last one, there will always be another coming along. See the excitement that God has built into your life and say a hearty "Yes" to the occasions for joy and life and goodness God sets before you in the opportunities of this moment. ☩

C. H. Cox, Jr.

STRANGE PARADOX

The strangest paradox is that as we accept the heavy yoke of Christ, all our burdens become lighter. As we accept the stewardship of God's grace and give ourselves to the Kingdom's cause, we become rich. At the very heart of Christian stewardship is the act of service, even at great cost. But the wonderful thing is that Christian service does something to us, as well as to the people whom we serve.



Courtesy: Steve Highfield

BE KIND TO SOME-ONE ELSE

A beautiful creed to live by was expressed by Etienne De Grellet: "I expect to pass this way but once; any good therefore that I can show to any fellow creature, let me do it now. Let me not defer or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again."

STEWARDSHIP IS NOT A BUZZWORD

"Stewardship" is often a "buzzword" or cliché in Christian circles, but shouldn't be. Like clichés, buzzwords are terms that at first have a freshness, but soon, because of overuse or imprecise use, become tags that say many things to many people.

Unfortunately, buzzwords become short-cuts that keep us from thinking through the concepts they are meant to communicate.

If asked, many Christians will say that stewardship is a fund-raising term that has little if any relationship to our faith. The same type of complaint often heard about the word "tithing," is often equated with stewardship.


All of the aforementioned notions about stewardship and tithing are inaccurate. Stewardship is a way of life; it is Jesus' call to us to share God's grace. Stewardship is not marginal to the Gospel, rather it is there that Jesus tells us about God and about how we are to live. And perhaps because he knew how much trouble our perspective on the material things of this world could be to us, Jesus gave us numerous statements and parables about what our relationship to material things should be. By urging us to avoid the problems inherent in materialism and by telling us what his Father's Kingdom is like, Jesus gives us a clear picture of stewardship, a picture that is found in Holy Scripture; hardly a fund-raising gimmick. Furthermore, the Old Testament writers make numerous references to tithing and to one's responsibility to use one's possessions in conformity with Yahweh's laws. The emphasis in the Old Testament is upon strict responsibility and the tithe is given as a norm. The approach would be considered authoritarian by many, but the tone is that of a stern, but loving parent teaching a child necessary truths.

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TRUST IN MATERIAL THINGS?

There is no doubt that you need to be responsible with your money, invest it wisely, and take your manner of making a living very seriously. But to put all your trust in material things is counter to a Christian's faith, which should be grounded in God.

Security must come from personal and emotional stability, a confidence in your own ability to cope with future events, and ultimately from the knowledge that there is a loving God, intimately interested in you. This should be the basis for security. When money becomes the focus, people tend to stop working at personal and emotional growth and fail to develop a deeper faith in God. Children should learn this at an early age. At all stages of their development we must emphasize to them how good it is to share. We must show them by your own attitude that irresponsible consumerism is nothing more than greed; that living well does not consist in having many possessions. The byproduct of teaching such things to your children is that they will have a greater appreciation of their own emotional powers, intellectual strengths, and faith in God. 

I'M SURE YOU UNDERSTAND

Age 1 *I'd like to give to the church, Lord, but you see I'm still in diapers, and I don't have any money of my own. I'm sure you understand.*

Age 3 *I'd like to give to the church, Lord, but you see I'm just a toddler, and I haven't learned to count yet. I'm sure you understand.*

Age 6 *I'd like to give to the church, Lord, but Daddy only gives me a nickel allowance, and ten percent would be half a penny. I'm sure you understand.*

Age 16 *I'd like to give to the church, Lord, but Mom says to save the money for college, though \$10.00 for the movies seems only fair, so I won't be square. I'm sure you understand.*

Age 20 *I'd like to give to the church, Lord, but now that I'm on a college scholarship it would be unfair to give an offering when others are helping me. I'm sure you understand.*

Age 25 *I'd like to give to the church, Lord, but I just got married and setting up a home has to be number one priority; payments and everything. I'm sure you understand.*

Age 35 *I'd like to give to the church, Lord, but you see, raising a family's more expensive than I thought. And I never know when I'll be laid off or on a strike. I'm sure you understand.*

Age 45 *I'd like to give to the church, Lord, but a college education these days is more than ever. My mission is to my kids for the next ten years. I'm sure you understand.*

Age 65 *I'd like to give to the church, Lord, but retirement's come for both of us. And you know what it's like to live on a fixed income. I'm sure you understand.*

Age 80 *I'd like to give to the church, Lord, but now the will is all drawn up, and though I forgot the church, I'm sure my kids will take care of it the way I always wanted to. I'm sure you understand.*

STEWARD OF THE MONTH

A Steward with Courage

Submitted by Jonni Lockport, NY

It takes a special kind of woman to be the wife of an Army Chaplain. Our Pastor is serving his second overseas deployment since the events of 9/11 led our country to war. He has been away from his family and church for almost 16 months this time and is not expected back for another five.

Not only does this remarkable woman lovingly and patiently care for their three children (aged 5, 9, and 12 years), but she also gives so much to others at a time when many in her position would simply not be able to handle anything beyond her own situation. Above and beyond the needs of our own congregation, which she handles with love, grace, and patience (she helps with every-

thing from choir to VBS), she cares also for the community of military families who are experiencing deployment.

Through her, Operation Enduring Comfort was begun to give support to spouses and children of those who are deployed on military duty. She also leads the Young Peacemaker's program at our church and school while organizing a Home-school Resource Center for families who home-school their children. She is an exemplary steward; giving so much of herself and her time to others, every word from her mouth, every choice she makes, it is clear that her motivation is always to bring glory to God. She is a blessing to everyone she meets.

GIVE TILL IT HELPS

We were created to use all we have in fellowship with God. When that is not done, our lives are unfulfilled and incomplete. It is not a matter of earning our salvation, but of putting God in the center where he belongs. When we do that, everything else can fall into place. And when we do that, we want to express our thanks by giving and by sharing our time and talents to help others.

“Steward of the Month” is an exciting way to recognize exemplary stewards. If you are aware of someone who has exemplified Christian stewardship, please tell us about it at www.stewardofthemonth.com. Once a month, one submission will be chosen to be published in *Stewardship*. In addition, if your story is chosen, \$100 will be given to the church or organization of your choice.

DEAR EDITOR:

We hear so many pleas for money today. Our mail boxes are full of “give to me and my organization” letters every week. The biblical command has always been and continues to be: “Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse.” The church is God’s way of carrying on Good Works today. It is God’s program of evangelism in the 21st century just as it was in the first century.

Christ loved the church and gave himself for it. It is his Body. He is coming back for the church. Someone

said to me the other day, “I don’t have much to give to any organization, but what I do have to give, I want to give to my church where it can be used for the glory of God.”

The Apostle Paul placed a high value on being found faithful as a Christian in the matter of sharing God’s grace. The Christian who

gives his tithe to God’s work at God’s house on the first day of the week fits that description.

S. Defoe, Charlotte, NC.



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STEWARDSHIP IS NOT A BUZZWORD...

Stewardship is introduced in the earliest of our sacred Scriptures and Jesus amplifies and extends our knowledge of stewardship in the New Testament. Indeed, Jesus expands the limits of stewardship beyond almsgiving or the observance of external codes of responsibility, and explains its meaning by using various metaphors and stories that show us a way of life involving all aspects of our lives, our external actions as well as our thoughts and motives. Ω

