

42

Days To Victory

Stewardship Enrichment Devotionals

Week 6

The Christian's Stewardship Response

My Challenge

Day 36, Sunday, October 21

We're entering the last week of our "Journey to Victory." It has been an exciting and challenging experience. These days have been marked by growth and maturity.

As you look back over the years, perhaps there are areas of regret. You haven't been what you or God wanted you to be. But when you became a Christian, God did not demand a performance bond.

Perhaps you have realized you haven't served the Savior as you would like to have done. There were so many times when you were asked to do this or that for your church and your Christ, and you didn't have the time or the inclination.

There is a story of a group of men sitting around the pot-bellied stove in the country store discussing the mysteries of life.

"I'm going deaf and blind," sighed one old fellow. "I don't know what the good Lord wants to leave me here for."

"Now - now," replied a friend, "the Lord's ways are not our ways and we can't always understand. But if He's left you here, He's got work for you to do."

The old fellow sat for a minute in quiet meditation, then announced, "Well, I'm not a-gonna' do it."

Could this be you?

Perhaps you have come to realize that you really have never made a meaningful sacrifice for the Lord. Sure you have given, perhaps even generously, but never responded to His call to completely surrender and sacrifice for His glory. The desire has been there, but there was always the pull in the opposite direction. Something was always there with more attraction.

I recall the story of a boy who said to his girlfriend one night, "I don't have a lot of money like Jerome Green, but I sure do love you," to which she made no comment. Then the boy said, "I don't have a beautiful home like Jerome Green, but I really love you." Again, the girl was silent. "I don't have a brand new Porsche like Jerome Green," added the boyfriend, "but you mean all the world to me." Finally, the girl responded, "I love you too, but tell me a little more about Jerome Green.

Could this be you?

You realize that again and again you have struggled with the desire to be the Christian God wants you to be. Your intentions are good, but every time something comes up and you delay. There are so many attractions the world puts before you. There is always the Jordan River to cross before you reach the Promised Land.

Could this be you?

Maybe as you reflect you realize that everything seems to be wrong. There is no real joy, nor peace in your life. So many regrets. So many problems. So many failures. So many missed opportunities. Is there an answer?

Look within.

We need an incentive from time to time to freshen up our dedication, to renew our loyalty, to take stock of ourselves, and see if we are any better in our spiritual situation now than we were last week or last year or ten years ago. Is there a little more in our understanding of God and in our prayer life and in our relationship to our Savior than there has been? Are we really living or are we just going through the motions?

Look up in prayer.

In the comic strip Blondie, Dagwood is in the office of his boss, Mr. Dithers. Someone is on the phone and you can hear the sound clear across the room. Mr. Dithers says, "My wife has quite a loud voice." "It is loud," agrees Dagwood. "That's why all her prayers are answered," adds Mr. Dithers, "she calls direct."

Isn't it wonderful that we can call direct when we pray! Talk it over with Him. He understands and will forgive any failure.

In every life situation, no matter how difficult, no matter how frustrating, no matter how tempted you are to lose heart, you can be sure that you are not using all your strength if you have not asked for Divine guidance.

God may not always give you the wisdom to solve your own problem. But you can always be assured that Jesus is strong enough to handle it, compassionate enough to feel it, loving enough to care for it, and wise enough to deal with it.

And He will also give you guidance in the commitment for next Sunday.

Lord, I accept the challenge. I have looked within and am sure of my heart. I now look up to You in prayer and commitment knowing that You hear my prayer and will lead me to the commitment of dollars that I will give in Your name.

The Christian's Stewardship Response

My Faith

Day 37, Monday, October 15

What we do for Christ and our church at this time needs to be done now. Remember the Broadway musical "Annie," based on the comic strip, "Little Orphan Annie"? In it she sings again and again:

The sun will come out tomorrow, so you've got
to hang on 'til tomorrow – come what may!

Tomorrow . . . Tomorrow, I love you, tomorrow;
you're only a day away!

It is a great song filled with optimism and determination. For us however, tomorrow is not the answer – today matters. What you do must be done now – Commitment Sunday.

