

# Stewardship

Inspiring a deeper understanding of true giving

October 2023

**T**here is a story about a prosperous farmer who was a very poor financial supporter of his church, his pastor went to visit him in hopes of getting him to increase his giving. The pastor pointed out to him that the Lord had given him a fertile piece of land and had blessed him with sunshine and rain so that his crops would grow.

The preacher added, “You know, this farm and everything you have is really on loan to you from God. You should be more grateful.” The farmer replied, “I don’t mean to complain, Reverend, but you should have seen what a mess this place was when the Lord was running it by himself!”

Most of us can sympathize quite well with that farmer. On one level, we would probably agree that the preacher was right in saying that everything we have comes from God, but on another level we may well feel that whatever worthwhile has been made of what we have been given is our own doing.

## From God’s hand

There is a natural sense of pride we feel when we have accomplished something and that makes us reluctant to share the credit, even with God. But to say that all things come to us from God’s hand is to acknowledge that behind everything is God. Without God’s grace, blessings, and mercy, we literally could not exist. God is, in the ultimate sense, the King of our world.

There have always been people who felt as this farmer did, however. Many of the kings we read about in the Bible

were very concerned to have the record of their accomplishments widely known and revered. Some even wanted to be treated as gods themselves and have their subjects worship them.

But common people in the Bible were infected with this “look at what I’ve



done” attitude as well. Thus, many people sought such status symbols as large land holdings, abundant flocks, several wives, and large numbers of children, especially sons.

Against this prevalent feeling, King David’s attitude about his own status before God stands out in stark contrast. In his final days, as he prepared to turn the

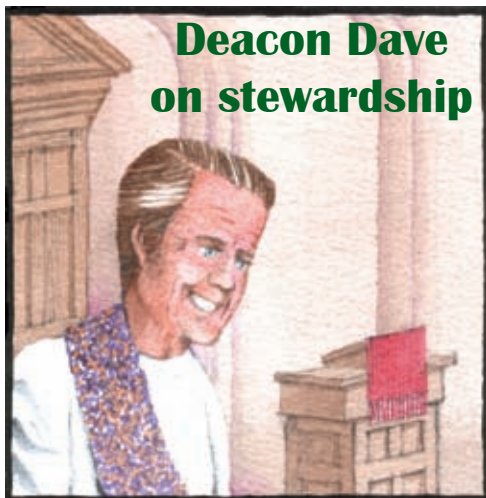
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*“It is God’s power to provide you richly with every good gift; thus you will have ample means in yourselves to meet each and every situation, with enough to spare for every good cause.”*

II Corinthians 9:8



## Deacon Dave on stewardship




*Money is deeply and significantly symbolic. It isn't just a silver coin or a piece of engraved paper; it represents our time and our talents as well. It is symbolic, because when we give of our money, we are giving of ourselves. And the contrary is also true: when we withhold our money, we are withholding of ourselves.*

The dictionary defines “time” as a period during which something exists or can be accomplished. We live in twenty four hour increments. We live one day at a time, one hour at a time.

We make time for work, recreation and rest. If you are like me, all of our time is accounted for. Most of us run through our days like that character in Alice in Wonderland, crying “I’m late, I’m late.” I challenge you to get still for a moment and take a good long look at your typical day and count how much time you allot to the giver of life.

If you’re really serious about this challenge, we agree that time is a gift given freely from our creator. It is life itself. Yet, sadly we misuse this gift. Typically, we foster the attitude of self-service, rather than other service, including service to our church.

If we are honest, we can see areas in which we can improve our response to God, for God’s astonishing gift of time. You might say “I do give.” I invite you to take a closer look at your giving habits. When you give, in what spirit do you give? Is it to give loudly so all those within striking range know of your gift? When you show some kindness or use your talent, are you pompous and pumped up? Then the reward


is superficial. The gift is given in the spirit of self-service. As the words of scripture remind us to be “doers of the Word, not hearers only.” 

## Abundant Life!

Did you ever notice how much bigger a check for \$100 looks in the offering plate than in the envelope to the electric company, or at the supermarket checkout counter? Most of us would not consider sending the power company only what we have left over. And, canned beans and white bread would be a large portion of our weekly fare if we only bought groceries with what is left over. Yet, many are willing to return to God only what is left over after we satisfy our other desires. I have actually heard church officials categorize their giving to the church with “other discretionary spending”!

Giving to the church isn’t the same as giving to the poor; churches have fixed expenses too! Only a portion of what churches receive is actually used to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the imprisoned, etc. Yet, experience shows that members who are not generous with the church are not generous with other organizations and causes either.

