

Stewardship

Inspiring a deeper understanding of true giving

February 2012

Children, even with their lack of sophistication, often have a way of getting to the heart of things quicker than the rest of us with all of our acquired knowledge. This came through to me rather graphically when a girl of seven was attempting to tell me of her favorite Bible story.

She referred to it as the story about sharing, but I did not catch on to what she had in mind until she went further and described the scene involving the multiplication of loaves and fishes.

The girl had a point, and her remark provided me with a totally different outlook on a story that I had heard many times over. Somehow, her observation seemed much more down to earth than the phrase, “multiplication of loaves and fishes” ... not that Jesus could not multiply anything he chose ... he certainly could. But coming at the story as this child did is perhaps more apt to bring home the message of the miracle, which after all is said and done is more important than the wonder of a large crowd being provided with a picnic lunch on some hillside of long ago.

This really is a story about sharing. What would have happened if the person with the loaves and fish had insisted that he needed what little he had for himself? He could have claimed that the rest of the folks should have had enough foresight to bring their own food, and that they did not deserve to share in his goodies since they were not responsible people. He might have been convinced that the

hunger of others was not his problem. Granted, such an attitude would not necessarily have stopped Jesus from doing his thing, but the fact is that the approach he chose to use is very much the same approach that God has most often used throughout history. God offers love and concern; he feeds and nourishes, but most often calls upon people like you



and me to provide the means from what he has already given us.

To take nothing away from the miraculous event of the story, it might be that the miracle of bringing about a truly generous sharing was even greater than

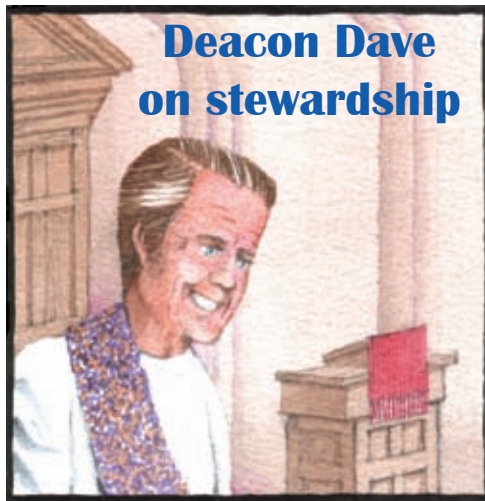
The meaning of stewardship has to do with 100%, rather than 2, 3, or even 10%. All people are stewards. The only uncertainty is what kind.

It is God's house in which we live, and it is to God that we are responsible. We are God's managers.

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Our weekly gift to God should be a gift that is acceptable ... a fitting expression of our esteem and respect of God, sacrificial, causing some degree of burden to the giver, and proportionate ... truly saying: "God I love you, and thank you for all you have given me." This gift of mine should be an account of my stewardship to God, my generous and loving father.



St. Paul summed up the basic principles of Christian stewardship when he wrote to the members of the church at Corinth: "I seek not yours, but you!" Jesus gave a similar interpretation of it when he said: "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these other things shall be added unto you." Both Jesus and Paul were appealing for a total dedication to the cause of the Kingdom.

This stewardship of all of life will lead some to enter full time Christian service. To all, it will mean an on-the-job witnessing, no matter what our abilities, our bank accounts, or our jobs. Christian stewardship means the glad contribution of time and abilities to the work of the local church and church related causes around the world.

Because our gifts and circumstances differ, we cannot all be ministers or missionaries, teachers or nurses. We cannot all witness to Christ in the professions, like Albert Schweitzer, or in the business world, like a "Golden Rule" Nash. But we can all give of our time and energy right where we are. This is where such gifts are most needed and most appreciated.


And the answer that the Christian steward will make, will include voluntary service in some of the opportunities in their church.

Of course, we do not all have the same abilities or the same material resources. Not all of us can do the same things. But all of us should do as many of them as time, abilities, and circumstances will allow.

Some will say: "But I'm just too busy to do any of these things!"

There is a saying that if you want to get something done, ask a busy person to do it. This is true because the person who gets things done is the person who has learned to budget their time and energy toward worthy goals. True, we do not all have the same amount of time to give. But the Christian steward knows how to budget their time just as they know how to budget their money; and they know that the gift of time and abilities is just as necessary to the Kingdom as is the gift of money. They take time to do the Kingdom's work.