Two things are necessary for meaningful sacrifice: love and faith.

First: His love for us, and our love for Him. This is embodied in a verse of scripture and a verse of song. "For Christ's love compels us..." (II Corinthians 5:14)

"Here, O Lord, Your Servants Gather"

Here, O Lord, your servants gather, hand we link with hand;
Looking toward our Savior's cross, joined in love we stand.
As we seek the realm of God, we unite to pray:
Jesus, Savior, guide our steps, for You are the way.

Second: Only faith - complete trust in Christ and His promises - will lead us to the point of genuine sacrifice. This can be seen in the history of Israel as they were about to enter the Promised Land and faced the barrier of the Jordan River. God said to the priests:

"When you move among the people and they follow you, and the people have sanctified themselves, having set themselves apart for a great adventure, you are going to move down to the water's edge. When you come to the water's edge, your priests are going to pause. But tell them this, "Take one step more, and put your feet in the water." (Joshua 3:3-8)

Think of it – "Take one step more." God was ready to part the waters, but it took one more step – a step of faith for the miracle to happen.

This is where you are today: Take one more step! A step of faith and God will do His miracle in your life.

Every great event in the lives of God's people in the past was the result of faith on their part. God was able and willing, but he waited on their faith. Read the eleventh chapter of Hebrews for an example of this.

Times have changed, but God hasn't. His promises are still valid. It is still true that "my God shall supply all your needs." Surely if you can trust Him with your soul for eternity, then you can trust him with your dollars for now.

One of the most powerful testimonies I have heard or read is given below. Dr. Kregg Hood in his book Take God at His Word asks:

“When was the last time you read Luke 6:38? “Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” I have a confession to make. For far too long I have simply not believed this passage. I have tried hard to find some way to get around the truth that is taught so clearly. I think my motivation was based partially on my opposition to what some call “prosperity teaching.” But, deep inside, I think my struggles with this passage really signaled my lack of faith in God to reward my obedient giving.

“Jesus says to tap into God’s economy. The Lord is a generous provider. You won’t run out of money! Don’t be afraid to give. When you give, you also receive – “a good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap.” I’ve never seen an exception to this rule. You always receive more than you give. If you give love, you receive more love. If you give friendship, you receive more friends in return. I’ve even noticed if you give a smile to someone, you will receive more smiles. So it follows from Scripture and practical experience that if you give money, you receive more money.

“For years I struggled with this text. I thought it was materialistic to think God would bless me financially when I gave money to do his work. But, in reality, the materialistic view is thinking that my own ingenuity is the only source of my ability to make money. A spiritual person obeys and trusts God to release his blessings and provide all the resources of life. The unspiritual person believes human effort is the source of material wealth.”

Actually this is what the Bible says in II Corinthians 9:10-11. Paul is saying that if you give generously, even sacrificially, that, “God will make you rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion and your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.”

In Malachi 3:10, God himself promises that if we are faithful and even sacrificial in our giving He will “pour out a blessing that there shall not be room enough to receive all of it.” That is enough for me. Isn’t it for you?

His promises and His plans are certain. You can trust Him in every area of your life. Take the step of faith – a step of action! This is faith in action!

*Lord, I have faith – make it stronger. Help me love You more.
Help me step out in belief, faith, love and trust
to make a commitment that will help accomplish Your will for our church.*

The Christian's Stewardship Response

My Decision - Part I

Day 38, Tuesday, October 16

*"Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision:
for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision."
Joel 3:14*

Every day the same thing happens repeatedly with my cat Angel. She has been out and needs to come in. I hear her at the door to the garage. I open the door and wait for her to come in. Will she? No! She lowers her head suspiciously as if I were the enemy. "Come on Angel," I say impatiently. She sits down and begins to wash her face with one paw. My patience is wearing thin by now. I raise my voice and say, "Come in here." She looks at me as if to say "who died and made you king" and sits. Finally I say, "Angel I'm not going to stand here forever. If you don't come in I'm going to close the door. This is your last chance." Does she come in? No! She figures I'll be patient – so far she's right. Finally she slowly and cautiously ambles in. I reach down to ruffle her head with my usual affectionate gesture. She twists away and gives me that blank stare as if to say, "Where have I seen you before?" But, she's a cat.

