

God's Stewards are Mangers, not Owners

The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it. (Psalm 24:1) That simple truth is something that we understand when we contemplate the vastness of the created universe, and remember that God is the creator, and thereby the owner, of all that exists. At the very least, we think of the mountains, the rivers, the continents themselves as belonging to Him.

But we tend to feel differently about the things that surround us, the things that are the products of our world. We look at the deed for our house, and we see *our* name on it; it is *our* name that is on the registration for our car; *we* are the ones who purchased that new chair or stereo or whatever else it may be. We worked for it; we spent our money on it. It is ours.

But listen to those words from the psalm again: ***The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.*** The God who created all things—be it the raw materials that we use or the people who know how to turn those raw materials into finished products—has the right to lay claim to all things. And that does include our homes, our cars, our stereos, our clothing and everything else that we like to think of as ours.

In His love and mercy, God—the owner of all things—provides us with all that we have and enjoy in this life. But it still belongs to Him. We are merely stewards of all His property. A steward is simply the manager of the household, the one who makes sure the Master's home and holdings are put to the best use. And God expects us to be responsible, trustworthy managers.

How do we show we are good managers? We must not lose sight of the fact that all that we have is still a trust from the Owner, and is to be used to serve Him. It is His property, and He will require an accounting of all we have done with it. We are using His property in the right way when we use it for our benefit, and to provide for our daily needs. He even wants us to use His blessings to bring enjoyment and pleasure to life. But if we are not using His property in His service, we have failed in our stewardship.

The Gospel lesson today reminds us that greater blessings call for greater responsibility to manage His property according to His purposes. We cannot simply say, "It's mine! I'll do with it as I please! Rather, we must start with the fact that all things belong to God. Thankfully, He gives us great use of them, and provides for our needs in the process. We should receive them and use them with thanksgiving. But we will always remember that it all belongs to Him, even those things we like to think of as ours—and as His forgiven and redeemed children, set free from selfishness and greed, we will strive, with the help and strength of the Holy Spirit, to use all He entrusts to us to the honour and glory of His holy name.

God's Stewards are Empowered by the Holy Spirit.

One of the growing service industries today involves the whole field of financial management and planning. People who at one time simply put their money into the bank now turn to financial planners to help them manage their resources. In the often complex global economy, it can be hard for the uninitiated or the untrained to know how to make the best use of their monetary resources and earn the highest return on them. There are many who are like that servant who hid the master's money in the ground, because we just don't know what to do with it. We need someone in the know to help and guide in what is the best use of our finances.

If handling our money to the best possible advantage can be a daunting challenge, then the whole idea of using the Lord's greater gifts to the best advantage can be absolutely overwhelming. As the Scripture lesson said today, God is going to require an accounting of our stewardship. Are we going to be able to stand before Him and say that we have done well with His gifts?

God does not call us as His stewards because He needs our help or advice. But we, as stewards, need help for our task. Thankfully, our Lord and master doesn't simply give us the resources and say: "Take your best shot. Do what you can with what I give you." Rather, as our God entrusts His bounty to us, He gives us His Holy Spirit to empower, direct and teach us in our lives. Jesus promised: ***the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.***

It is the Spirit-led life of faith that empowers us as stewards of God's goodness. With the help and strength of the Holy Spirit, who leads us to faith and guides us in all of our life, we are able to carry out a stewardship that is good and beneficial for us and for our Master. It is the Spirit who helps us to see that our money, our time, and all the other blessings of life are gifts from our loving Father in heaven. It is the Holy Spirit who sets us free from a slavery to the world and the things of the world through the faith He gives us, that faith which trusts in God and His love and goodness towards us. It is the Spirit who shows us what is good and wholesome in our use of the things of this world. And it is the Spirit who gives us the power to do what our God would have us to do with all His gifts, and use them to honour the Master who entrusts them to us.

Perhaps the hardest part of our stewardship is that we forget the work and strength of the Holy Spirit. We sometimes want to do it on our own, to do it our way. And all too often we end up doing it wrong. But when we are led by the Spirit, empowered with His grace and help, then we experience the blessings of doing God's work in God's way—and that will bring benefits beyond anything we can imagine in this world. Our prayer should be that God would give us His Spirit, so that we, with His strength and help, may be the stewards that God wants us to be.

God's Stewards Serve Together in the Body of Christ.

