

42

Days To Victory

Stewardship Enrichment Devotionals

Week 4

The Christian's Stewardship

Stewardship Involves Partnership

Day 22, Sunday, October 7

I Corinthians 3:9

We have all heard about the flea who hitched a ride on the elephant. When they crossed a bridge the flea said, "We really shook that bridge didn't we?"

When the Bible says, "We are fellow laborers with God" it is not saying we are equal in our impact, but that we are necessary for God's work in this world. He has chosen to allow us to help accomplish His purpose.

What a privilege this is! What an honor! A relationship with Royalty! The Lord God who created and sustains this universe is ready to join hands with us to do His work today. We enter into a partnership relationship with the Christ who loves us and gave Himself for us. This is our stewardship responsibility. You know the poem that begins: "He has no hands but our hands to do His work today." What a responsibility!

Oh, but the problem comes when we fail in our part. Remember this parable of Jesus. The father tells the first son to work in the vineyard. The son says, "Yes, I'll go" but he never goes. To the second son He says, "Go work in my vineyard." This son says, "No I won't work" but later he changed his mind and worked in the vineyard. Jesus asked the question, "Which one did the will of the father?" The one who worked.

We face accountability in our service or lack of it. We could have given sacrificially but didn't. We could have served but didn't. We often are like the "barren fig tree" (Mark 11:13-14) Jesus spoke of. It was all leaves, but no fruit. It offered great promise, but no performance. It was all show and no go.

In our sacrificial giving we are in partnership with Christ. We give and He blesses us and uses the gift for His glory and the enrichment of His church.

When Charles Fuller was pastor of First Baptist Church in Roanoke, Virginia he wrote this article, which speaks to us during our Stewardship Enrichment Capital Campaign.

There is a sizable addition to the First Baptist Church in Roanoke, Virginia, which had its financial beginnings with a five-dollar gift and an attached note written by a seven year-old boy who had earned the money helping a friend on a paper route. The note and gift were placed on the pastor's desk.

The message in the note was simple. It read, "For building."

The meticulous grammarian would insist that the lad omitted an article, "the," but perhaps the statement was more accurate without the article. The lad was for building...for building a plant...for building a ministry...for building a fellowship...for building a people...

When the congregation was challenged by that seven year-old's spirit of giving, it developed a new countenance on the face of its stewardship. As a result, there is a building today...fully paid for...being used to minister in the name of Christ...and there is another building already under construction.

This is being in partnership with God. This is being His fellow laborers. This is stewardship, which results in our growth and His glory.

Someone once said, "I would have been proud to have picked up the brush that fell from the hand of Michelangelo, to have carried the pen and ink of Milton, to have held the telescope for Columbus, to have run errands for Shakespeare, or to have pumped the bellows of the organ as Handel played his majestic music. Oh, to have been a part of those great men."

But wait – how much more wonderful to do the same for Christ today! How exciting to be His partners – to be His hands to do His work, to be His voice to tell His story, to be His heart to give and sacrifice for His glory.

Lord, thank you for allowing me to be your partner. Help me to be neither a silent nor a passive partner, but an active worker – a positive part of this team.

The Christian's Stewardship

Stewardship Acknowledges Lordship

Day 23, Monday, October 1

Philippians 2:10-11

The heart of stewardship for the Christian is the declaration that Jesus Christ is Lord of one's life. It begins with salvation - "Believe on Jesus Christ as Lord and you shall be saved" (Acts 16:31). It ends on a human level at death. In between these two points in time, we are His stewards based on His Lordship.

Those who say Jesus Christ is Lord and obey His commands to live and love, to give and to sacrifice, are secure and joyous for their life is "in Christ Jesus." This solves so much and gives guidance to everything when Jesus Christ is Lord of my life. One seeks to know God's will, and then does it. To use an old idea and a current question: "What Would Jesus Do?" determines the attitude and action.

Now what are the implications for us today as we think of our stewardship based on the Lordship of Christ?

1. It means that we determine God's will for our lives. Through prayer, Bible study, the witness of our fellow Christians and leading of the Holy Spirit.
2. It certainly involves the giving of time, talent, and treasure "as He has prospered you." (I Corinthians 16:2)
3. It does demand sacrifice. One cannot "follow" Christ without sacrificial living. The Bible says that we are to present ourselves as "living sacrifices."