I wonder if God doesn't feel that way about us. He stands at the door and knocks. He calls and opens it in love. He waits...and waits...and waits.

He's still waiting for us to accept His invitation to enter into the fullness of His fellowship. He waits for us to be obedient to His word and His will. He waits for us to be good stewards – to give ourselves, and our possessions sacrificially. He waits!

Only five days remain on our 42 Days to Victory journey to Commitment Sunday. By now you have received your personalized Commitment Card, or you will soon. You and your family are faced with a decision. You have to decide soon. How much will your commitment be? What sacrifice will you make for our Savior and our church? Time is short! Here are some guidelines to assist in your decision:

1. Accept His Word. Consider these verses of scripture and let your heart respond to them.

This is an Old Testament concept as well as a New Testament teaching: "The Lord said to Moses, 'Tell the Israelites to bring me an offering. You are to receive the offering for me from each man who has a willing heart.'" (Exodus 25:1-2)

And Paul wrote, "Each man should give what he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." (II Corinthians 9:7)

"One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed." (Proverbs 11:24-25)

"Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the first fruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine." (Proverbs 3:9-10)

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

“Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.” (II Corinthians 9:6)

Paul gave a guide in II Corinthians 8:12: “For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.” Paul was echoing God’s instructions to Israel through Moses, “Each of you must bring a gift in proportion to the way the Lord your God has blessed you.” (Deuteronomy 16:17)

How has God blessed you? Let this be the measure of your giving.

2. Act willingly and cheerfully.

You will notice that the Bible emphasizes a “willing heart”. In our church, there will never be any force or pressure in regards to giving. Paul stresses giving “not reluctantly or under compulsion.” (II Corinthians 9:7a)

Paul then adds, “God loves a cheerful giver.” (II Corinthians 9:7b) The spirit in which a gift is made has an effect on the person giving and on the one to whom it is given. With a cheerful gift comes a marvelous sense of satisfaction, divine peace, and an awareness of God’s love.

*Lord, I take You at Your word. You have never let me down
and I know You will honor Your promise now.*

*With complete trust and willingness, I am ready to make a commitment – my
commitment – our commitment to build up Your house.*

What joy and anticipation this brings to my heart. Lead me into Your will!

The Christian's Stewardship Response

My Decision - Part II

Day 39, Wednesday, October 17

3. Ask God to set the amount.

If most of us simply considered our present budget, we would decide on the basis of fact and reason that we couldn't give any more. Such reasoning is understandable, but it leaves out two elements – God and time. There is no faith involved and no plan. Now is the time to pray – “Lord what do You want to do through me? I am willing and ready to be the conduit through which flows your provision for whatever time you want to supply my need.”

God knows your present financial position, but He also knows what He has in store for you in the future. What he told Jeremiah, He says to you:

“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord; Plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek with all your heart. I will be found by you, declares the Lord.” (Jeremiah 29:11-14a)

He will lead you to give proportionately. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament emphasize proportionate giving.

Both the rich and the poor (and all in between) are to give according to what they have (the start) and what God intends to give them (in the next three years).

As you pray, God will lead you to a sacrifice. This is God's way of measuring our gifts. David said, “God forbid I should offer that which costs me nothing (a sacrifice).”

This may be more than you think you can give, but it isn't. God never leads one to give unless He has already planned to provide. This is revelation giving or faith giving and it is giving God's way. “Without faith it is impossible to please God.” (Hebrews 11:6)

Sacrifice is more an attitude than an amount! It indicates that you have first given yourself to the Lord (II Corinthians 8:5).

4. Anticipate God's blessings.

Look for God's rewards for your obedience to His guidance.

- "I'll...pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it." (Malachi 3:9,10)
- "Give and it shall be given unto you...full and over flowing." (Luke 6:38)
- "As a man sows so shall he reap." (II Corinthians 9:6)
- "You will be made rich in every way..." (II Corinthians 9:11)

The blessings will include financial blessings, for He gives to us that we might give to others. He gives that we might get that we might give, and the cycle continues.