To the Christian steward, life is a vocation that calls for a total dedication, including money, time, talents, everything. They give themselves. With St. Paul, God says to all of us: "I seek not yours, but you." And the Christian steward lays their time and abilities on the altar and replies humbly:

"All things come of thee, O Lord, and of thine own have we given thee." 



"Please, Dick, don't make a scene!"



Through the Stained Glass...

John Haughey spoke to a gathering of church leaders some time ago about the “Holy Use of Money,” taken from the title of a book he wrote. He described what he called “mammon illness,” that is so pervasive in our consumer oriented culture.

What is “mammon?”

Rev. Haughey’s description of “mammon illness” begins with a definition of the word “mammon.” In Luke’s Gospel, the word “mammon” is not a neutral term. It is not simply another word for “money.” It connotes disorder. Its root meaning is “that in which one puts one’s trust.” Mammon becomes a source of disorder because people allow it to make a claim on them that only God can make. Rev. Haughey says, “Judging from the many references Jesus made about money and possessions, Jesus must have discerned this mammon illness to be widespread.

Concerns about money and possessions constituted a major obstacle to his hearers being able to accept his words about the character of God.”

Running after things

One symptom of mammon illness is “running after things.” Here Rev. Haughey uses Luke 12 as a reference point: “As for you, do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not worry anymore. All the nations seek for these things, and your father knows that you need them.” (vs.

29-30). It is as if Jesus were saying “To provide yourself and yours with what you want and with what you need, you think you have to run.” He connects running with unbelieving. He invites his hearers to connect slowing down and walking with believing. He doesn’t deride providing for oneself, just doing so with anxiety, because anxiety is a sign that a person thinks there is a part of his or her life out of God’s loving reach. ☩



Dear Editor:

I get so many pleas for money today. The mail box is 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 his work 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 stewardship. The Christian who gives his tithe to God’s Work at God’s house on the first day of the week fits that description.

J. Dufault

Stewarding God’s time in my life involves these questions:

Am I giving sacrificially of my time and talents to the church and to others?

How many of my free hours are spent each week doing things that serve or entertain myself?

Am I using all my talents in ways that are God-pleasing?

Do I believe that God will bless me with adequate time to do everything expected if I give generously of my time and talents to others?

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Children, even with their ...

whatever Jesus might have done with the bread and the fish. Neither bread nor fish had the power to say “no” to anything, but whoever brought the food was called to say, “Yes.” Changing things is more often than not far easier than changing people, and the gospel message was meant to do just that ... to change people, you and me included. True, Jesus was able to bring about changes in bread, fish, water and wine, but as with everything else he did, these events were meant to be a means of changing and redeeming the folks who would experience the events and read the stories.

This same Jesus who had compassion for the crowds is calling us to be food to one another. Those with empty stomachs must be given bread. The people who are hungry for love are in need of concern and must be given time. There are many in turmoil and confusion who could well use an understanding friend or a willing listener.

We are told in the story that after everyone had eaten there was enough left over to fill a number of baskets. This, too, is not all that different from what things are today. I dread to think of the number of doggie bags that go from restaurants to the refrigerators to wastebaskets. While some scratch for money to buy essentials, others are looking for the best place to invest their surplus. With the distribution of food and wealth being what it is, you and I have an awesome responsibility. I do not think that our God wants us to feel guilty for what we have, but I do think that God expects us to use that which he has given in ways that would enhance the lives and hopes of so many who do not know the meaning of leftovers.



“I seek not yours, but you!”

The person in the story was not asked to solve the hunger problem for the whole world or even his own country. He was, however, asked to do what he could for those who were with him.

And there are ways in which we can respond despite the many ways that we cannot. Sometimes it will be in a personal way of one kind or another. Perhaps it will be in a voting booth when our unselfish choices may lessen the needs of someone else. It may be a simple phone call or some time spent in a hospital room. What do we do with the money saved by buying less expensive food? Does it provide us with more goodies next week, or could it perhaps go to some program that would help those whose perception of a good deal is to watch their children eat a couple of times a week. Yes, there are many ways in which we cannot share, but that does not discount the ways we can. 