

Stewardship

Inspiring a deeper understanding of true giving

July, 2008

ME! A CARETAKER?

"This is my home and this is my family. I'm no caretaker."

That would probably be our reaction if someone came to us and tried to tell us that the things we have do not really belong to us. And yet that is exactly what the Bible tells us. In Psalm 24:1 we read, "The Earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof; the world and they that dwell therein."

Is not everything we have a gift from God? The Apostle Paul writes to the Christians at Corinth, "What hast thou that thou didst not receive?" (1 Cor. 4:7) Every Christian knows that the answer to this question is, "Nothing." God has given us everything we have, even life itself. Because all that we have and all that we are belongs to God, we do not spend our time, our strength, and our money to please ourselves, but to please God.

What does this mean? Specifically, how can we live to please God? Certainly God wants us to spend part of our time, talent and resources on ourselves and our families. God has given us our lives and expects us to enjoy them in God's service. God also wants us to give for the needs - both physical and spiritual - of others.

How can we best do this? By giving to our church and community. Christ founded the church to preach to the world and to minister to the needy in God's name. Whenever we give to the church we are doing this work for Christ. We do not give to the church because we expect to receive anything in return. We give to the church because that is what God wants us to do with our money. Remember that it is not ours, but God's; we are simply the caretakers.

How much then should we give to the church? The New Testament offers several answers to this question. When Zacchaeus, the dishonest tax-collector, became a Christian he told Jesus that he would give half of his wealth to feed the poor. (Lk 19:



1-10) When Mary of Bethany realized that Jesus was soon to be crucified, she bought the most expensive gift she could find to give to him. (Jn 12: 1-8) When Barnabas, the Levite from Cyprus, became a Christian, he sold all the land that he owned and brought the money to the apostles. (Acts 4: 36-37) The action of each of these individuals was different and yet each was giving their money in a way that was pleasing to God.

How can we be sure that our gifts are pleasing to God? Here are some suggested ways:

† Pray about your giving. When the offering basket is passed in church imagine that it is Jesus who is holding it. Put into it what you would not be ashamed for him to see.

Through your giving show him how much you are willing to sacrifice for him, who sacrificed his life for you.

† Consider the needs of the church. Consider what your church can do in the name of Christ at home and around the world if you give generously. Ask yourself, "What kind of church would this church be if every parishioner gave just as I do?"

† Consider the Biblical standard of the tithe. Before Christ came to save his people they

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LIFE IS A STEWARDSHIP

Human life is the first and greatest gift of all and carries great responsibilities with it.

As Christians, we know that our lives are sacred trusts. We are the stewards of those lives; God depends on us to use them to accomplish God's purposes.



TO GIVE ENOUGH

How do we know when we have given enough of ourselves?

Our life is peaceful.

Our children become generous, too.

We are sensitive to others' needs.

We remember those who have no food.

We begin to trust in God.

We see our problems in a new light.

We feel the Lord present with us.

EXCESS BAGGAGE and How to Unload It!

In the last century, a tourist from America paid a visit to a renowned Polish rabbi, Hofetz Chaim. He was astonished to see that the rabbi's home was only a simple room filled with books, plus a table and a bench.

"Rabbi," asked the tourist, "where is your furniture?"

"Where is yours?" replied Hofetz Chaim.

"Mine?" asked the puzzled American.

"But, I'm only a visitor here. I'm only passing through."

"So am I," said the rabbi.

Experienced travelers learn how much baggage is just enough. They take what they need and leave behind the non-essentials that would only be a burden. To move freely, they travel light. Visitor, traveler, pilgrim - whatever word we use - each one of us is only "passing through."

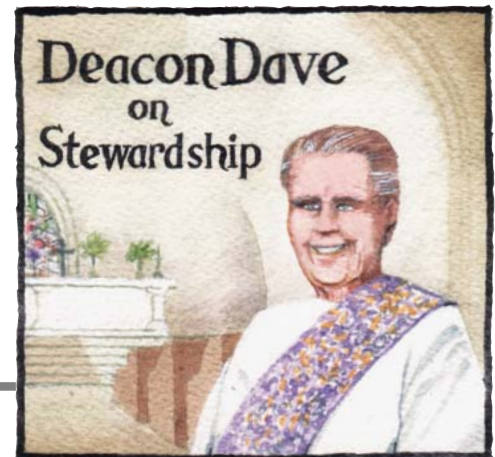
How we go through life depends a lot on what each of us decides is essential in the things we own, the attachments we form, the ideas that shape our lives.

More and more people say they'd like to make changes in the way they live.

Louis Harris commented that we may be coming to the point "where accumulation of physical possessions and steadily increasing consumption would no longer be as central to people's concerns ... This would mark a striking turn-about in the country's thinking."

But any major change in the way we live is

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WALKING WITH GRACE

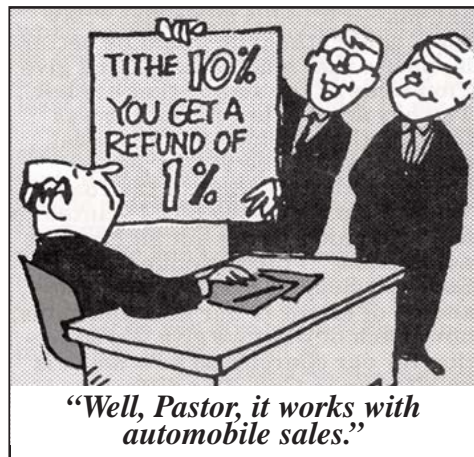
"Ask and you shall receive." Do you believe it? There are those who will answer a flat no; that it's impossible to prove God rewards us or answers our prayers. Too many prayers they say go unanswered, while rewards can usually be attributed to hard work or blind luck.

