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STEWARDSHIP TIPS FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

Scriptural Reflections on the Blessings of Giving

Written by Rev. John Heckmann, previously published in *LWML Treasured News*



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by

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INTRODUCTION

Treasurer Lois Anderson has been sending out these most wonderful *Treasured News* documents and has given me the opportunity to share with you some thoughts on what it means to be a Christian steward of all with which God has blessed us. This whole matter of Christian stewardship is a teaching of our Savior that is very near and dear to my heart. We have talked about “The 7 T’s of Stewardship.” We have visited about various aspects of stewardship. We created a little series of thoughts that dealt with the fact that the giving Christian gives faithfully, compassionately, gracefully, proportionately, and globally.

As we have worked through these thoughts and shared them with others, it just dawned on me that oftentimes we look at Christian stewardship as something that the adults do, while forgetting to teach these concepts of the Christian life to our youth and children. That is why we hear in many congregations that when the present generations, who are in their 70’s, 80’s, and 90’s, are with the Lord in heaven, the church is going to be in a world of hurt in regard to finances because we will lose those regular givers who very often bless us with large gifts. Sadly, in many places, the young people who make up the generations that follow them have been taught very little, if anything, about stewardship.

So, if you will allow me, we will see if it works to share with you some thoughts we can share with the children, teens, and young adults in our families and in our congregations. If you have no children or teens or young adults in your household right now, share these thoughts with those who do. Give this wide circulation, even outside the LWML.

UNDERSTAND ALL YOU HAVE IS GOD'S

Christian stewardship reminds us that the things we have, everything we have, our time, talents, treasure, tissue, touch, testimony, even our trash (think about that for a minute), are blessings from God. All the things we own belong to God and He loans them to us for the length of time that He sees fit and in the quantity that He knows is best for us. What that means for you and me is that He trusts us to be responsible for these things for the period of time that He puts them under our care.

Jesus shares with us a well-known parable in Luke 19:12-26 that sums this up very well. *“A nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and then return. Calling ten of his servants, he gave them ten minas, and said to them, ‘Engage in business until I come.’ But his citizens hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, ‘We do not want this man to reign over us.’ When he returned, having received the kingdom, he ordered these servants to whom he had given the money to be called to him, that he might know what they had gained by doing business. The first came before him, saying, ‘Lord, your mina has made ten minas more.’ And he said to him, ‘Well done, good servant! Because you have been faithful in a very little, you shall have authority over ten cities.’ And the second came, saying, ‘Lord, your mina has made five minas.’ And he said to him, ‘And you are to be over five cities.’ Then another came, saying, ‘Lord, here is your mina, which I kept laid away in a handkerchief; for I was afraid of you, because you are a severe man. You take what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sow.’ He said to him, ‘I will condemn you with your own words, you wicked servant! You knew that I was a severe man, taking what I did not deposit and reaping what I did not sow? Why then did you not put my money in the bank, and at my coming I might have collected it with interest?’ And he said to those who stood by, ‘Take the mina from him, and give it to the one who has the ten minas.’ And they said to him, ‘Lord, he has ten minas!’ I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.”*

What does this mean for us? It means many things. I think one point is that our heavenly Father calls on us and equips us to be responsible with the money we earn and how we use it as we look at our possessions as a treasure God has provided. Another point is that we understand the privilege that is ours to care for these things with which He provides us.

Oh, what a blessing it will be when we hear our Master say to us on our glorious day of judgment and welcome into the kingdom of heaven, *“Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master”* (Matthew 25:23).

USE GIFTS WISELY

If you have possessions, any possessions at all, no matter how many or few you might think them to be, it means that God is blessing you with these things and trusting you to use these things wisely.

As I say that, I think one of the key words in that sentence is “use,” as we say “use these things wisely.” God does not shower down all of these blessings to store up in bank vaults or safe rooms in our homes, never to be used for His glory and the good of His kingdom or the welfare of those He places in our lives.

For some, it becomes very easy to hoard these things, thinking that we need to keep as much as we can for ourselves in case, and this will never ever happen, God should quit providing for us and we fall upon hard times. Now, don't get me wrong. This does not mean that we go out and live as did the younger son in the well-known parable more properly called the Prodigal Father since “prodigal” rightly means extravagant. This, after all, is how the father in the parable dealt with his repentant, returning, son, and this is exactly how our Father deals with us, His oftentimes wayward children, but that is a whole other story which we don't have time for right now.

What Christian stewardship means is using the things with which God has blessed us in ways that are pleasing to God and for the good of His kingdom both here on earth and for eternity in heaven. It does not mean living at either extreme: pinching each penny until it screams or throwing it all to the wind just for the fun of it.

No, we turn to God in His Word to see how He would have us use the money and possessions He has provided for us. We look for opportunities to care for those He places in our lives, even as we plan for our future and take care of the needs we have right now. And no matter what our circumstances we are blessed to be able to say with full confidence, just as did St. Paul in Philippians 4:10-13, *I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*

RETURN PORTION OF BLESSINGS TO GOD

In order to use wisely the money and things God constantly gives to us, it is important that we give back to Him. Without a doubt, as Christian stewards we are called upon to plan ahead and put money away for college one day, or other big ticket items we see down the road. That being said though, we are also called upon to return to God a portion of that with which He has blessed us. You have probably heard the number 10% tossed around as a good number. (As you know, the tithe, the giving of 10%, is an Old Testament regulation, but since we are freed from the Law by Christ, we are not bound to it.)