Soon we will have the opportunity of demonstrating that Jesus Christ is Lord of our lives, as we receive and willingly return our commitment card for Stewardship Enrichment.

The amount is not determined by how much someone else gives but again "as He has prospered you."

Here are some modern day examples of sacrifice. These are actual people just like you who faced the same decision you are facing. They had the same fears that you have, but they had a faith far greater than their fear.

- ◆ Here is a young single mother of two children. She struggled to make ends meet, but she loved her Lord and her church. She couldn't think of anything she could do beyond her regular tithe. She testified that as she prayed the Lord seemed to be saying, "You can give a second tithe for these three years. Trust me!"

On Commitment Sunday she made this her commitment. Some time later she shared with her pastor that a month later her supervisor called her into his office and said she was being promoted with a salary that was fifty percent more than she had been making.

- ◆ Here is a couple who had been setting aside in savings a thousand dollars a month. This was to supplement their regular retirement program. At the time this special savings had grown to over a hundred thousand dollars. They decided that they would make this their sacrificial commitment saying, “We have years to add to our retirement and our church needs this now. To us this is a sacrifice and we gladly make it for our God.”

As the writer of Hebrews says, “Time would fail me to tell of” countless others who by faith stepped forward to do God’s will. This you can do also! “As God has prospered you.”

Dear God, You are my Lord and I want to be and do all the things that show You that I am a good manager of all You have placed in my care.

The Christian Stewardship Manual

The Bible Is Our Map – Part I

Day 24, Tuesday, October 2

2 Timothy 2:15

A young boy came home from Bible School and immediately went to his room and began to sing. His mother went to see what was happening. She found him standing on his Bible singing. “Why are you standing on your Bible?” I learned it in Bible School today, he answered. “You know, Momma. We sang:

The B-I-B-L-E -- yes that's the book for me.
I stand alone on the word of God
The B-I-B-L-E -- BIBLE!”

He may have missed the figurative meaning, but he had the right idea. The Bible is the book we stand on. It is the map for the Christian's journey from cradle to grave.

It is God's inspired Word to us.

The path before us all is an unknown one. It may be confusing and difficult, even dangerous at times. Before us may be potholes and debris, which could result in injury or even death. It could be like an unmarked highway with detours. It is all so confusing. Which way should we go? What road should we take?

Since God loves us so much, He has given us the Bible, an authoritative map to direct us on our Christian pilgrimage. It is of no value to us, however, unless we know its contents.

Every year the Bible is the best seller on the market. That is not a bad record for a book that is over 2,000 years old.

But it makes no difference how many Bibles are sold, if they are not read and believed and followed. It is sad that the Bible may be the best sold but the least read and understood book in the world.

For example, a man attended an auction and heard the auctioneer ask: “What am I offered for this beautiful bust of John Milton?” A man in the crowd called out, “That's not Milton. It's Shakespeare.” To which the auctioneer replied: “Well folks, that's one on me. Shows how little I know about the Bible.”

I think this is the reason God challenges us to “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.” (II Timothy 2:15) Notice we are to study the word of God. We are to approach it with a hunger to know God's message for our lives and with an eagerness to obey His commands.

The verse says we are to show ourselves “as one approved (by God).” The word translated “approved” means to be tested and to meet the standard of the one testing. In practical terms it means you have read God's word, obeyed His commands, followed His directions and He has placed His stamp of approval on your life.

You may not have the “Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval,” but you can have God’s. Remember, “If you please God it doesn’t matter who else you displease, and if you displease God it doesn’t matter who else you please.”

Consider this story from a friend...

My wife was a tremendous Christian and a devout Bible scholar with graduate degrees. The Bible was the map for her life!

In her later years, she had Alzheimer’s with all its problems. She was unable to remember names, faces, and places. I discovered an amazing thing, however.

The Alzheimer unit where she was being cared for had Bible study sessions, which she attended regularly. When asked a question she would quote the Scripture verses and interpret them fluently. On one occasion, I asked her, “You tell me you can’t remember things, that your mind just won’t work, yet you can quote long passages of the Bible and pray clearly. How do you explain it?” Her reply was, “I remember them with my heart, not my mind.”

