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Stewardship... God's Way

Senior Adult Edition

Jesus told a parable about a man who gave each of three servants a number of “talents” of gold. Talents were weights, especially of things valuable, things that could be “traded on.” We get our English word from the Greek word, *talenton*. So a talent is a resource you have which is valuable, and can be “traded on.”

Two of the servants in the parable made more money from their talents. One servant was given only one talent. He buried that one to keep it safe. He didn’t lose it, but neither did he gain anything from it. It lost its value because it was buried. Only if it had been used would it have been profitable.

Buried gold is a symbol of opportunity not seized. You may be doing absolutely all you can with all you have in the power of the Lord. However, for the rest of us, who to some degree bury our gold, the question is why, how, and how much.

You may work where there are many people who are not Christians. What are you doing to seize the opportunity to witness in some way?

You may have the time and resources to do volunteer missions. It may have never occurred to you, but there is “gold”.

You may be confined to home most of the time, not able to do much of anything. Wrong. You could be the greatest prayer warrior the county ever saw. It’s gold.

You may have an artistic or musical ability. It’s gold to any church, in the service of the Lord.

Why do we ever fail to seize our opportunities for the Lord? Whatever the reason, the discipline of seizing our opportunities demands we deal with the temptations, and get on with the will of God. It’s one of the ways we show God and others we believe we owe Him our first and best, and our all, and we believe God blesses those who are generous with Him and with others.

As a means of applying these two principles of stewardship, here are two areas in which we all need to develop disciplined lives:

How We Spend Our Time

Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:16: **Redeeming the time, because the days are evil (KJV)**. Here and in Colossians 4:5 Paul uses the word “time” in the Greek (though translated “opportunity” in the NIV, it means the same thing). Time itself is a valuable asset or possession of ours. However, it is one which slips through our fingers the moment we get it. If, on its way through our hands, we do not use it properly for the Lord and His good purposes, it is wasted.

Secure a pocket calendar or journal which you can easily carry. Mark each set of pages into “slots” of one hour each. During each hour of the day for just two days, mark something in each slot for how you used that hour of time. Review after the first day. Make adjustments if you feel the need. After you fill out the second day, ask yourself: *Am I managing my time with my spiritual good, and that of others, in mind? Am I serving God with my time? Are there changes which need to take place in my life?*

Opportunity Knocking

Closely related to time is opportunity. Sometimes we have heard people pray at the beginning of the offertory in church something like this: “Lord take not only our money, but our time, talents, and opportunity.”

Unto Him is Due – What?

Stewardship Study – Part 3

Background Passage: Deuteronomy 26:1-11

Focal Passage: Deuteronomy 26:2,10

Bible Truth: *We should make specific offerings of our first and best, since we owe God our very lives.*

Among the non-Christian people of New Hebrides, various customs include the celebration of feasts where an abundance of food is prepared, including roasted pig. In the middle of the feast, someone will say officially, “We must give to our god.” And then the participants will cut off the pig’s tail, and throw it in the brush nearby for their god.

If we’re honest about the state of Christian stewardship in many places, we would admit that many Christians give God the pigtails. While there is great variety in the economic status of American Christians, on average most are modestly well off — especially if compared to people in other countries of the world. There are pockets of faithfulness in churches everywhere, and there are the usual fringes where people give nothing, but most Christians fall into the vast middle, where the habit is to do with life and money everything they have to do and want to do, and then to give something out of the leftovers to the church.

We really need Christians today to understand and be committed to faithful stewardship! The local church needs it! The work of outreach needs it! Missions across North America and internationally needs it!



Stewardship starts at home, with the individual Christian. This principle has been part of God's way of working with His people ever since the Hebrews came out of Egypt and formed a nation. While still in the wilderness, Moses taught them some important principles of stewardship. Two of them are contained in our text from Deuteronomy 26. The focal passage is:

**2 Take some of the first fruits of all that you produce from the soil of the land the Lord your God is giving you and put them in a basket. Then go to the place the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for His name...
10...Place the basket before the Lord your God and bow down before Him.**

The Point of our Study Today

God's word teaches us we are to give Him the first, the best, and our all, and He will reward our faithfulness. In order to obey Him in stewardship we should not only give money, but spend our time in a godly way, and take every opportunity we have to serve Him.

First Fruit Giving

Stewardship comes down to actions. No matter how we "feel" about things, what we do tells the real truth, doesn't it? And the Bible says we are to "**Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the first fruits of all your crops**" (Proverbs 3:9).

This principle of return applies to more — much more — than just the money we put in the offering plate. The principle says **generous giving of self and means**. Self, ourselves, our lives, our opportunities and talents, are included. We can't be stingy with anything God has given us.

Remember the law of "gleaning" in the Old Testament (Leviticus 23:22)? It was designed to give us a standard by which to show us what it meant to think of others and be generous. It shows us how to provide for helping others, even before the need arises.

Paul taught in 2 Corinthians 9:6-7 **whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously**. This means our giving, whether money in a plate in church, or gifts to needy persons, help or counsel, a major sacrifice or just a helping hand, are investments in our own blessing of life. Whether God uses monetary income or open doors, or the returned help of friends, or whatever, He will bless us beyond what we give.