But even greater are the personal blessings of peace, joy, and happiness and the sense of knowing that you are God's partner in His Kingdom's work.

Now, back to that personalized commitment card. Complete it, bring it to church, and place it on the altar as an act of sacred worship.

In a few days you are going to hold that commitment card in your hand. You need to do what will show your faith in God's provision and the depth of your love. Complete your prayer process now and complete the card as God leads.

If you listen, I believe you will hear the Holy Spirit whisper – "Do it now!"

Lord, I hear your "still, small voice" and will do it now - in love and in faith.

The Christian's Stewardship Response

My Commitment

Day 40, Thursday, October 18

It is Countdown to Commitment time! Only three days and we shall all be making our three-year, sacrificial, financial commitments to our Lord to fund His vision. This coming Sunday morning we will be joining with all the others of our beloved church to achieve victory in the mission the Lord has given us.

Few decisions will mean as much to our church as: 1) your decision to make a commitment; 2) the amount of your sacrifice; and 3) the spirit of your commitment.

In the final days, let's consider the following steps leading to the greatest spiritual commitment since you became a Christian and the greatest financial commitment of your life.

1. The first step is to talk with God!

In any decision that a Christian makes, one should first talk with the Savior. Obviously, we do this in prayer. This is essential!

Let the first word of prayer be one of thanksgiving and praise. "In everything by prayer...with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." (Philippians 4:6)

Thank God for our Savior, who sacrificed Himself for our salvation. "Count your many blessings" and thank God for them "one by one."

Now you are ready to talk with God about what He would have you do. The scripture promises, "In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths." (Proverbs 3:6) Pray "Lord, what do you want me to do?" You see, prayer is not to get God's approval for our will, but to reveal God's will for us.

2. The second step is to listen to God!

Prayer is a two-way street. We talk to God and then He talks to us.

Get ready! God is going to speak to you and reveal His will. Pray, "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening."

He will tell you what He expects you to do as your part in the future of His church. He will lead you to a commitment that is far beyond what you have been considering. Don't panic! He already knows what your future is for He has planned it. Now have faith to believe that He knows best.

But wait, God isn't through! He may lead you step by step to a greater figure – a real sacrifice. In a capital campaign a short time ago one of the leaders said he was glad the program was over. He said every time he prayed the Lord raised his commitment. He said, "I started out at \$100,000 and ended at \$1,000,000. I am so thankful I kept praying and listening to God.

3. The third and final step is to obey as God directs: Act!

Isn't it wonderful that you can ask and God will answer? You hear His voice and discover His will for you and your family.

Isn't it exciting to finally know what God is planning in your life and to know what He is counting on you to do?

Winston Churchill was England's outstanding leader during World War II. During the war years, at a time of great crisis, the nation's coal miners went on strike.

Churchill called the miners together and challenged them with these words:

"This is England's darkest hour. But England will be victorious. The soldiers who are now on the front lines will come marching home, and they will talk of this dark hour of their nation. They will be wanting to know of everyone, 'Where were you in England's darkest hour?' Some will say, 'I was at home, wrapping bandages for first aid on the front lines.'" Then Churchill looked at those coal miners and said to them, "And they will ask you, 'Where were you in England's darkest hour?'"

The next morning the coal miners returned to the mines.

In coming years, you will look back on the days of challenge for our church and recall them as our finest hours. God may ask, "Where were you? What sacrifice did you make?"

And your answer will be

*Lord, I am ready, willing and able
and it is my heart's desire to be a part of Your will for our church.*

The Christian's Stewardship Response

My Sacrifice

Day 41, Friday, October 19

It is an old story but a good one...

A pig and a hen were taking a stroll in the barnyard. A truck passed by, bearing the sign: "Ham and Eggs." The hen said, "See, you and I are partners."

"Yes," replied the pig. "But for you it is a day's work. For me it is a total sacrifice."

This is what God expects of you! It is what He expects of any one who calls himself or herself a Christian.