There was never a time when she was not aware of His presence. Like the Psalmist she said, “Your word have I hidden in my heart.” When the “Word” is in your heart, God is there also.

Our supreme desire is to please our Savior and to do this we must find, follow, and faithfully obey the direction given in His map for our lives - the Bible.

At first we may not find our Lord’s teachings of stewardship to be appealing, but when we begin to obey, we discover that it truly is, “more blessed to give than receive.” And as our map leads us into eternity, we shall hear His words, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

*Lord, it is the desire of my heart to hide Your Word in my heart,
so that I may give with a willing heart.*

The Christian's Stewardship Manual

The Bible Is Our Guide - Part II

Day 25, Wednesday, October 3

John 16:12-14

Our manual for Christ-like living is the Bible! Many times, however, we hear people say, "I try to read the Bible but I can't understand it."

Perhaps they are saying what the Ethiopian said to Philip. Remember the story in Acts? Philip was going from Jerusalem to Gaza when he met "a man of great authority" who was reading from the prophet Isaiah. Phillip asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" The man replied, "How can I unless I have someone to guide me?" (Acts 8:26-40)

God long ago recognized the need and provided the answer — the Holy Spirit. Jesus said to the disciples, "I have many things to share with you but you are not ready, but when the "Spirit is come He will guide you into all truth." Today the Holy Spirit simply awaits our invitation to guide us in understanding the Bible and living the Christian life.

The Bible is God's inspired word to us – "all scripture is given by inspiration of God..." (II Timothy 3:16) Holy men of old spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. Today the same Spirit waits to guide us to understanding the manual God has given – the Bible.

- ▶ He who inspired the Bible must interpret it.
- ▶ He who authored the Bible must apply it.
- ▶ He who moved upon men to record God's Word must move upon men to receive it.

Without the Holy Spirit we may:

- ▶ Know the words but miss the wonder.
- ▶ Read the sentence but miss the substance.
- ▶ Understand the grammar but miss the greatness.
- ▶ Grasp its history but miss His Story.

In fact, we will never know the life it gives, the light it shed nor the love it reveals without the Holy Spirit's moving in our hearts and minds.

When we invite the Holy Spirit to help us to understand the Bible as we read and study it, the Holy Spirit will:

1. Lead us to **accept** it as God's Word and as God's unique message to us. We realize that the Word is speaking directly to us. As the Philippian jailer we ask, "What must I do to be saved?" and the answer comes, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved."
2. Lead us to **apply** the truth to our personal need at the time. There are times when He needs to force us to see ourselves as looking into a mirror. There are other times when He reveals to us the God of all comfort and brings peace to our turmoil.

There are other times when major decisions need to be made (such as your part in Stewardship Enrichment). We read the Word and pray and the Holy Spirit leads us to follow in the footsteps of Jesus to sacrificial commitment.

3. Lead us to **allow** the word to be "a light unto my path and a lamp unto my feet."
 - ▶ When there is worry He leads you to "cast all your anxiety on Him because he cares for you." (I Peter 5:7)
 - ▶ When there is failure He points you to "confess your sin for He is faithful and just to forgive." (I John 1:9)
 - ▶ When there is turmoil He points you to Jesus' words, "...Peace I give to you..." (John 14:27)
 - ▶ When there is sorrow and separation He says, "Let not your heart be troubled...in my Father's house are many mansions." (John 14:1-2)
 - ▶ When there is reluctance, even rebellion, He reminds you that obedience to the Father is the only happy way. "...To obey is better than sacrifice..." (I Samuel 15:22)
 - ▶ When there is selfishness he guides you to the words, "Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over..." (Luke 6:38)

*Lord, may your Holy Spirit guide my heart and mind
as I seek to be a part of Your will for our church.*

THE CHRISTIAN'S STEWARDSHIP MANUAL

The Christian's Instructions - Part III

Day 26, Thursday, October 4

Someone has said that the Word of God:

- ◆ Commenced history,
- ◆ Controls history, and will
- ◆ Consummate history.

Today, God has given us His written word – The Bible. This book gives us His directions for Christ-like living. If we follow the directions there is joy. If not, there is emptiness.

