

42

Days To Victory

Stewardship Enrichment Devotionals

Week 5

The Christian Steward's Church

Our Members - Part II

Day 29, Sunday, October 14

Romans 12:4-13

Our church can and should be like this story about the Special Olympics. As you know the Special Olympics features mentally and physically disabled athletes from around the world. There was a foot race among a group of people with Down Syndrome. The runners were close together as they came around the track toward the finish line. One of them stumbled and fell. When that happened, the rest of the runners stopped. They went back as a group, helped the runner who'd fallen to stand up, and then all ran across the finish line together. Once across, they hugged and congratulated each other for finishing the race.

This is what our church was meant to be. You can make it so!

Our church needs members who are willing to be used – to serve where needed. God gave you special talents and abilities. The secret to a happy, useful life is to be content with what He gave you, and use your gifts and talents in the way God asks. Our church needs your talent and abilities!

Our church needs members who are willing to give, to sacrifice and more. What we are doing for God in our church is demanding. Our Stewardship Enrichment Capital Campaign asks for the best in all of us.

An American stood beside a native in India. It was a poor part of the country, yet a lovely temple was under construction. The practical-minded Westerner turned to a native and asked: "How much will it cost?" A startled look came over the face of the woman, "The cost does not count...it is for our God."

As Jesus moved toward Calvary, He never counted the cost. He surrounded Himself with men and women, most of them simple, humble people who shared His spirit and His attitude. They did not count the cost and neither should we! It is for our God!

When this happens we will have great Stewardship Enrichment.
You and your family can lead the way!

*Lord, help me to link arms with others in our church, and press toward the finish line
and the prize of the calling of God.
I want to cross the finish line together with my fellow Saints.*

The Christian Steward's Church

Our Privilege

Day 30, Monday, October 8

Ephesians 5:25

Author Tony Compolo tells a story about a survey of several hundred people who had reached age ninety-five. They were asked if they could live their life over, what would they do differently?

Researchers summarized all the answers and distilled them to the most prominent three.

- (3) I would put more importance on relationships and treat people differently.
- (2) I would take more risks with my life.
- (1) I would try to do something that would live on after I am dead.

Now that is something to think about and something to act on! If you want to accomplish all three things the 95 year olds wished for, then go to work in our church!

Basically what these 95 year olds were saying was that if they had another chance, they wanted their lives to really matter, to make a difference in time and eternity. They wanted their influence to live on after they were gone.

Now you probably are not 95, but you may have the same desires and ambitions. Here's the answer – get involved in our church, and your life and influence will matter. In fact, our Stewardship Enrichment Capital Campaign will guarantee that. Jesus said of Mary of Bethany's gift, "This which she has done will be spoken of as a memorial to her wherever the gospel is preached throughout all eternity."

What you do will definitely affect the lives of young and old alike. It will have an impact today and for years to come. Even those not yet born will be influenced by what you do. What a privilege!

How then can you get started to insure this? Here are several suggestions:

1. Get involved in what is happening today in our church. There is a class to be taught, committees to serve on, visits to be made, members who need to be encouraged – make your own list. You can matter.
2. Volunteer to assist in the work of the capital campaign. There are calls to be made, meals to be prepared, prayers to be offered, etc. Ask someone now involved!
3. You can pray! This has been said so many times, to some it has lost its meaning to many. God has promised: "Call upon me and I will answer you and show you great and mighty things which you know not." (Jeremiah 33:3) There are miracles to be performed in our church and in your life and the miracles are waiting for your prayers to bring them to pass.

Here is a prayer offered in a capital campaign in another church:

"Lord, you have blessed this church in a wonderful way, but I want so much more. I want to see more people come to know you. I want our church to become more Christ-like. I want our facilities to expand to meet our needs. I

want us to give as you have given to us. I want us to learn the meaning of sacrifice and to practice it in our stewardship enrichment campaign. Lord I want you to answer this prayer, beginning in me."