Sacrifice – this one word, more than any other, will explain the success of our church and our Stewardship Enrichment Capital Campaign. We cannot achieve victory for our Savior without it.

As we are approaching the time of commitment, we need to look even more closely at what God wants us to do. No one can tell you an amount to give. For some it will be in the hundreds or thousands of dollars, while for others it will be the hundreds of thousands of dollars, but for all it should be a sacrifice.

Let's get personal! Sacrifice on the part of today's Christians requires both faith and courage. As you pray about your commitment, you will develop a courageous faith and wondrous things will happen.

I can hear someone say, "I agree with all of that, but I am not wealthy. If I only had more I would gladly sacrifice." Would you?

Through the years I have often heard men say that if God were to bless them financially they would become good stewards. In time I have seen many of them truly blessed. Prosperity was theirs! Wealth beyond what they had envisioned! But were they then good stewards? No! Most drifted away from the church and forgot who had given them their wealth.

The point is I am firmly convinced that if one was not a good steward, a faithful and sacrificial giver when he has little, he will not be a good steward when God blesses him with abundance.

Remember the words of Jesus, "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?"(Mark 8:36)

John D. Rockefeller once said: "If I had not started tithing and giving sacrificially when I was young and had little, I probably would not do so now that I have millions."

You might be thinking, "But I am so limited in my income, my little won't matter much." So was the widow whom Jesus praised so highly because she sacrificed everything. Her little mattered to Him! God's approval is not based on the amount, but on the attitude – is it a sacrifice?

Preacher John Henry Jowett was presiding at the opening ceremony of a new children's home. The names of the contributors were read in order of the size of their gifts. The names and

donations of the rich were greeted with much applause. As the names of the givers became less prominent and the amounts smaller, the applause died to a mere ripple.

Finally, when the last name was read, that of a poor widow who had given sacrificially out of her small income, not one hand clapped. Dr. Jowett reacted by greeting their silence with silence. He stood and looked out the window, silently, while the audience stirred in embarrassment. Then he said, "Listen! Listen! I think I can hear the clapping of those pierced hands."

Of course, our individual financial gifts for Stewardship Enrichment will not be public. And it is not how much we have, but what we do with what we have that receives the divine applause. On judgment day, it will not be those who have given out of their abundance and sacrificed nothing that will hear the clapping of those pierced hands. Whether we are rich or poor God's question is, "Did you sacrifice?"

What we intend to do for Christ and our church needs to be done now! Only sacrifice will lead to victory!

*Dear Jesus, my heart breaks as I realize the sacrifice you made for me.
But, my spirit soars and my heart is mended as I realize, in my own way, I can
sacrifice for you with that which you have placed in my care.*

Thank you for your love gift for me. Accept my love gift to you.

The Christian's Stewardship Response

Our Victory

Day 42, Saturday, October 20

When Woodrow Wilson was President of the United States he once said, "I would rather fail in a cause that I know someday will triumph, than to triumph in a cause that I know some day will fail!" This is a great concept. Isn't it wonderful, however, that we can today succeed in a cause that we know will be victorious – our Stewardship Enrichment Capital Campaign.

Certain characteristics are evident in every victory. We can see them in the great victory of God's people in the Battle of Jericho when the "walls came tumbling down." (Joshua 6)

1. Obedience Precedes Victory

God commanded and the people obeyed. They were to march about the great and powerful walled city of Jericho seven times. They were to circle the city and then to blow their trumpets and shout when commanded to. Everyone's participation was needed. What a test of faith!

Some probably said to themselves, "Why seven times? Once or twice will do just as well." Others may have thought, "Why this shouting? I am too dignified for that conduct." Yet they obeyed. Why? Because they believed God and their leaders.

God asked all the people to participate. Everyone mattered if there was to be a victory. The same is true today – you matter. We are approaching Commitment Sunday and victory depends on all of us being present and doing as God asks.

It is important that everyone be present and obedient – in spirit and in person.

Not only was each one to be present, but each was asked to participate. God not only wants you present, but He wants you to have that commitment card in hand, ready to place it in His hands.