Let's decide right now that we are going to follow the directions God has given us as Christians. He gave us instructions concerning:

1. **Sacrifice** – "...I urge you to offer your bodies as living sacrifices..." (Romans 12:1-2) We soon discover that the instruction manual begins to make demands on our time, talent and treasure.

If we obey the instructions, there is success. When all else fails, read the instructions.

2. **Service** – The manual tells us "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." (Ephesians 2:10) In fact, we discover that our faith is not valid if not accompanied by good works for Christ and in His name. As James 2:20 says, "...faith without deeds is useless."
3. **Stewardship** – Jesus taught that we are all stewards of everything we are and everything we possess. The Apostle Paul said, "It is required of stewards that one be found faithful."

Certainly this includes all of the above and much more, but let's look at one major area of stewardship – our possessions.

As we are considering the Stewardship Enrichment Capital Campaign our church is now involved in, we need to earnestly consider what God would have us do – what our sacrificial gift will be. To arrive at this amount, let us follow the directions of our guidebook.

Pray. You will never know what you ought to do without prayer. God already knows! He knows your future and what He has planned for your life. In prayer, He will lay that amount on your heart. Time after time a husband and wife prayed separately and then when they compared figures, they were the same! God had been at work. "Call me and I will answer and show you great and mighty things beyond your imagination." (Jeremiah 33:3)

Obey by faith. Frequently when God has revealed a figure, whether it be hundreds or thousands or a hundred thousand dollars or more, the first reaction has been “I can’t do that!” Yet when faith stepped in and prayer continued to commitment, the affirmation was made, “I can and by faith I will.”

A pastor tells the following story...

His church was in a capital campaign such as the one we are now in. Every member was urged to prayerfully consider what each one should give. One day a lady approached him, handed him a check for \$5,000. She asked “Is that enough?” The pastor answered, “If it represents you and your love for Christ and His church.”

A few days later she returned, asked for her check back, and handed him another one for “\$25,000. Again she asked, “Is that enough?” The pastor gave the same answer, “If it represents you and your love for Christ and His church.”

A short time later, the lady called for an appointment to see the pastor. This time she handed the pastor a check for \$50,000. With tears streaming down her cheeks she said, “God would not let me forget what you said. I have prayed and this represents me and my love for Christ and His church – our church.”

Will your commitment represent you and your love for Christ and His church?

*Lord, I do love You and our church, and I want my gift
to speak to You and to me of the depth of my love.*

The Christian Steward's Church

Day 27, Friday, October 5

In the New Testament the word “church” is used 115 times. Every book in the New Testament was written to a church, gives the history of the church, or is for use in a church. Obviously, anything of such importance deserves our attention on our Journey to Victory. Let’s begin this section by considering “our church.”

Our Church

Matthew 16:18

The local church is the most important organization or grouping of people on the face of the earth. It is divine in its origin, divine in its purpose, and divine in its destiny.

Here we are not talking about a building. We make a mistake when we point to a building and say, “that is my church.” That is the building that houses the “church” — the body of Christ — in that location. The church is people, not bricks and stone and lumber.

It is His church and we, the members, belong to Him.

On the other hand, it is our church. It is made up of people, just like you and me, who have bonded together to be His body here in this location. As such, we have been given great responsibilities and awesome privileges.

We are to be His witness here where we live and throughout the world. Jesus said, “...You will be witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8) We do this by going to others ourselves to tell of Jesus, and giving that others might go when and where we cannot.

The New Testament describes the church as a body and, as such, we all have individual responsibilities. Some are hands, some feet, some eyes, some ears, but all are members of one body. It takes everyone working together for the body to function properly.

One of the folk tales of the Canadian Northwoods tells about two porcupines in the freezing weather who would huddle close together, but the closer they got together the more they were pricked by the quills of the other. So they would move apart and then they would begin to chill and to freeze again. So they would move back together, and again the quills would prick the other one. So they would move apart; and the process went on and on. The moral of the story is, they needed each other, but they needed each other.

And I have an idea that that is the perfect picture of the average body of believers in Christ. We need each other so much, but sometime in the abrasive way of life, we needle each other. We are one in our church and must function as one body to achieve victory in the great task God has given us.