We face the moment of decision. This is my church. This is my ministry. This is my capital campaign. This is my commitment!

4. You can give sacrificially. Give yourself completely to Christ and your finances will follow. Paul praised those of Macedonia who begged him to let them give and then they gave sacrificially. The key was that "they first gave themselves to the Lord" (II Corinthians 8:5). This you can do! It is easier to give your money (part of you) when you have first given yourself (all of you). The song says, "All to Jesus, I surrender. All to Him I freely give."

"Christ loved the church and gave himself for it."

(Ephesians 5:25)

Lord, help me to follow Your lead and love the church so much that I am willing to give myself - everything I have - to helping it succeed.

The Christian Steward's Church

Our Money

Day 31, Tuesday, October 9

I Corinthians 16:1-2

Mention money in church and certain things happen. Some close their ears and wonder why they came this Sunday. Others will think, "There he goes again. All he preaches on is money." The committed Christian who is, by definition, "a good steward" will enjoy it. She will recognize it as a major part of Jesus' teaching and the Bible's message.

Money is an interesting subject where ever it is discussed. Note some reactions:

- ❖ Woody Allen says, "Money is better than poverty even if only for financial reasons."
- ❖ Money has miraculous powers. "It greases the palm, feathers a nest, holds heads above the water, makes both ends meet."
- ❖ Carl Sandburg stated in one of his poems that "money buys everything except love, personality, freedom, immortality, silence, and peace."

All of this is interesting and no wonder we love it. Here is the problem. Not money, but "the love of money is the root of all evil" (I Timothy 6:10).

It's hard not to love money, for it is necessary in so many areas, and provides for so much good. Food, clothing, and shelter all require money. Medicines, doctors, and dentists all require money. Education, transportation, and recreation all require money. On and on we could go.

When we begin to love it - put it first in our lives, it becomes our master, even over God. When we elevate it to first place it becomes our object of worship.

What is the solution to the problem? Actually the solution is simple. In a word it is stewardship! Once we come to understand and accept our stewardship responsibilities, the problem is solved. In simple steps:

1. **Stewardship in one phrase is - God owns it all!** He is the creator and owner of everything. "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it." (Psalm 24:1).
2. **We are His stewards.** We are responsible to Him for how we
 - ❖ Receive what we have
 - ❖ Use what we have
 - ❖ Give what we have
 - ❖ Leave what we have

This includes our time, talent, and treasure. It embraces time and eternity.

3. **We are to give "offerings."** Sacrificial gifts over and above our tithes.

Only love can bring one to the point of sacrificial giving.

A little boy saw his mother come to the house and leave her muddy shoes at the door before she entered. In a spirit of helpfulness he cleaned the shoes and polished them. The he placed them by her dresser. The mother was so pleased with his thoughtfulness that she placed a dollar bill on his pillow with her note "Thank you!" The next morning the dollar bill with the note still attached was on the breakfast table. He added his note: "I did it for love!"

It is the "love of Christ which compels us!" (II Corinthians 5:14) One translation states "the love of Christ leaves me no choice." We learned how to love from Christ and we love Him so much that our love leaves us no choice but to give with passion.

4. We are and will be accountable to Him.

A man began to doze in church just before the offering. In his sleep he could see the ushers coming down the aisle. He reached reluctantly for a bill. The usher reached his seat. He was about to place the dollar on the plate, but the plate seemed to fade out. In its place was a nail-pierced hand waiting to receive his gift. Glancing up, he saw not the usher's familiar face but a face of deep tenderness and a thorn-crowned brow. For the first time in his life, it dawned on him that he was not giving to the usher, to the preacher, nor to the church, but to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Lord, I know beyond a shadow of a doubt that you own everything - including me.

*And you have placed some possessions and money in my hands
and have given me the power to get more.*

Lord, I want to be a good manager - a good steward - of all that You have given me.

