

## Part Five: “Stewardship: The Managing of God’s Assets”

The spiritual disciplines related to stewardship must find their start in an “attitude of gratitude.” Indeed, a recognition that God’s blessings for His children are bountiful, constant, and forever provides not only a foundation for praise and appreciation, but also a motivation for us to then follow His commands to be generous, purposeful, and happy in our giving to others. Just remember that “giving” will always be an indispensable part of “thanksgiving.”

G.K. Chesterton observed that a lack of gratitude is the root of all sin. An exaggeration? Not if you consider that Romans 1:21-32 underscores the same profound reality. Make no mistake, living a life of thanksgiving is of paramount importance to successful stewardship.

Psalms 9:1,2 -- “I will give thanks to the Lord with all my heart; I will tell of all Your wonders. I will be glad and exult in You; I will sing praise to Your name, O Most High.”

Psalms 26:6,7 -- “I shall wash my hands in innocence and I will go about Your altar, O Lord, that I may proclaim with the voice of thanksgiving and declare all Your wonders.”

Psalms 100:4,5 -- “Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him, bless His name. For the Lord is good; His lovingkindness is everlasting and His faithfulness to all generations.”

“We have, for several years, been greatly encouraged by keeping a Thanksgiving Jar in our living room. Into that jar, we regularly place brief notes which express our thanks to God for various blessings He has bestowed on us and our loved ones...and for expressions of His love, power, and glory. This has been a great stimulant to our “gratitude attitude” as we learn to better “see” the Lord’s care in our lives day to day. Also, as the jar fills up throughout the year, we pour the notes into a big sack and, beginning with the Christmas season, we go through several of them a night to remember and thank God afresh for His existential goodness to us.”

Jonah 2: 9 -- “But I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving. That which I have vowed I will pay. Salvation is from the Lord.”

Note in the Scriptures above (and so many others) how thanksgiving is linked to a devotion to testify to God’s wonders, to tell the world of His loving kindness and faithfulness, and to humbly obey His commands to live a sanctified life. As our awareness of God’s character grows and our appreciation of His innumerable blessings to us increases, we become closer to those faithful stewards that Jesus describes in His parables. For we recognize God as the source of all that we have; we express our thankfulness to Him in both word and deed; and we trust Him as our all-beneficent Father as we confidently and generously give to others.

Randy Alcorn describes a steward as “someone an owner entrusts with the management of his assets.” That’s spot on. And the first thing to embrace in this definition is God’s ownership of absolutely everything -- all of nature, all in the angelic realms, and even every single one of us!

Psalms 24:1-- "The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains, the world and those who dwell in it."

Deuteronomy 10:14 -- "Behold, to the Lord your God belong heaven and the highest heavens, the earth and all that is in it."

Job 41:11 -- "Who has given to Me that I should repay him? Whatever is under the whole heaven is Mine."

1 Corinthians 6:19, 20 -- "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit Who is in you, Whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore, glorify God in your body."

God owns it all. He created it all. He sustains it all. And God's graciousness and generosity are so abounding that we could never "out-give" Him.

James 1:17,18 -- "Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow."

Romans 8:32 -- "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?"

The true disciple of Jesus Christ joyfully lives out this "attitude of gratitude" as he or she understands that God blesses us with more than we can count, more than we can imagine, much more that we could ever give back to Him. Yet this Almighty God invites you and me to participate in His holy service to the world as His honored stewards. He gives us the

"Do you make it a habit to count your blessings? You should. It's a potent way to fight apathy, dissatisfaction, and the illusion of self-sufficiency."

responsibility of managing His assets and, as those parables Jesus teaches so clearly emphasize, God wants us to exercise the required virtues of a good steward: humility, wisdom, generosity, industriousness, vision, skill, gratitude, and an understanding that the assets are God's, not ours. We are to never forget our accountability to the Master and to anticipate that He will be returning to evaluate (and, when it is called for, reward) our performance.

Of course, our stewardship responsibilities involve what we do with God's money. But we must wisely manage and invest everything else He has given us. Time. Talents and spiritual gifts. Opportunities. Relationships. Passions and priorities. And yes, money.