In the Stewardship Enrichment Capital Campaign before us, it is only together that we can accomplish the task God has given our church. Even with the large gifts that some will make, we are

all essential to victory – each of us. The Apostle Paul gave us the guidelines, “Everyone of you ...” 100% participation. Do you realize that all by yourself you can make that 100% not happen?

Say out loud and with conviction: “It is **my** church!” I know you are only one, but you are one and you matter to Christ, to the other members, and to yourself.

During the Olympic Games one summer, the third runner in a relay race dropped the baton as he tried to pass it. He threw himself on the ground, wept openly and had to be helped from the arena. Think of what was involved in his failure:

- ❖ It put his team out of the running.
- ❖ It disappointed his country.
 - ❖ The success of the two runners before him was canceled.
 - ❖ The runner who was to follow never had his chance.
 - ❖ He had to live with his failure.

Others are dependent on you. Others may work and give, but only you can do what God wants you to do. Those who come before you have faithfully passed the baton to you. Let those who come after you find you faithful. Don't drop the baton.

It is essential that you fill your place in our church. Your regular presence, your dedicated service, your constant prayer and your sacrificial financial support will make a difference in the impact of our church today and in eternity.

*Lord, in years past other Saints have been faithful to build our church.
They have passed the baton to me. Help me to not drop the baton.
Help me run with patience the race set before me, and
may those who come behind me find me faithful.*

The Christian Steward's Church

Our Members - Part I

Day 28, Saturday, October 6

Acts 2:44-47

A young pastor was walking in his backyard when his foot struck what appeared to be an old lamp buried in the ground. When he picked it up, an old genie dressed in rags suddenly popped out.

The old genie was annoyed that he had been awakened. "Okay," he said, "tell me your one wish and make it quick. I want to get back into the lamp."

"I've always dreamed of this happening," the pastor said, excitedly. "Stay right here. I'll be back in a minute." Soon he returned with a map of the Middle East, unfolded it, and showed it to the genie.

"My one wish is that peace and harmony will come to this whole area, from Turkey to Egypt, from Israel to Iraq and Iran," the pastor said.

"Are you crazy?" the genie exclaimed. "Give me a break. I'm an old genie, and the Middle East has been in strife and at war for thousands of years. I just can't do it!"

The pastor thought for a while and then said, "Okay, I'll make another request. I wish that my church would be a place where everyone could live in peace, where everyone would give sacrificial offerings over and above the tithe."

The genie pondered the request and then said, "Do you mind if I take another look at that map?"

Yes, in a church it is difficult to achieve complete unity and complete sacrificial giving. It depends on us giving ourselves completely to the Lord and His church to make it so. It is difficult, but not impossible.

The problem today is that 40% of members are standing on the promises and 60% are sitting off the premises.

Three local church pastors were having lunch together. As they discussed their problems, they discovered that they all had the same problem – cockroaches.

The first pastor said, "I sprayed with DDT, but it didn't help. They all returned."

The second pastor said, "I called in an exterminator, but it didn't work either. They soon returned."

The Baptist pastor said, "I solved the problem easily. I baptized them, added them to the membership role, and they haven't been back since."

This is what membership means to many whose names are on our roll. Today our church needs members who are loyal to Christ and His work. Ask yourself – “How can I help?” “What can I do?”

You can begin by being present. Never underestimate the importance of your attendance. Actually when you are in your place in our church you are ministering in at least six ways. By your presence, you...

- + influence everyone with whom you come in contact.
- + make a witness. You have said, “This is important to me.”
- + enable God to use you, in innumerable ways, to accomplish His divine will.
- + place yourself in the company of other pilgrims on the journey of life, and give them the opportunity for enrichment and encouragement.
- + place yourself in the center of God’s people, where the acts of God are remembered and treasured, and where the Spirit of God is both welcomed and affirmed. It is there, waiting upon God – like the Apostles in the upper room – that wonderful things occur and power is discovered.
- + become involved in the greatest force for good in the entire world. The sun never sets on the army of which you are a part. The work of God’s people is really what makes the difference in this world.

Our church needs members who love one another and are united in their love for our church.

*Lord, help me to be an active, living, and giving
part of Your church – my church – our church.*