Into Your hand and Your hand alone I place my gift.

Use it (and me) for Your glory.

The Christian Steward's Church

Our Finances – Part I

Day 32, Wednesday, October 10

Philippians 4:19

A ministry that helped people with Christian financial advice received about 150,000 calls per month from people asking for help. The profile of the average caller:

- Age 30-35
- Owes \$15,000 - \$20,000 in school loans
- Owes \$17,000 - \$20,000 in credit card debt
- Owes \$20,000 on two cars
- Owes \$120,000 on the average mortgage

In America today:

- 50% of marriages fail
- 60-80% of these cite financial problems as the root cause of strife
- \$1.17 is spent for every \$1 earned

Many are not managing their money well. Note this information on the giving patterns in our churches:

- Individuals pay four times as much in interest as they give the church (10.2% vs. 2.3%)
- 80 cents of every dollar is given by those 55 and over
- 20% of members give 80% of the money contributed
- 30% give the other 20% of contributions
- 50% give nothing at all
- 1 in 5 churches borrow money to keep the doors open

Why do we consider all of these figures? There are several reasons:

- They reveal the tremendous financial burdens with which many live.
- They reveal the major problem so many face when they think of tithing and/or giving to their church.
- They reveal the few who support the work of the church that is enjoyed by all.
- They reveal the marital problems caused by financial problems.

Whether you fit into this pattern or not, it may be profitable to analyze the situation and see if all of us could handle our finances more effectively and become better stewards. Perhaps a good way to do this is to do a Bible study of one of the miracle's of Jesus - the feeding of the five thousand found in Mark 6.

1. Admit there is a problem – Mark 6:34-37

You know the story. Great crowds were following Jesus to see and hear Him. Seeing their needs, Jesus “had compassion on them.” It was dinner time and they had no food – there was a problem and the disciples recognized it.

Unlike so many today, when dealing with finances people stick their heads in the sand and refuse to see a problem. Note the following:

Lending institutions have criteria to determine if one is in danger of debt destruction:

- You pay only bare minimum each month on credit and never pay more than that minimum.
- You make partial payments rather than full.
- You start falling behind on payments shortly after opening an account.
- Your account balance always seems to grow. You cannot seem to pay it off.
- You have periodic bouts of late payments.

All of this says, “I have a problem and I need to deal with it.” It is important because if you do not master your money, your money will master you. It means:

- You have a burden of debt that is back breaking
- You can’t get out of the maze of discouragement, disillusionment and despair.
- You have no hope for savings, retirement, education of children – the future is bleak.
- You cannot support the Lord’s work as you want to and as God wants you to.

Lord, help me master money.

I want You to be the center of my life – not money, not debt.

I will take positive steps now to control my debt.

The Christian Steward's Church

Our Finances - Part II

Day 33, Thursday, October 11

Philippians 4:19

2. Consider what your resources are – Mark 6:38

This is what Jesus and the disciples did. They found a young man with five loaves and two fishes. These were the assets that were available to deal with the problem.

In like manner, this is where to start to solve the debt problem. The first step in making ends meet is to know how far apart they are.

1. Make a list of your income – all sources of capital. This reveals what you have to work with.
2. Make an honest list of all your “outgo”. On this list include everything you are responsible for – item by item.
3. Put the two together – if the expenses exceed the income you are in trouble (I know – it took a PhD to conclude that.) Some of you may have a “near debt” experience.
4. Now it is time to recognize that financial problems do not usually come from too little financial resources but from misplaced priorities, by a lifestyle out of control and by reckless use of credit cards.

When your outgo exceeds your income,
Your upkeep will be your downfall.

3. Give what you have to Jesus – Mark 6:41

The young man gave his resources (the loaves and fishes) to Jesus and trusted Him. Jesus was their greatest resource. It may seem simplistic, but this is the first step in solving your problem. Ask for guidance and follow His leadership. Do your part and He will bless. The lad gave his food, but was fed along with thousands of others.