“You can sing all you want about how you love Jesus, you can have crocodile tears in your eyes, but the consecration that doesn't reach your purse has not reached your heart.”  
(Adrian Rogers)

Did you know that the Bible talks more about money (especially, our attitudes towards it) than it does about heaven, hell, or even the gospel? It's true. But, although that's such a large study, let me point you to three Scriptures that are especially relevant. In Acts 20:35, the apostle Paul quotes Jesus as saying, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” That simple statement, buttressed by our Lord's many

other teachings on giving, greed, simplicity of life, the snare of wealth, and so on reminds us of how important it is to be generous. We are also to give with an ongoing trust in Christ's care for us, being motivated too by rewards He is storing up for us in heaven for the generosity we show now. It's also noteworthy that the context of Paul's remarks includes not only the priority of helping the needy, but also needs of industriousness and sacrifice so that we can give in greater amounts.

Relevant to this subject are the sharp words of Jesus (Luke 11:42) when He rebukes the Pharisees for giving alms out of the wrong motives. “But woe to you Pharisees! For you pay tithes of mint and rue and every kind of garden herb, and yet disregard justice and the love of God; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.” These hypocritical false teachers were giving to impress God, to earn His favor, and to show off to others. But Jesus shows here (and in many other instances) that He demands giving that is pure of heart, generous, relevant to the greatest needs, and directed ultimately to Him. Only such gifts will find heavenly rewards.

And then there is the wonderfully revealing Chapter 9 of 2 Corinthians. Read it carefully and you'll note that there are several things to learn and follow about the proper stewardship of God's finances. For instance, generosity should be carefully planned. Also, our giving should be bountiful even as we rely on God to be bountiful in His giving to us. The target of giving in this case was Christians who were experiencing severe needs and I believe it's of particular importance that we observe that same priority in our giving.

“If a person gets his attitude toward money straight, it will help straighten out almost every other area in his life.”  
(Billy Graham)

Keep in mind the danger of wanting to hold on to the things of this world as if they were ours. We must carefully, constantly beware the lurking temptations of covetousness, stinginess, and pride, ingratitude, and lack of faith. And one more item from verse 7 in that same chapter. The Greek word translated “cheerful” here is “hilaros” and, while it doesn't mean rip-roaring hilarity, it does signify a joyful readiness of mind. God loves the giver who is careful but prompt, who isn't stingy, who isn't boastful. Rather, He honors the giver who understands that, when all's said and done, he is but a faithful steward of God's assets, investing them for the Father's use and in view of heavenly rewards.

Now, before we leave this subject of stewardship, let me make a few additional but quick exhortations. The first is to repeat that our giving must be wholistic. Everything we have been

given is to be managed, protected, kept pure, and invested in God's kingdom: money, time, spiritual gifts, natural talents, opportunities, relationships, and attitudes. Second, as with all spiritual disciplines, careful planning is necessary. Don't waste your money on foolish things. Avoid spending in ways that would enrich evildoers. Be circumspect in giving to organizations and individuals, making sure they are themselves acting according to righteous standards.

An excellent study relevant to stewardship and finances is the generosity, humility, and faith in God shown by the widow who gave her gift in the Temple who so impressed Jesus as she gave "out of her poverty."

The third quick exhortation? Note the preponderance of examples in Scripture which suggest that priorities of giving be made to missionary support (that is, the Lord's servants committed to the Great Commission) and to the needs of the poor, sick, and persecuted, especially those in the household of faith. Fourth, beware an "automatic withdrawal" attitude towards giving. Rather, be purposefully involved with those who you give money and time to. Check on them.

Pray fervently for them. When you can, support them in other ways. And be the kind of loyal cheerleader who enlists others in their support.

One final warning. Living in the era we do, we are inundated by advertisements, fashions, and comparisons which breed dissatisfaction, envy, greed, and a chilling lack of gratitude. We must fight these enemies of contentment all the time. For if we give in to them, we will be distracted, dispirited, and worthless stewards. So let us instead carefully cultivate that "attitude of gratitude" that will fill us with thanksgiving, confidence, generosity, and an enthusiastic anticipation of the rewards to come our Master will bring with Him when He returns.