



8 "T"s of Stewardship

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(Previously published in the *Treasured News* – January – July 2013.)

revised August 2017
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THE 8 T's OF CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP

Christian Stewardship is concerned with God's gifts and the way we use them. There are many passages in the Bible that are concerned with a giving God and a receiving people. How the receiving people use all that comes from a giving God is, in my book, what Christian Stewardship is all about.

Our Missouri Synod has this as their definition of stewardship: ***“Christian stewardship is the free and joyous activity of the child of God and God’s family, the church, in managing all of life and life’s resources for God’s purposes.”***

We read in Luke 6:20-38

²⁰ *And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said: “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.*

²¹ *“Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied. “Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.*

²² *“Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! ²³ Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets.*

²⁴ *“But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.*

²⁵ *“Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry. “Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.*

²⁶ *“Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.*

²⁷ *“But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ²⁹ To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. ³⁰ Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. ³¹ And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.*

³² *“If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³ And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴ And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. ³⁵ But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. ³⁶ Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.*

³⁷ *“Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; ³⁸ give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.”*

Malachi 3:10

¹⁰ *“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.*

This is the only place in the Bible that I know of where God calls on us to put Him to the test.

2 Corinthians 9:6-8

⁶ *Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. ⁷ Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.*

The motivation in all of this is always the Gospel. It is always my response to God for all that He has given to me. It is never something I have to do. It is always done cheerfully and eagerly. When it becomes something I “have to do” then the whole concept is lost.

When we are talking about Stewardship, pray about what you will give and then give it. I would also suggest to you that the way to do this is to always decide what percentage of your gross income you want to give and then take it right off the top. In our household, the first checks we write each month are to St. Paul Lutheran Church, to Jesus Is Lord Mission Society, to the LWML and to whatever other religious or charitable organization we are supporting at the time.

The other thought, and then we will get to the Eight T’s of Stewardship is to arrive at a percentage to give and then increase that percentage one percent a year. Deb and I have been blessed to do that. As that money or time or talent is given first, it is never missed. Ask me sometime how that works.

The Eight T’s of Stewardship

The Eight T’s are: **Time, Talent, Treasure, Testimony, Touch, Tissue, Trash, and Technology.** You know the first three; the last four go like this: testimony (Christian witnessing), touch (relationships), tissue (care of our bodies), trash (care of God’s creation), and technology (our use of the electronic devices and tools with which God has blessed us).

TIME

TIME is a gift from God. Psalm 139:16 states that *“All the days ordained for me were written in Your [God’s] book before one of them came to be.”* Our times are truly in God’s hands (Psalm 31:15). And, regardless of the number of years God ordains for us, we say with the Psalmist, *“You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Each man’s life is but a breath”* (Psalm 39:5). Jesus reminds us that we cannot add a single hour to our lives by worrying about it (Matthew 6:27). Ecclesiastes 3:1 reminds us that *“there is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven.”*

So, what are we to do with God’s gift of TIME? St. Paul gives this instruction: *“And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light”* (Romans 13:11-12). St. Paul also gives us this encouragement in Ephesians 5:15-16: *“Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.”*

As maturing stewards we receive TIME as a gift from God and strive to make the best use of it in our family relationships, work, and other life activities, including our work in God’s kingdom and church while He blesses us with life on this earth. We do this not only as an obligation, but also as a free and joyous activity. At the end of our lives when we stand before the Judge of every human being we will rejoice when the King says, *“Well done, good and faithful servant”* (Matthew 25:21).

Every January many people make a lot of good resolutions and some of them included using TIME wisely. Now we can reflect on how we’re doing...and resolve again to use our gift of TIME in a way that honors God and blesses others. And that is only fitting because ***“maturing stewards do the right things for the right reasons and strive for excellence in all they do, including the wise use of their time.”***

TALENT

Our TALENTS include the gifts, skills and abilities that God has given to us. We often hear people talking about their “God-given abilities.” And this is right on target because all we are and have is a gift from a good and gracious God.

Our TALENTS include the gifts that God has entrusted to us. The 12th chapters of Romans and 1 Corinthians speak about some of these gifts and remind us that the Holy Spirit gives various gifts according to His will, and He desires that we use these gifts for the common good (1 Peter 4:10).

Using our God-given TALENTS wisely and well produces the fruit of the Spirit that Paul mentions in Galatians 5:22: *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”*

Just as God provided skilled workers to help with the building of the Old Testament tabernacle and temples, so He continues to bless His people today with special gifts and skills to be of service in ways that honor God and bless others. We are members of the body of Christ (in our congregations) and each of us has TALENTS to put to work within that body so that it may be built up to be the worshipping, witnessing and serving community that God intends.

