

FOUNDATIONS FOR STEWARDSHIP

An Awareness of God

Christian stewardship begins with the awareness of God. It is that simple. If we are aware of God, we realize that there is a higher priority in life. Higher than life itself. Higher than ourselves. When we are aware of God, we finally realize that everything belongs to God.



We live in a materialistic society. And the more we accumulate, the more distant God becomes in our lives. And the more we believe that we are the owners, not God. As we push God to the outside of our lives, we become more possessive about money and things. We take the center stage, acting as though we own the world and that the creation is here to serve us and the things we want.

Think about it. We own nothing. We come into this world with nothing and we leave with nothing. We even leave our bodies behind.

Stewardship is at the very heart of faith, and faith is at the very heart of stewardship. Stewardship is far more than giving to the church although it includes that giving. It all begins with an awareness of God at the center of life.

What is our Calling?

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We Are Stewards

We are given the opportunity to manage and care for everything that belongs to God. The word steward at its heart means “manager.” The steward is not the owner but is the manager.

This is a remarkable privilege! We get to manage on God’s behalf. It’s one thing to manage for a corporation; it is quite another thing to have the opportunity to help God do God’s work here on earth. When we see ourselves as stewards, we realize we are serving God by being caretakers of creation. We care for creation both by careful use of it and by sharing it with others.



Being such a steward is also a great responsibility. We have a lot to take care of! God has made a lot of “stuff.” We live in a very developed nation. We have more than enough.

So we are called not only to manage it well and preserve it as best we can but also to share it gladly. God expects this of us as good managers of all things.

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God Is Gracious

Stewards know that God is extremely good and gracious. Stewards are those who know God has blessed them in many ways.

The blessings of God include the gift of life itself. While life has its ups and downs, most of the time we are immensely grateful for the opportunity to be alive. There is so much in life to enjoy—beautiful sunrises, good food, friendships, and the joy of human love. God gives us everything in life.



Best of all, God gives us the promise of love, God’s presence, and the gift of forgiveness through faith in Jesus Christ. We are truly blessed. As an old song says, “count your blessings before you sleep . . .”

Stewards are people who do count their blessings. Stewards, as a result, want to give thanks to God by how they use life and by the gifts they share.

That offering envelope in the plate is one way we have of saying “Thanks God.”

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God's Love In Christ

In the First Letter of John we read, "We love because God first loved us." Hardly a more true word was ever written. Our love and our sharing are motivated by the awareness that others have loved us.

This says something about the importance of being loved and of love in our human families. It also says something about the importance of realizing how much God loved us. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son to die for it." That's how much God loves you. Jesus Christ died for you. There is no greater love.



As stewards we know that love and as a result we want to love others by word and deed. Our sharing of our time and our talent and our treasure all are ways of expressing that love. That little envelope we put in the plate in many ways says, "God loves me and I love you."

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Giving is essential to living.

There are many things that motivate us to be generous givers as people of God. One of the most important is our own need to give. This need is not driven by guilt or by the expectation of God or anyone else. It is a need that originates deep in our own spirit.

Stewards are people who have discovered that we are made in such a way that we need to give just like we need to eat and breathe. When we don't give, we dry up inside. When we do give, our lives are enlarged and enriched in ways we could never dream of. Giving helps make us not only better people but more whole and full.



Long ago it was realized that the Dead Sea is one of the few bodies of water in the world without an outlet. The water flows from the Sea of Galilee in the north down the Jordan River and into the Dead Sea. It just stops there. There is no animal life in the Dead Sea because of its high salt content.

The Dead Sea is a good illustration of life without any outlet, of a life that only takes and doesn't give. Giving is essential to living. Stewards are people who have discovered that truth and it becomes one of the foundations of life and actions for them.

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Tithe

The word "tithe" is a biblical word for 10%. It is one of the basic building blocks of stewardship.



In the Bible the tithe was the basic offering to God. The farmers brought a 10th of their harvest and gave in thanks to God and the shepherds brought a tenth of their flock as an offering (the best 10th too). It was God's instruction to do just that. "You shall bring a tithe...."

This instruction is still one of the basic foundations of stewardship. It is a good practice not only because it comes from God's Word but also because it is so helpful.

How much should we give? Here's an easy answer since whether we are good in math or not, we can easily calculate 10%. It also means we can enjoy having 90% left for our needs and use. That's not a bad deal!

Surprisingly, moving toward the tithe can also help us be better managers of the 90% left for us. Many of us need better discipline of our finances. Becoming a tither is a way of forcing ourselves to manage our money more carefully. When we are giving generously we simply have to be better at managing money and we will pay more attention to where it goes.

For many the tithe is a good goal to grow toward. Calculate your total giving and determine the percentage of your total take-home household income this represents. If you are below 10%, set your sights on growing by a percent a year. If you are already at 10%, then continue to stretch your giving in gratitude.

The important thing is to begin by giving a percentage of household income as opposed to simply picking an amount that seems okay. Start toward tithing, a foundation for stewardship and a source of great satisfaction.