I would still say though that it is a fine number, as long as it does not somehow become a New Testament requirement in our thinking and thus a stumbling block to Christian stewardship. We taught our children that 10% was a good place to begin, and from there the sky is the limit as you are invited to increase that percentage year after year. With children I think we can begin there, as we have said, while the numbers are small and the teaching is taking place. If we are dealing with folks who are a little older and the numbers are a little bigger, maybe we need to start with 5%, or some other percentage that we have prayed about, endeavoring all along to increase that number year after year as we grow in this grace of giving. We should also add again that this giving does not just have to be dollars and cents, but that it can include the time we give in service to our Lord as we serve others. It may be through the giving of our time or the talents with which God has blessed us. It may be through our gifts of tissue and touch and testimony and trash and our recycling efforts.

An example of this is seen in the lives of a couple of families I have been blessed to know over the years who make it a yearly event on birthdays and at Christmas time, as the new presents are given and opened and played with, that the children, with the help of their parents, **go through the things they already have and give some of them away to people who are in need.** (Not the broken junk that is no longer of any value, but as they say, those “gently used items.”) As this is done, a few things take place: **the children learn about sharing with others, “less-fortunate” children are blessed, and the bedroom does not bulge with too many things.**

If I might be so bold, this would also work with adults as far too many of us know about bulging storage places and monthly rental checks going to the storage shed people. We can also relate to the amount of money we spend to put up another shed on our property, or the fact that a

congregation just voted to spend \$300,000 to add storage space to the church. Why not be good stewards of what God has given to us and maybe, just maybe, give some of it away?

Again, this does not refer to the junk that needs to be thrown away or recycled. Some mission congregations tell stories of how “generous people” and sister congregations are all too happy to help the struggling new congregation **by giving them their 1940’s mimeograph machines or outdated fax machines using thermal paper**. Or they feel helpful to share other things that are cluttering up their storage space as they have bought new copiers and plain paper fax machines. In short, as we teach our children Christian stewardship principles, we are blessed to be able to share with them and model for them through our actions this whole idea of **giving with thankful hearts a portion back to God who has given it all to us in the first place**.

As St. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 9:6-8, The point is this: *whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.*

PLAN AHEAD

Christian stewardship reminds us that we cannot take it with us, nor should we want to. As I say that, don’t misunderstand and think that I am saying that we don’t need to plan ahead. We do! **We must plan ahead in all aspects of our lives**. As you hear me say that you don’t have to stress over the test that you have in school tomorrow, you are not hearing me say to blow off studying for that test and just see what happens.

No, we plan ahead. We study for the test so that we can do our best on it. We plan for the future, beginning already now in your teen or young adult years by being good stewards of all of the gifts with which God has blessed us as we put aside money for things like college and other “big ticket” items down the road.

When we were growing up, and this will most certainly date me as a fossil-aged old man, my parents gave us an allowance each week. It was always divided between “**savings**” and “**spending**” as they taught us stewardship principles. One week we would get a nickel for “savings” and a dime for “spending,” while the next week we would get a dime for “savings” and a nickel for “spending.” The “savings” money was put aside for big ticket items that we wanted somewhere down the road.

The “spending” money could be spent however we wanted to, but of that “spending” money a tenth, right off the top before anything was spent, was always set aside to give to the Lord and the church.

To be sure, that was not too hard back then. It came to a whole three cents per month that we gave to the Lord. That was until we got a raise in allowance as we got older. Some years we got a nickel raise per week in each category!

The important part of this teaching from little on is now that the income is much greater, **the principle is still there**. I am going to return to God the first portion of all that I receive, including even birthday cash and Christmas money and work bonuses and inheritances and the like. This is done, not because I have to, but **because I am blessed to be able to do this as God blesses me** with not only these gifts of money, but all of the physical and spiritual gifts with which He so freely and regularly blesses me.

You see, it is important that we keep all of this in the right perspective. For when we get it mixed up and our love of things or money come before our faith and our love for our heavenly Father, we lose sight of what is important. Good stewardship means having that good balance, (a nickel this week and a dime next week, fifty years ago) between giving and saving and spending. Without a doubt it takes practice and discipline and that is why I would suggest we begin when our children are young and the numbers don't look quite as big. As we all know, when the numbers get a little bit bigger it is very easy to think we will return less or nothing to the Lord this time around because times are tough and finances are tight right now. We will catch Him next time.

The problem is that it then becomes very easy to forget about our Lord and the work of His Church and concentrate on the computers, cars, homes, iPods, iPads and everything else “i,” shoes, boats, purses, golf clubs etc., etc., etc. If I may say it, a steward knows that according to 1 Timothy 6:6-10, *Godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.*

What a blessing it is to be trusted by almighty God to care for the things He entrusts to us, knowing that He shares with us those things in just the right amounts and at just the right times!