Make every effort to discover your gifts, skills, and abilities and find ways to put them to work in your congregation.

TREASURE

TREASURE, or money, is what people most often think about when they hear the term “stewardship.” And it is true that money and, specifically, the wise use and management of money are important parts of Christian stewardship. One of the Bible passages that speaks to the wise use of money is 1 Timothy 6:17-19: *“Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of life that is truly life.”*

There are only a few things we can do with money—earn it, give it, save it, spend it and bequeath it. Good stewardship means striving to keep a healthy balance with these uses. For example, one can get so concerned with earning that he overworks at the expense of his health and relationships. Or, one can get carried away with spending and not have anything left for giving and saving.

The above Scripture passages affirm that God gives us all kinds of good gifts for our enjoyment, but adds that we are to use these gifts for more than our own enjoyment. Our cold and selfish natures encourage us to use money and goods only for ourselves, adopting some strange strategy like, “God helps those who help themselves.” But the new nature within us because of the working of the Holy Spirit urges us to use all our gifts, including the gift of money, for the common good and for the expansion of God’s kingdom on earth. What joy will follow us into heaven when our glorious Lord commends us for our wise use of money and says, *“Well done, good and faithful servant!”* (Matthew 25:21)

Did you know Jesus talked often about money? Sixteen of the thirty-eight parables were concerned with how to handle money and possessions. In the Gospels, an amazing one out of ten verses (288 in all) deal directly with the subject of money. The Bible offers 500 verses on prayer, less than 500 verses on faith, but more than 2,000 verses on money and possessions. (Howard L. Dayton, Jr., Leadership, Vol. 2, no. 2)

TESTIMONY

It might seem a bit strange to talk about the stewardship of testimony. But Jesus instructed His disciples of all ages to make disciples, teaching and baptizing and encouraging people to follow God's teachings (Matthew 28:18-20). He also told His first disciples that they were to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

As modern day disciples we also desire to be faithful witnesses, saying and doing all that we can to give witness to our Lord Jesus Christ *who desires that all people be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth* (1 Timothy 2:4).

St. Peter in his first letter (3:15) instructs us with these words: *"But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope you have. But do this with gentleness and respect."* With that in mind, I would like to share with you a thought or two about a concept borrowed from the business world. It is called an "Elevator Speech". What it is, very simply, is a presentation you have worked on, planned, thought through, practiced, refined and worked on again that will tell a person the message you would like to share with them, in our case the Gospel message of Jesus Christ, in the amount of time you have with others on an elevator. (If you have more time you will, of course, be blessed to expand on your speech.) In short, it is a quick (the two minutes or so that you are on an elevator with someone) sharing of the Gospel that will excite the hearer, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, hopefully lead them to want to know more either then or at some other time. It is as simple and safe as telling the other person how God has impacted your life and sharing with them that He would love to do the same in their life.

What a privilege to be able to do the work that the angels of God long to do—that is, give our testimony of the joy, peace and hope that are ours because of the redeeming work of Jesus Christ. And what added joy we will have to take into eternity when the words of Daniel 12:3 come true: *"Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever."*

TOUCH

TOUCH refers to the relationships we have with God and with each other. It is similar to what St. John wrote about in 1 John 1:3-4: *"We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you may also have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete."*

TOUCH also refers to the relationships we have with our families, neighbors, coworkers, and others in our communities and society. As God's stewards, we are to adopt the role of a servant in our dealings with each other (John 13:14-15), provide for our family members (1 Timothy 5:8) and carry each other's burdens (Galatians 6:2). In short, *"we are to use every opportunity to do good to others, especially to those who belong to the family of believers"* (Galatians 6:10).

While here upon earth in visible form Jesus went about everywhere doing good to all He encountered—those who loved Him as well as those who hated Him. In Matthew 25:40 Jesus said, *"I tell you the truth, whatever you did [fed the hungry, gave drink to the thirsty, clothed the naked, and visited those who were sick or in prison] for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me."*

How blessed it is to have many opportunities to "TOUCH" others in so many positive ways. What joy we will have when the King on the last day declares to us: *"Well done, good and faithful servant,"* (Matthew 25:21) because you took the time and made the effort to touch one of the least of My brothers.