The Bible tells us we are to give the “first fruits” of our income to God. When we trust Him with the first part, He will bless and see that the rest goes farther.

Memorize Proverbs 3:9-10 – “Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the first fruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing and your vats will brim with new wine.”

“Those who honor Me I will honor.” (1 Samuel 2:30) If you trust Christ with your soul, surely you can trust Him with your finances.

The first step in getting out of debt is to stop spending, and for most people the first step in doing that is to eliminate credit cards. One person said, “I like credit cards, they go so much farther than money.” Actually, “plastic surgery” is needed. Cut them into 2 pieces

and put one piece in the garbage at home and the other in the garbage at work. This will prevent any possibility of “divine healing” (or theft).

Philippians 4:19 does not say, “My God shall supply all my needs according to Master Card.”

Actually there are only two ways to reduce debt.

1. Reduce expenses – eliminate every non-essential to enable you to pay off the high interest credit debts. Do you have to have that club membership or eat out at that fancy restaurant every week? Postpone major purchases.
2. Increase income – perhaps a second part-time job. Have a garage sale. What can you sell? Perhaps you don’t have to have that boat, travel trailer, second home, etc.

It isn’t easy, but it can be done!

4. Anticipate the miracle – Mark 6:42-44

God will multiply what you give Him.

1. Believe it can be done! In Matthew 9:29 Jesus said, “According to your faith it will be done to you.” Just as He met the need of feeding the multitude, He will meet your needs if you are obedient to His commands and follow His way.
2. By faith follow His leadership! “But seek first His Kingdom and his righteousness. And these things will be given to you as well.” (Matthew 6:33) In Ephesians 3:20-21 “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us.”

He is able (and desires) to do more for us and in us than we can imagine. Trust Him!

Develop a plan to deal with debt. Stewardship Enrichment is a three-year program – you can give less the first year as you deal with your debt; more the second year; and more the third year. As your debt goes down, your giving goes up.

*Lord, I commit that, with Your help, I will deal with my debt,
so that I can commit to being a part of Your plan for our church.*

The Christian Steward's Church

Our Opportunity

Day 34, Friday, October 12

Ephesians 5:15-16

The future of our church is defined by what we do today. This is God's hour of opportunity for our church. He has positioned us in a time and place with challenges that are incredible. But such opportunities create responsibility.

God has never asked His people to do anything without providing the necessary resources to accomplish His will. Those resources, however, are not sitting in our church's bank account. The resources we need to accomplish our ministry and mission are in our pockets and in our wills.

On Commitment Sunday, we truly have our hour of opportunity. We must cherish this moment and realize that unless we "seize this moment", we will miss God's plan.

Opportunity is only a visitor. Don't assume it will be back tomorrow – move while the door is open!

God calls you to sacrifice. This is your opportunity.

This is the moment of truth for us. We either make a commitment or make an excuse. Right then and there you decide the future.

God calls you to service. You hear the Savior say, "Now is the time, follow me." "Don't look at the fields and say it is four months to the harvest. I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest." (John 4:35)

God calls you to faithful stewardship. Of course we all know we are stewards but we forget sometimes that the Bible says, "It is required in stewards, that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful." (I Corinthians 4:2)

The father of five children came home with a toy that he had won in a drawing at the office. He called the children together and asked which one should get the present. He asked:

- ◆ Who is most obedient to mother?
 - ◆ Who never talks back to mother?
 - ◆ Who does everything mother says?

Five voices answered in unison: "You get the toy, Daddy!"

In addition to tithing He calls for offerings, and this is where the real willingness to change takes place. In our commitment to Stewardship Enrichment, we are all called on to give over and above our regular giving, and for most of us this will mean changing our lifestyle.