One of the buzz words in the business world is “*team*”. We no longer have people working on the line building cars—we have a production *team* that functions together to produce an automobile. Office hierarchies have been replaced by management *teams*. The only place where the team approach no longer seems to be practised is the one place where we think it should be: among the high priced athletes, who seem themselves as stars, and that the franchise—and the world—revolve around them.

Actually, it is the bible that first established the team approach to all of life. ***Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ***, we are told. But we also see it in the whole understanding of the church. Paul tells us: ***Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it***. More than that, Paul also reminds us that God has combined each member of His church, of His body ***so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it***.

God deals with us as individuals as far as our salvation is concerned. When Jesus died on that cross to take away the sin of the whole world, He wasn't just acting on a team basis. His forgiveness and life encompasses all people, but it comes to us as individuals. Each and every one of us is special and precious to Him. He knows us by name. He knows the things that concern and trouble me, even if they are different from the concerns that affect my neighbour.

But now, as the redeemed people of God, given the stewardship of His gifts to us, we are drawn together as one body in Christ. When we look at this in a practical sense, we realize that God has brought us together as His stewards that we might serve Him and one another through the team approach to our stewardship. We realize that the church cannot exist on the financial support of any individual member (unless, perhaps that individual happens to be Microsoft chairman Bill Gates, one of the richest men in the world.) One person cannot typically do all the things that need to be done—such as repairing the roof, or teaching Sunday School and Bible Class; or hosting dinners and preaching sermons. But when God's stewards each use their gifts as He intends, great things can be accomplished for His name's sake.

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. All that God has entrusted to us, be it our finances, our talents or our time, has been given to us for the good of all, as a means of sharing and caring with one another. It is only when we are together that we are best equipped to provide for the needs of ministry in this place, but also to carry out that ministry in the ways we serve and work together. The power and the resources of the church come from God through the individuals who come together in His name. And now, pooling those resources, sharing them together, working together as a team, we go forth to build up the body and make it strong, and reach out into the world around us with the good news of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen again. Thanks be to God for the many faithful stewards, who do use their gifts in mutual service to God and to one another, for their gifts have brought great blessings to the ministry of our church, under the grace and guidance of our heavenly Father.

God's Stewards are Stewards in All Aspects of Life.

For many, the whole idea of stewardship brings up nothing but negative thoughts and images. All it means to them is that the church is asking for money again! Stewardship is all about money, especially the amount I do—or don't—put in the offering plate each week.

God's stewards do understand the importance of money and its proper use. It may be interesting to note that of all the verses in scripture, about 10% of them speak of money and its use. These verses also remind us how God does want us to use our treasures to the honour and glory of His name.

But stewardship isn't just about money. The church often talks about stewardship in terms of our time, our talents, and our treasures. Stewardship is the right use of all God's blessings under His gracious guidance. Stewardship involves our roles as parents, and is reflected in the way we use our time for our children. Stewardship involves a right understanding of the time we spend watching tv, or doing our homework or chores. It involves the help we give our neighbour to build a fence or to rake leaves. It involves our support and involvement with charities beyond the walls of the church. It involves our personal health and wellness, that we are taking good care of the bodies our Lord has given to us. It is about our work and our leisure; it is about our church activities and our social activities. Good stewardship includes an understanding of the movies we watch, the books we read, the music we listen to. Good stewardship involves care for the world, and a proper sense and understanding of ecology.

Christian stewardship isn't just about money. It is better to say that 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. It goes all the way back to the basic understanding that we are simply managers of God's gifts. As parents, we are the caretakers of God's children; as homeowners, we are caretakers of God's property. As citizens, we are entrusted with the care of government in our democratic society through the electoral process—and the list goes on and on.

Every area of life is to be used in a God-pleasing way, whether it be dealing with our spouse or doing our job at the office or plant. We show in all we do, and in the way we use the time, the talents and the treasures God has given to us, that we seek to do all things to honour our Saviour and our God.

St. Paul said: ***You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.*** Our stewardship begins at the cross, where our Saviour gave Himself that we might no longer live for ourselves, but for Him who died and rose again for us. And as those who have forgiveness, life and salvation as a gracious gift of God; as those who have been blessed in so many ways by our gracious Father, we want to live to serve Him in faithful stewardship in all that we do.

At home or at school, at work or at play; in our church and in our personal lives, may God enable us to be faithful stewards of His blessings—stewards who use His bounty to the honour and glory of His name, so that when the day of reckoning does come, He will look at us and say: *“Well done, good and faithful steward! Enter into the joy of your Master.”*