

Stewardship

WHEN OUR LORD EXHORTS US TO PRAY, WE SURELY KNOW WHERE TO START AND WHAT TO DO. Some will fold their hands, others bow their head, many will do both, and some will kneel. When God bids us to “sing praise,” we may not have celestial voices, but we at least know we’re supposed to open our mouths and bring forth sounds!

The same holds true when our Lord commands us to forgive someone who has wronged us. It may not be easy, but difficult as it may be, even a child knows what God is asking of them. How they go about it will vary, but surely, everyone knows what is expected.

We understand most of what God asks and expects of us and how to respond, even if we are not always fully able to comply or obey. However, there is one expectation the Lord has of us that I am not certain we know how to do, even if we are of a mood and mind to do it.

I am talking about being thankful ... about giving thanks. It is certainly not a rare or infrequent request, either. A quick check of any complete concordance to the Scriptures will reveal that there are more than one-hundred-fifty times when the Bible reminds, encourages or even commands us to give thanks to God. To “give thanks” or to “be thankful” is mentioned that many times! And yet, what if God were suddenly to stand in the midst of us, as was true in biblical times, and say, “All right everyone, give thanks on the count of three!!!” I suspect there would be such variety of response it would border on mayhem, and Jesus’ response would be, “I didn’t say ‘Everyone do their own thing!’ I said, ‘Everyone give thanks!’”

How do you go about giving thanks? In the first place, I suspect that if the truth be known, being thankful regularly presents a problem for most of us. Most of us feel that what we have is by our wit

and work, and we are in no one’s debt for what we legitimately have coming to us. Even if we can somehow muster up the willingness to be grateful, we simply don’t know how to do it! At best we might bow our heads for a moment of prayer and tell God how thankful we are.

Too many Christians operate under the assumption that once they have told God how grateful they are for what they have,



they now have the right to use everything they have for themselves. They completely miss the very purpose for which God gives to us! Namely, that we are to use these gifts in God’s service and in the service of others. Anything less than that is simple selfishness! To be thankful must lead to a mature understanding of why God has blessed us. God gives to us not to make us thankful, but to make us generous and useful to him and to others!

True thanksgiving begins with being genuinely grateful to God ... the giver of

TIME IS GIVEN TO US

With God, there is no time; God is eternal, without beginning and without ending. A thousand years in God’s sight is but a moment past. We, however, live in time, the time given to us by God, the Creator of time. Time is given to us to live in, for and through God. Time is made holy (or unholy) by how we use it, either to the glory of God, or to the glory of ourselves, as we are known to God.



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THE WAY OF THE CROSS

"I didn't realize what I was getting into." That's a statement we sometimes make when we find it necessary to back out or turn away from some responsibility we've previously accepted. Perhaps we'd been asked to chair a community or school committee. We accepted, thinking of the honor. Months later, we resign after discovering that the job was all work, little thanks, and no honor at all. We hadn't seen all that when we'd agreed to take on the task.

Lent invites us to re-think our commitment to follow Jesus and be good stewards of our time and talent. "My way," Jesus says, "requires you to deny yourself and carry a cross. Are you sure you want to come with me?" Self-denial does not mean treating ourselves as dirt. Rather it means answering the call of Jesus even when the call is to something we would not choose. It also means being so committed to Christ that we see him brighter and more clearly than we see the hard road.

COST VS. BENEFIT

In business, it's not uncommon to do a cost versus benefit study to see if the proposed endeavor will produce enough benefits (measured in money) to make it worthwhile. If so, they proceed. If not, the idea is scrapped. I recently did a cost versus benefit study on my use of time and treasures. Instead of measuring the cost in monetary terms, I tried to put a spiritual value to things. I asked myself several questions regarding my use of time and talents. The answers were rather sobering. A few of the questions went like this:

† Could I tape my favorite show so I could teach a Bible study that evening?

† For all the money I spend eating out, could I give a little more at church for those less fortunate?

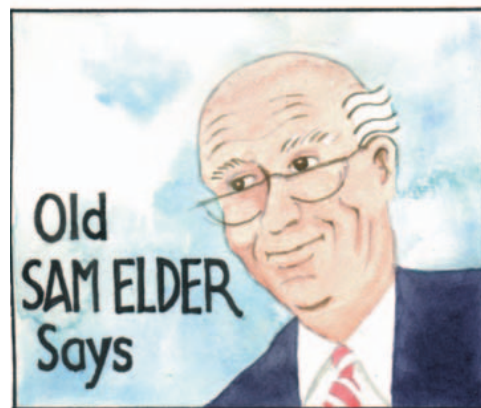
† Could I cut Sunday morning coffee-time by fifteen minutes in order to get to church a little early and pray over the service, for hearts to be transformed?

These aren't easy questions, but they must be asked by each of us. Can you do a spiritual cost versus benefit study? The payoff just might be bigger than you think! ☩

E. Peterson



"He must be going to talk about the annual report!"



THE GIFT

As I was saying to Pastor Goodly, money is our easiest giving. Notice how nicely a ten dollar bill fits in a collection plate. Better yet, by writing a check we can stack a lot of dollars in that same space on the plate. But one thing we cannot do; we cannot fit a 150 pound person into that plate; not even 10% of that person. Which is just my ridiculous way of showing that giving of ourselves is our most difficult giving. Giving of ourselves means giving the best of our love, our devotion, our talents, our time, and our mind.

I told the Pastor that giving money is only 10% of our stewardship duties. The other 90% includes everything it takes to make a great Christian. That's why I like so much to talk about the 90%. Everybody knows they should give money, even those who never give. Just for an example, folks are startled when I point out that attendance at worship, and other church activities is a steward's duty.