Possible Motives for Giving

- General good of the church
- Group pressure
- Pride or embarrassment
- Social approval
- Pity
- Tax exemption
- Fear
- Owing a tithe
- Humanitarianism
- Loyalty to church
- Example of Christ
- Rewards
- Pursuit of happiness
- Love for Jesus

Which motives do you think are worthy of Christians?

People preparing to make investments in the stock market or open savings accounts or put money in “CDs” (for the youth, this is *not* a disk that goes in the computer or stereo!) are interested in the “rate of return.” This is how much you can expect to get back regularly, as a percentage of what you invest.

Investments with God bring *great* returns! Look at what the Bible says:

Give and it will be given unto 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).

This is a wonderful promise for those who are being obedient to give God the first and the best, but are worried this will result in not having enough to get along afterward. God knows we have needs, and His principle is, if you are generous with Him, He will be generous with you.

We have to understand a fine line, here. We must never give with the expectation that for every dollar we part with, we’ll get two or three in return from somewhere else. If we go into it thinking what can we get out of it, we have violated the spirit of giving.

Murphy’s Law of Rain

A corollary to the famous “Murphy’s Law” states that the day you happen to wash your car, it will rain. However, washing your car just to make it rain *won’t work*. How does this humorous thought apply to giving, and the promise of God?

The principle of first fruits giving is very important. Understanding and obeying it will make a difference in the way we live.

Our background passage in Exodus teaches us God required His people to hold feasts — combinations of fellowship meals and worship events — in which they brought some of the first of their crops to be harvested, or the first of their lambs or cattle to be born, and offered them to the Lord. Some gifts were converted to burnt offerings, ceremonial acts of submission and obedience to God. Other gifts were used to feed not only priests, but the hungry, and to provide what we might call today a “food bank.”

In the focal passage in Deuteronomy, Moses wrote: **Take some of the first fruits of all that you produce.** At the time, that was only the fruit **from the soil of the land.** The principle, however, applies to whatever happens to be the source of a people’s economy.

What is Your Fruit?

If we are to give the *first fruits*, what are your *fruits*?

- The garden you raise?
- The talents you have?
- The money you “make?”

What does it mean to “be fruitful?”

Other passages, like Leviticus 22:19-20 or Leviticus 22:24 teach us the first fruit offering could not be blemished or defective in any way. So if it had to be *first* and *flawless* as well, it was to be the first and best of what we have.



Did you know that not only did God say the first of the harvest belongs to Him, but the first of animals and *man* as well? Numbers 3:13 says clearly **all the firstborn are mine**. God told the Israelites to bring the firstborn animals and make sacrifices of them. With man He allowed them to substitute an animal, because man's life is higher, and special to God.

Why does God want us to give the first fruits? Is it because He needs them? No! Clearly first fruit giving is for *us*. It is an exercise in worshipful obedience. It is a way in which we develop our discipleship.

Many senior adult Christians today have a similar tale about growing up. They were given a small allowance for the week, and their parents told them to take the first nickel (for example) and put it in an envelope for their offering to God. Not just any nickel, but the first one.

This is what many call giving “off the top.” Why is it important? Because nobody appreciates the dregs nearly as much. If you dropped by someone's house and said you had just gone to the city dump and taken a load of overripe peaches to discard, but saved a basket of them, thinking he or she might like to eat them before they go bad tomorrow — how grateful would you expect him to be? If you called someone to come over to dinner, and told them you had called five other couples and none could come, and they were your last resort, how likely do you believe they would be to accept your invitation? How, then, do we expect God to feel about offerings which are scraped together out of what is left after we've done whatever we wanted with the rest of our “increase?”

We need to give the first and best so as to teach ourselves that God deserves it!

Not only this, but the first fruits represent the entire crop, the whole flock — the whole life. When we give off the top of what we make, it should be a worshipful event in which we really pledge our whole lives to God.

Making an offering in church is a symbolic act. It represents our whole beings, all we have and are.

Are Symbols Important?

Think of symbolic things done in church:

- Baptism symbolizes burial and rebirth to a new life, in the cleansing power of the Holy Spirit.
- The Lord's Supper doesn't mean we really eat Jesus' body — but it symbolizes it, helping us to understand how we are associating with Him and feeding on Him.
- In weddings, a bride and groom exchange rings. The rings do not marry them. They stand for their marriage vows. They symbolize their love and commitment to be faithful for life.
- Shouldn't our offerings be truthful symbols, too, representing our total lives?

The Blessings of Giving

We would owe God our first and best whether or not we believed we would have “enough” after giving a worthy gift to God. But all of us have responsible concerns about our having enough to pay bills and take care of needs. There's nothing wrong with that.

Don't you think God knows that? Do we realize God knows our needs even before we mention them to Him (Matthew 6:8)? So would we be so surprised to learn God teaches us in His word that He works by the principle of *returns* — He returns more to us than we give to Him, when we give obediently and in the proper spirit?

The principle of returns is: ***Generous giving of self and means, without hoarding what God has lent, ultimately returns more than what was given.*** This means when we give generously to God, He gives more than generously back.