## Live more joyfully

It’s all a matter of “an attitude of gratitude.” People who acknowledge God as the source of whatever wealth they have, generally share it with pleasure and wish they could give more. People who are convinced that whatever they have is solely the fruit of their own efforts, generally are more comfortable with an “I’ll take mine first” attitude. Each dollar given away looms large as self-denial. Is there any doubt about who lives more joyfully? Christ promised not wealth, but abundant life! 

## Letters to the Editor



### Dear Editor:

They looked like a small parade coming down the street from the cul-de-sac. Five little boys and girls on their very first two-wheel bikes were obviously on a mission. They pulled a red wagon loaded with a blanket holding precious cargo ... dolls? Stuffed animals? Free kittens?

But what made this entourage stand out was the method they had devised for pulling the wagon. Two ropes, both probably ten feet long, were tied to the wagon handle. Each rope led to a different bicycle, onto which it was securely knotted. Clever! Two bikes pulled the wagon. By riding side by side, a few feet apart, the “pullers” kept the wagon from veering unsteadily or tipping over. The other three bikers seemed equally intent on this mission, with communication at 100%. Because the children were good “stewards” of their “treasure,” the wagon rolled smoothly down the street toward the goal.

We Christians use stewardship in similar ways: Start with the Gospel, and the need to “take it into all the world.” Use material and spiritual gifts from God to accomplish this. Trusting God’s leadership, we know where we’re going and how to get there. Keep moving, without veering off course. Pull together and share the load, remembering that the Bible says we are, “working together with him...” (2 Corinthians 6:1) God leads and loves each of us more than we can possibly understand! Enjoy the stewardship journey!

Cathy

## The Good Steward

In laboring to grow more faithful Christians whose giving reflects and in-forms their faith, we are doing more than just raising money. We seek to help believers understand that gifts to the church are qualitatively different from those sought by United Way or our alma mater.

The grateful response of a Christian to the love and grace of God is not primarily motivated by emotional reactions to pictures of starving children, battered women, or derelict men, although these will surely touch a Christian’s heart. Rather, we give because we recognize that without God’s gifts of our time and our talents ... our very lives ... we would have nothing.

We give because through our giving we witness to our understanding of Christ’s priorities for our world and we know that without our gifts, these priorities will not be realized. We give because it gives us joy. We give because Jesus told us, “It is more blessed to give than to receive,” and we know that Christ was telling us that it is in our own best interest to give.

We are created in God’s image. In our Baptism, we become, in St. Paul’s words, “new persons in Christ Jesus.” We bear the giving nature of our creator. Giving to the church, to the many agencies of God’s reconciling love in the world, is part and parcel of our very being.

*Christians cannot not give, it’s just not in them.* ☩



*There is a difference between ownership and possession. We may claim to own things, but as between man and God, we own nothing. God owns all things. We simply use them or possess them temporarily.*

*As stewards or trustees, we must administer God’s property in a way pleasing to him, and acknowledge God’s ownership by setting apart a portion of time and income for the extension of his kingdom.*

Continued from page 1...

## There is a story about ...

throne of Israel over to his son, Solomon. David also laid the groundwork so that Solomon could build the Temple in Jerusalem. He had all of the materials needed to do the job gathered.

He contracted with skilled craftsmen to serve his son. And he donated not only income from the royal treasury, but also huge sums from his personal fortunes toward the project.

Finally, he challenged the people themselves to offer not only from their own possessions, but also to offer their skills and talents to the task that lay ahead. The people responded generously in both ways. David then prayed a prayer that has to be considered remarkable for a king in that age. The whole prayer is recorded in I Chronicles 29:10–19, but consider the implications of just two verses.

First of all, David ascribed to God the attributes that were normally used to speak of a king. He said, “Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou are exalted as head above all.” (v.11) There were not many kings who would say that their kingdom really belonged to someone else.


The second remarkable thing was that David acknowledged that ultimately, the people had God and not the king to thank for everything they had. He said, “But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly? For all things come from thee, and of thy own have we given thee” (v.14).

## Everything is on loan

That admission is an appropriate text for us today. As we think about things that we label as our own, it is always

helpful to recognize that whatever we have is really on loan to us from God. That is the real meaning of stewardship.

It is vitally important that each of us view stewardship as the Christian way of life and not just a plea for our money. We agree with Clarence Stoughton’s definition that “Stewardship is what I do after I have said I believe.” That includes what we do with our wallets, but also a lot more. Stewardship is our attitude toward everything that God has placed at our disposal during our stay on this earth. It is a lifelong struggle on our part to overcome our tendency to get and to keep and to develop our God-given potential to care and share.

But even more, it is our humble acknowledgment that all good things come from God. With David we pray, “But who are we that we should be able to offer willingly? For all things come from thee, and of thy own have we given thee. 



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