Others are doubtful, skeptical. They've prayed for pay raises, improved health, a happy marriage, and some of their prayers are answered and some are not. They picture a God of moods who reacts as inconsistently as most parents do with their children.

Both the disbeliever and the confused skeptic fail to consider one all-important element in a working relationship with God. Faith. It is obvious, too, that neither has honestly tried God's generosity by putting God first in their lives; by giving God their complete, no-exceptions trust.

The attitude you develop is all the reward you'll need; the certainty that God won't fail you and the realization that your role in life, your place in God's plan, is as important to God as anyone.

Put your trust in God and prove it by giving of yourself, to God and to others, and no force on earth can turn you from happiness. Think not of receiving, but of giving. Think not of having, but of being made as a living example of God's grace. Only then can you honestly say you have tried God's generosity. ☩



LEARNING TO TRUST

Charles Swindoll, in one of his many poignant meditations, shared a humorous list of requirements for trusting or mis-trusting a dentist. It begins with the heading, "Never trust a dentist...":

- † who wears dentures;
- † whose drill is driven by a system of pulleys connected to three mice on a treadmill;
- † who sends you a Christmas card and charges you for it; or,
- † who sprays his equipment with Lysol to sterilize it.


The image of going to a new dentist for the first time is a helpful measure of our ability to trust.

We laugh at the list, but the image of going to a new dentist for the first time is a helpful measure of our ability to trust. We live in an age of suspicion and caution when it comes to placing our confidence in anyone who promises to solve our daily problems.

And it has infected our faith, at least that part of our faith that has to do with trusting in the promises of God. God gives us all we have, and we can trust God to provide for our needs.

Deciding to participate fully in giving of our time, talent and resources requires a deep faith; trusting that what is left over for our own use will be enough for our needs and the needs of our loved ones as well.

Those who make the decision to put God first in their lives, find their faith deepened and, far from being impoverished, they find themselves enriched both spiritually and materially.

Pray about it. What is God calling you to do? 

SUMMER PARABLE

Now it came to pass that, as the time of vacation drew near, a certain member of the church bethought him of cool streams where fish were found, and his children thought of sandy beaches by the sea, and his wife thought of the mountains. And this parishioner spoke and said: "Lo the hot days come and my work lieth heavy upon me. Come, let us depart and go where fishes do bite, and where the cool winds bring refreshment and the land is beautiful about us."

"Thou speakest words of wisdom," said his wife. "Yet three, nay, even four, things must we do ere we go."

"Three things I think of, but not a fourth," said her husband; "that we ask our neighbors to minister unto our flowers, that we arrange for our grass to be mowed and watered, that we have our mail forwarded; but no other thing cometh to my mind."

"The fourth is like unto the other three, but greater than all," said his spouse, "even this: that thou dig into thy purse and pay the church pledge, in order that the good

SPIRITUAL ENRICHMENT

Every act of faith tends to enrich the one who makes it. For most people, it is an act of faith to contribute a significant portion of their incomes to the programs of the church. Developing adequate faith for tithing is certain to bring deeper involvement in and stronger commitment to the church. Great spiritual enrichment will result.



name of the church may be preserved, that the heart of the treasurer be made glad, and that it may be well with thee. For verily I say unto thee, thou hast more money now than thou wilt have when thou dost return."

And the husband replied, "Verily, thou art noble and wise among women." And he did pay his pledge for the summer, and the treasurer rejoiced greatly, saying, "Of a truth, there are those who care for the good of the church."

And it was so. 

DEAR EDITOR:

Make religion a joy, not a routine task! For modern Christians who face the ever widening gulf, which secularism has created between religion and daily life, integration (of religion and everyday life) must be a constant and conscious aim.

The layman must come to see Christianity not as a routine set of practices, but as a full, satisfying, joyous way of life ... which influences and transforms every aspect of individual and social activity ... elevating work, study, recreation, family life, even eating and sleeping, to the super-

natural.

Does anyone honestly believe people will be able to see Christianity in this true and marvelous way without first detaching themselves from over emphasis on money and the things it can buy? Putting God first through tithing blots out the glitter of material gain which blinds so many of us to life's really



worthwhile goals.

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ME! A CARETAKER?

were commanded to give a tenth of their income to God. Now that Christ has come can we give any less?

All people are caretakers. Nothing belongs to us; everything belongs to God. Not everyone realizes this, but Christians do and strive to please God in the use of all that God has put in their care.

"Yes, I'm a caretaker - God's caretaker!" 

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EXCESS BAGGAGE...

going to require decisions by millions of individuals, in their personal and public lives, in answer to the question: "How do I want to travel?"

On a personal level, questions like these may be helpful to anyone who is serious about finding out what to hold onto and what to let go:

† What possessions do I have that cause more trouble and worry than they're worth?

† Do I weigh myself down by longing for more than I need or can afford?

† Do I waste valuable time and energy on things that don't really matter?

† Does the desire for "bigger, better, more" crowd out the values of intimacy, communication and the giving of affection?

† Do I feel good about my work, the persons in my life, myself?

† If I had only three months to live, what would I let go of and what would I hold onto? 