

Stewardship

Inspiring a deeper understanding of true giving

December

Because I was three years old, Mother held my hand as we entered the department store. It was December 1973. She had ten dollar bills for me ... one for each of the Christmas gifts I'd soon purchase. Hand in hand, we explored the aisles filled with numerous possibilities.

After choosing nine gifts, it was time to buy Mother's. Reluctantly, but with careful instructions, she allowed me to leave her, and cross to the next aisle ... alone!

The hairpin counter reached my chin. I pointed to a small package. Showing the clerk one dollar bill, I asked, "Do I have enough money to buy these?"

"Oh, yes," she replied, "That package is only a fifty cents. Do you want them?"

"Yes, please," I replied.

She put them in a small paper bag and gave me two quarters in change. I bounded back to Mother and handed her the change. She was puzzled.

"You got my gift?" she asked. I nodded with a smile. I didn't know much about arithmetic or shopping, but I knew about

Christmas secrets. I told nobody what I had purchased.

She savored the love

Years later, Mother said she was more curious about that Christmas gift than any she ever received. She kept those hairpins unopened for many years. The truth was that I'd bought the wrong kind! But that didn't matter. She savored the thoughtfulness and love behind this gift. And when she added her own thoughtfulness and love to those dollar hairpins, the wrong gift became a very wonderful one.

This is similar to the way God receives our gifts. God lovingly accepts and blesses our offerings. 

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How many Christians in the world today really aware of the simple and sometimes difficult needs of others, as Jesus had been?

Opportunities to serve are all around us. In our churches, volunteers can commit to being a disciple of Christ by willingly giving of their time and talent.



Spiritual Investing Values

For all their differences, Christianity, Judaism and Islam share many beliefs on at least one subject: the management of money.

In all three religions, those who seek to apply their spiritual values to personal investing will find scriptural guidance. Common among the faiths is a conviction that the money a person has ... no matter how little or how much ... comes from God, and that individuals must be good stewards of what's been given to them.

When you get to the Pearly Gates, the Lord isn't going to say, "What rate of return did you get?" God is going to ask, "What did you do with what I have given you?"

God intends each person to be a prudent money manager. The idea of stewardship means that you need to be careful and responsible with the use of your money. That encourages people to budget and to live within their means and not to be so focused on materialism that they lose sight of the higher values in life. People must understand that their financial resources don't really belong to them. Part of it is to manage money in a way that acknowledges that God is the owner.

A steward is one who's in charge of managing the possessions of another in the best interest of the owners. The other person is God. I'm just managing what God has entrusted to me, but I'm doing it in his best interest. 



How appreciated it makes the Lord feel when we use his gifts to make this world a little better! Wherever and whenever we volunteer our time and talents, we are essentially thanking the Lord for such wonderful gifts. We are showing him that we appreciate our blessings. Find a way to use your gifts at church and in the community. The rewards will be far more than you ever expected.

Not Everything, ...but Something

There was a cartoon in the New Yorker magazine a past Christmas that pictured a well-to-do businessman leaning back at his desk with his hands resting on his head and a broad smile on his face. The caption read, "During the holiday season, Mr. Arthur Jefferson takes a little time out of each day to think of those who are less fortunate."



Are we like this? Do we look at the enormity of the problem and ask ourselves, "What could I possibly do about world poverty. Even if I won the top prize on *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*, or some such program, that wouldn't even be a drop in the bucket compared to the magnitude of the problem.

The answer is "something." Do something. Each one of us has to do what we can with what we have. Whether it's supporting a mission fund, or volunteering at a soup kitchen, or assisting with any of dozens of other programs, including those within our own church community, we can help alleviate the problem in some way, great or small.

God doesn't ask us to solve the whole problem of poverty, just to do our share to help those less fortunate. 



Stewards of Christmas

We need to be good stewards of Christmas. Susie Sister is impressed by that air of good feeling in the crowds which exists briefly at Christmas time. Don Deacon says it differently. He says, “There has to be something right in an occasion which forces millions of people to think about someone other than themselves.”

The event is holy; the tradition wholesome. Every year we hear the complaints that Christmas has become too commercialized; that we need to put Christ back in Christmas. Some carry on campaigns to remove all religious symbols from public decorations. Most communities have become reconciled to that commercialization, because it satisfies certain segments of our society.

We need to be good stewards of Christmas in our own homes, in our own families, and in our own churches. We need to be good stewards by reaching out to bring Christmas to the unfortunate, the needy and aged. In all the hustle and bustle of the season, we need to take time to meditate on the significance of the holy day. We need to make sure that we are exchanging love more than exchanging gifts. We need to give love where love will not be returned.

We need to prove to the Susie Sisters and to the Don Deacons that the air of good feeling in the crowds is created by something deeper than the jazzed-up carols blasted from sound systems.

We can do it by being good stewards of our personal Christmas and that of our own church. 

My dad kindly left his snow-blower behind when he sold me the family home several years ago. It certainly makes winter easier to deal with, now that I don't have to shovel.

Recently I heard a sermon at church that dealt with Christmas being “light to the world.” Our pastor said that more often it's actions, not words, that convey the “good news.” He said that helping our neighbor or sharing our goods is a *stewardship of thanksgiving*.

After snow-blowing the driveway the other day, I began to put the machine away when I happened to look over and saw my next-door neighbor slaving away at his driveway with a shovel. There was a ton of snow! I was tired and just wanted a cup of coffee and the morning paper, but I headed next door instead. I had his driveway cleared in thirty minutes. He would have been shoveling for hours. As I finished, he came up to me and said, “You don't know how much I appreciate this!”

I simply responded, “My pleasure.” As I headed back home and prepared my coffee, it felt good to know that I had been able to share not just my possessions (given as a gift from my dad), but my strength and health and time as well. The coffee seemed extra tasty that morning. 

*G*iving a meaningful percentage of our income makes an important sacrifice that says how seriously we take our faith. At the same time it demonstrates that we care about other people, the needs of our church, and that we will go to significant sacrifices on their behalf.

A Test

Just suppose, for a moment, that when you opened your morning paper, right on the front page, replacing the usual headline stories, there was a self-analysis test. Now some of us are intrigued by these and others can't stand them. However, the one this morning is called *Test Your Christian Stewardship for the Past Year*. Sample questions are:



1. Have you attended worship services every Sunday you were physically able?
2. If you volunteered or were appointed to a position, did you fulfill your responsibilities in such a way that you can look back on the year with no misgivings?
3. Have you offered your services when you knew they were needed?
4. Have you fulfilled your financial promises?
5. Have you assumed that since you are a member of your church that its success or failure reflected upon you?

And so on and on the questions go, filling the page. Some of us will feel the pinch of conscience and, without ever finishing the test, turn to the sports, social page or comics.

Others will finish and find that if most of the questions are answered *yes*, they could surely feel that they had been good and faithful servants.

How alive was our faith this year?

How alive do we plan to make it next year?

Our stewardship is an individual thing. Our thinking about the questions should be personal, not comparisons with others.

How'd we do? 