In light of this, God always gives His promise of blessings to those who are obedient - to those who make sacrifices for Christ and His beloved church. He has promised, "Give, and it will be given

to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” (Luke 6:38)

When we look at the history of this church’s life and ministry, we know that God has blessed in the past. God is blessing us now and we thank Him for involvement today. We have experienced the miracle of His grace and we give thanks for it.

We will be faithful to those who have gone before us and have sown the seeds which we are now reaping. We will not fail our God, whose hand has given us such opportunities and brought us to this hour in our history. Let those who come behind us find us faithful.

We have all eternity to celebrate our victories, but only the one short hour in which to win them. Commitment Sunday is our opportunity.

*Lord, thank you for trusting me with this opportunity and responsibility.
You can count on me, because I know I can count on You!*

The Christian Steward's Church

Our Goal

Day 35, Saturday, October 13

Ephesians 3:21

Frequently we are asked, "What is the goal?" Those who ask this question usually are thinking of numerical goals. Our answer, however, is in terms of spiritual goals.

Our **goal** is for all members and friends of the church to pray for, find, and in faith follow God's will for their lives, individually, as their part of God's will for the church.

Becoming a Christian is optional. But once you become a Christian and ask Jesus Christ to take control of your life, involvement in His church and His work is what He asks of you.

Our **need** is to meet the financial objectives before us. The pastor, staff and the Stewardship Enrichment leadership team have, over a period of time, prayerfully considered what will be required to do the work and fulfill the vision God has given our church.

This need must be met and even exceeded if the future plans and growth of our church are to be realized. This requires all of us doing all that God asks of us.

Our **presence** is needed on Commitment Sunday at this exciting worship experience. We want everyone to share in this historic time in the history of our church. Few days will matter as much to the future of our church as will this day. It will be an hour that matters in eternity.

Our individual **participation** is required to meet what God is asking of us, and what He is asking of our congregation as a whole. In a few days, each of us will be receiving in the mail a personalized commitment card to be completed and returned on Commitment Sunday.

This card matters to God, to our church, and to you:

- It will represent you and your family.
- It will reveal your love for your God.
- It will represent your love for your church.
- It will recognize your obedience to God's will.
- It will say to your fellow members "I am with you in what God is doing in our church."

Our **prayer** is for this to be a high spiritual hour. Remember, it is "not by might nor power, but by My spirit" says the Lord and "unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain."

Continue praying for yourself and your family. God has a plan and purpose for you in this Stewardship Enrichment Capital Campaign. As we have said repeatedly, we all are called to pray for, find, and in faith follow God's will.

In prayer you will discover that He wants you to make a sacrificial commitment. You may need to reconfigure your lifestyle, change your plans for the future, or give money you had planned to leave in your will.

His will may take you beyond what you think is possible, but this is where faith takes over. He wants you to show your faith by your commitment. He will never lead you to do what He has not already planned to provide.

Our joy is to be able to join hands and hearts with you and your family and others of our fellowship in a glorious worship experience. Together we will sing and pray and feel the presence of the Holy Spirit in the service.

Will we reach our goals? Will we succeed in this glorious undertaking for our God? Will victory be ours for His glory?

The story is told of a wise man that lived high in the mountains. He was able to answer any question posed to him. Time and again he had been tested, but he always gave the right answer.

A young man decided to test him once again. He planned to hold a bird in his hands and ask, "What do I have in my hand?" If the wise man said, "a bird" he would then ask, "Is it dead or alive?" If the ancient one said "dead" he would release it and let it fly away. If the wise one said "alive" he would squeeze it and drop it dead before the man.

He made the long trek up the mountain until he encountered the man of wisdom. Holding the bird in his hand behind his back, he asked, "What do I have in my hand?" The wise man answered "a bird." "You are right sir, but is it alive or dead?" The man of wisdom answered, "You hold the answer in your hands!"

Will we reach our goal? You hold the answer in your hands!

Lord, You have placed resources in my hands and gifts and abilities in my life. You have given me the power to get wealth. I open my hands and all that I am to You, from whom all good things come.