TISSUE

TISSUE refers to the care and use of our bodies. St. Paul reminds us of some important truths in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20: *“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your body.”*

With the Psalmist we declare that we are fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139). Each one of us is special to God, endowed and gifted just the way He wanted to endow and gift us, so that we can be His instruments for good in this world.

The stewardship of TISSUE involves many things, such as proper nourishment, exercise, grooming, and other related items. It also refers to such issues as organ donations and transplants, various kinds of medical care, and the whole spectrum of life issues from conception, through birth, until after death.

Viewing ourselves and others as special creations by God encourages us to have the utmost respect for life at every point on the spectrum. On the Last Day when the King says, *“Well done, good and faithful servant”* (Matthew 25), He will be referring also to our stewardship of our physical welfare as well as that of others.

TRASH

TRASH refers to our care of God’s creation. God created all things in heaven and on earth. Therefore, all created things and beings belong to Him. He also made the first man and woman in His image and said to them, *“Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”* (Genesis 1:28)

According to Genesis 2:15 God put Adam into the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. He was the first manager of something that belonged to God, and he was to manage it according to God’s wishes. Unfortunately, he and Eve disobeyed God and desired to do things their own way. Through this act of disobedience sin entered into the world and the earth and everything on it was cursed because of that sin. And yet, this is a marvelous earth with all its beauty and bounty, and we are still God’s caretakers and managers.

It is hard to fathom that more than seven billion people now live on planet earth. According to God’s design there are ample resources on earth to satisfy the needs of all living creatures. The truth is that God provides but man divides. Our stewardship of the air, earth, water, crops, livestock and other resources on earth is of critical importance. Polluted air and water, world hunger and trashy environments give evidence to the need for improved stewardship of God’s creation.

TECHNOLOGY

Once again, Christian Stewardship begins with the conviction that everything we have—time, talent, treasure, testimony, touch, tissue, trash, and now technology—is a gift from God’s hands. Our response as called and redeemed children of God is to seek to use these gifts effectively and efficiently to His glory and in service in and to the kingdom of God both here on earth and ultimately in heaven for all eternity.

As we deal with the idea of our Christian Stewardship of Technology I would like to narrow that definition to electronic devices and how they are used in our lives. We will leave things like genetic engineering, artificial intelligence, nanotechnology, therapeutic cloning, etc., for another study.

As with anything else, technology can be used for “good” or for “evil”. The same laser beam that can cut the cancer from our body with very little damage to surrounding tissue, can guide the bomb to destroy the village. The car that carries people to church can also be the tool by which a drunken person can bring an end to life or a terrorist can kill many. The computer that can bring our Sunday morning worship service to a shut-in or a soldier deployed overseas can also destroy a young man addicted to pornography. How technology is used, as is the case in the seven other T’s is what we are talking about as we talk about Christian Stewardship. As with the seven other T’s a good question to ponder is; Is technology, or any of the other gifts God gives to us, our servant to use to His glory and for the benefit of His creation, or are we its slave? In short, how can we use any of these T’s, including technology, to the glory of God and in the service of His kingdom—in our individual lives, in our congregations, and in our communities as we live life in all those places as a forgiven child of God.

Very briefly, technology is used incorrectly when it becomes our god and we are indebted to it and under its control. It becomes our god when it is an all-consuming part of our life and we in effect serve technology when we always have to be connected, instead of allowing it to serve us.

The technology we are talking about can also have incredible impact in and for the Kingdom of God as we practice good stewardship of this gift from God. Technology can and does (and has for centuries) helped God’s people in making the most of the gifts with which He blesses us and has aided in proclaiming the Gospel message of salvation alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone, throughout the whole world. Think back to the invention of the printing press and the numbers of people who could now have their own Bible and other books; to radio and the ability in the day to broadcast the good news of Jesus Christ around the world; to computers today, and phones and tablets and other technology that allow us and everyone else to have the Word of God constantly at their fingertips. Without a doubt, technology, and more importantly our use of it, can enhance or destroy our Christian walk.

As we sum up these 8 T’s of Stewardship, may I suggest that there is one foundational Word from God to us through the pen of St. Paul that we need to consider? It is found in 1 Corinthians 10:31 where he writes, ³¹ *So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.* May this be our goal, to use every gift with which our Heavenly Father blesses us, in whatever quantity He sees fit to bless us, to achieve the purpose for which He has sent us out into His world, namely to make disciples of all nations so that His kingdom here on earth, and His kingdom in heaven, may grow as more and more people come to know Him as their Father, and Jesus Christ as their only Savior from sin and eternal death, through the power and working of the Holy Spirit in their life.