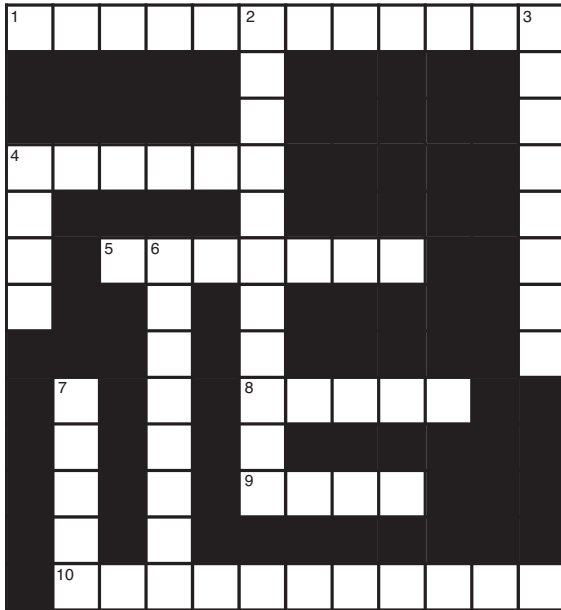
By that attendance, we are proclaiming to our town, the existence and wonder of our God and the church of Jesus Christ. We become a witness by example to all the people who observe our faithfulness. Actions always speak louder than words. We attend, not to demonstrate our saintliness, but to demonstrate the glory of God to others. I'm not talking about simply being there. You should look up that word "attendance" in a good dictionary. Of course, "being present" is the basic meaning, but note the further meanings, such as: "to be present for a purpose" or "to serve" or "to be attentive to."

So we have to be more than warm bodies taking up space. We need to keep alert to listen and to learn. We need to let down the

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STEWARDSHIP CROSSWORD PUZZLE

Solve the puzzle by looking at the clues and unscrambling the answers.



C. Sealey

ACROSS

CLUE

1. What we express to God for his goodness.
4. Thanksgiving to God while still hoarding.
5. Hoarding God's gifts.
8. Typically folded while praying.
9. To communicate with God.
10. Selfishly enjoying God's gifts.

ANSWER
iighnknvgvsta

hololw

eurpots

dnash

pyra

fnleedisulg

DOWN

CLUE

2. What we do with God's gifts.
3. Sharing our gifts with others.
4. Typically bowed while praying.
6. Expressing our gratitude to God.
7. Given to us by God for service to others.

ANSWER
rswpiedshat

gsueenro

hdae


Inaukthf

sgitf

TURBULENT TIMES

God's promise of redemption for sinners is not predicated on things going well. God didn't promise riches in heaven assuming the stock market is rising. There isn't a footnote at the bottom of the Ten Commandments with a disclaimer that these were only valid under certain conditions that God reserved the right to invoke. God's covenant with us applies in both good and difficult times.

Whatever our hard work has accomplished, we must not forget that God alone is the source of our abilities and wealth: "But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, so that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your ancestors, as he is doing today" (Deuteronomy 8:18).

In these difficult times, it is important to remember our faith and continue to be thankful for the gifts God has given us. We should continue to give and share these blessings no matter how difficult the times are, as there are many more troubled than we may be. Giving will help others to deal with adversities and will fill our hearts with gladness. "Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and will be repaid in full" (Proverbs 19:17). 

RESPONSIBLE STEWARDSHIP

The allocation of our paycheck between our offering envelope, day to day obligations, and towards a sizeable personal expenditure... in that order.

The blessings of "responsible stewardship" of our treasure become evident by the ease with which the required sum becomes available.

FAITH COMMUNITY

“Charge them to do good, to be rich in good works and generous, sharing what they have.”

(1 Timothy 6:18).
May Timothy's letter move us to better see how we are using all that the Lord has entrusted to us; our income, our talents, our time. This sense of stewardship will help us grow in faith and concern one for another. That's what faith community is all about.



“The Way of the Cross”


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WHEN OUR LORD EXHORTS US TO PRAY...

every gift. And that describes and includes all we are and possess ... they are gifts! The true fruit of genuine gratitude and thanksgiving, however, is how we use and what we do with what God has blessed us with.


It becomes clear ... in fact it is inescapable ... that genuine thankfulness and good stewardship are inseparably related. God has bound them together as closely as fingers on the same hand. You simply cannot lift up your heart in thanksgiving, as the Psalmist says, and not use what God has given you in his service and to his glory. What a hollow ring it must sound in the ears of God, the giver, when we express our thanksgiving, and then proceed to hoard, store-up, or self-indulge the blessings we have received as gifts. Jesus had many harsh words and stern warnings for those who said one thing and did yet another. One that comes immediately to mind is, “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and then do not do the things I say?”

Remember, joyfully and expectantly, why God blesses and showers us with an abundance of good gifts from above: Not just to make us thankful, but to make us useful! By any other name, what we

EXPRESS to God about what has been given to us is called "Thanksgiving." What we DO with all of it is called "Stewardship." 

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THE GIFT...

barriers and draw close to our brothers and sisters; “Fellowship” as Pastor Goodly would call it. We need to serve, each according to their talents and abilities. Strangely, when we search persistently and prayerfully, we can find that one task for which we were especially equipped. As I told Pastor Goodly, money is our easiest giving. 

- Across**
- 1. Thanksgiving
 - 2. Stewardship
 - 3. Generous
 - 4. Hollow
 - 4. Head
 - 5. Storeup
 - 8. Hands
 - 9. Pray
 - 7. Gifts
 - 10. Selfindulge
- Down**
- Crossword Puzzle Answers**