2. Sacrifice Provides Victory

The entire nation was commanded to go against the great city with its giant walls. They were expected to willingly sacrifice their lives to achieve victory. It was this willingness to sacrifice that God used to achieve victory.

Today you are not called upon to sacrifice your physical life, but God does ask a sacrifice of your financial life. He has led you to a commitment you think is impossible.

Perhaps you have questioned Him or even argued with Him, but because of your love for the Savior you are ready to sacrifice.

A friend's wife was, for months, in an Alzheimer Care Hospital. As you know, if you have had any experience in this area, it is a tremendously expensive, 24/7 care disease. Even

with Medicare and Blue Cross, the cost exceeded a quarter of a million dollars for hospitals, institutional care, medicines, doctors, etc.

Frequently friends who were trying to be helpful would say to my friend, “It’s a shame that after you have worked all your life to have a comfortable retirement that you now have to spend it all for medical bills.”

He appreciated their interest and concern, but he usually said, “Not at all, she sacrificed for fifty years for me and our labors together for our Lord. Now I can do the same for her. It is not that I have to, but that I get to.”

We can have the same attitude about our church. Certainly it is expensive to have a vision such as we have. To be sure it is demanding to build and maintain facilities such as ours. Yes, it is costly to provide a staff that is as trained and talented, and as committed and caring as ours. We don’t have to, but we get to. We get to make it all possible by our sacrifice. This is love in action.

3. Joy Follows Victory

When “the walls came tumbling down”, can’t you imagine the joy of the people? They had sacrificed and obeyed, and joy followed.

We do not usually associate joy with sacrifice, but Jesus did. The writer of Hebrews points out that Jesus – “for the joy set before him endured the cross...and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Hebrews 12:2).

This is our anticipation – yes our celebration – when we see victory in our beloved church for our blessed Savior Jesus Christ.

Tomorrow is Commitment Sunday for the Stewardship committee members. Pray now! Pray tonight! The Psalmist said, “Joy comes in the morning.” And so it will be!

Be there! Be present with your commitment card in hand ready to place it in the nail pierced hands of our Savior.

4. Thank Him for our Victory!

You matter much. There was a doctor in a small French village who was about to retire. He had been on call day and night; the people could not afford to pay him much, but that had made no difference. He cared for them as well as he was able.

As the day of his retirement approached the people wished to make a concrete expression of their gratitude and affection. It was proposed that on a given day, since they had so little money to give, they would each bring a pitcher of wine from their own cellars and pour it into a large barrel placed in the village square, which in turn would be presented to the doctor, as an expression of their affection and gratitude.

The day arrived and all day long the people were seen pouring their offerings into the barrel. The evening came and the barrel of wine was taken to the doctor’s humble residence and presented, with all the inevitable speeches. The presentation over, the people went back to their homes and the doctor was left alone with the memory of their

love. He went to the barrel and drew off a bit of wine, then went into the house and there sat comfortably by the fire to enjoy it. The first sip was a shock. It tasted like water. He sipped again. It was water. He went back to the barrel and drew off more, thinking there must have been some mistake. But no, the barrel was filled with water.

He called the mayor and the mayor called the assemblymen and there were hurried consultations. Then the truth was revealed. Everyone in the town had reasoned: "My little pitcher of wine won't be missed. I have so little for myself. The others will take care of it. The little water I substitute will not be noticed."

It is a tragic story. It is the kind of thing that can and does happen when people refuse to accept their responsibilities, and when they reason as the townspeople did – "I have so little for myself. What I have to offer won't be missed. The others will take care of it." How often people in the church have reasoned, "I have so little, my commitment will never be missed. My small increase will not be important. Let the others take care of it."

This kind of reasoning, in the face of our stewardship of God's gifts, is nothing less than our withholding from Him that which is rightfully His. It is always tragic; tragic for Him as well as for us.

*Lord, it is with profound joy that I obey your call to sacrifice.
With the commitment card I hold in my hand, I will demonstrate my love for you.
I will turn in my card as an offering to you and participate in the victory!*