



A Steward In Giving, Part I
Text: Selected Scriptures
Series: The Christian As A Steward, #2
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Introduction.

In our series on *The Christian As A Steward* today we begin a three part look at being “*A Steward In Giving.*” The Bible principles and practice of giving is more often not taught enough than it is over-stressed. Sometimes that is because it is considered to personal and sensitive to discuss frankly and openly. At other times, because it raises fear of “the church always talking about or asking for money.” Then too sometimes because we are afraid of being thought of as trying to use guilt (and, Yes, there is both real and false guilt when it comes to the subject of giving).

We often feel most comfortable with a bit of humour on the subject. You may have heard the story of a man who said, “Okay God, I’m going to throw this money up in the air. Take what you want, and whatever comes down, I’ll keep.”

There are many important principles and examples of being a steward in giving in the Bible and, as with all areas of truth, we need to know and live by them. This morning we will look at the reality of our giving as our stewardship and the purpose of giving. Next time we will consider the motives, plan and blessings of giving.

The Stewardship Of Giving.

The basic foundation of our giving is God’s ownership of everything. We looked at this last week when we surveyed what it means to be a steward. Let’s review that briefly. It is one thing to *know* that God is the Eternal God, the Creator of everything, the One who is in control of all things, the One who, in the final analysis, owns everything, but when it comes to ourselves, who we are, what we have, that knowledge is sometimes a lot more theoretical than practical.

God's statements go beyond theories, the abstract, they are specific and personal. Review several we looked at last week.

- In Psalm 50:10-12 God says, "For every beast of the forest is Mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird of the mountains, and everything that moves in the field is Mine. If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is Mine, and all it contains."
- In King David's prayer at the presentation of great gifts from himself, the leaders and people of the nation for the building of the temple he told God, "But who am I and who are my people that we should be able to offer as generously as this? For all things come from You, and from Your hand we have given You." And, "O LORD our God, all this abundance that we have provided to build You a house for Your holy name, it is from Your hand, and all is Yours" (1 Chronicles 29:14, 16).
- Then James wrote in his letter, **1:17**, "Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow."

So, the job you have, the pay check you earn, the money you have in the bank ultimately come from God and it all belongs to Him. The stocks and bonds, mutual funds, RRSPs, the merchandise on the shelves and in the warehouse, the grain, cattle and hogs — *all* belongs to God. Yes, you have worked long and hard to get where you are, but it is God, as Moses told Israel, "who is giving you the power to make wealth" (Deuteronomy 8:18).

In the final analysis there is no *self-made man*, no one who is actually *independently* wealthy. Every person on earth depends on the mercy and grace of God to survive. Everything we have and are is not only given to us by God, but it is a responsibility, a stewardship from and for God. Understanding being a good steward in giving begins with this basic foundation: God owns everything.

Everything is God's. We are responsible to manage it faithfully for Him, we are His stewards. The Bible gives us some directions which are for all of us in all times and circumstances.

The stewardship of giving has been given by God to all of His people. It is not limited to one with the "gift of giving." Romans 12:8 speaks of that gift, but it is a gift of special

freedom, generosity and joy that goes beyond the basic *stewardship* of giving. Each and every believer has the responsibility, the stewardship of giving to God.

Consider two New Testament examples. The first days of the church, recorded in the opening chapters of Acts, were special circumstances calling for special measures. The church had just been born, many of the new believers were far away from home. They needed to stay in Jerusalem to be taught, grounded in the truth before going back home. In brief, they pooled their resources to provide food and shelter. Chapter 2 verse 44, “And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common.” Again, a bit later, in chapter 4 we read, “and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them” (32). This was a voluntary action in special circumstances, underscored in the next chapter when a problem developed, Peter said, “While it (your property) remained unsold, did it not remain it your own? And after it was sold was it not under your control?” (5:4). For our purposes here today, note the *inclusiveness*—all of the people, not just the wealthy or some other select group.

Paul gave directions to the church at Corinth for giving. He told them, “On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come” (1 Corinthians 16:2). It is always “each one of you,” of “you” *plural*, that is , the entire group of believers. The stewardship of giving it is based on God’s ownership of everything and it includes every Christian.

The Purposes Of Giving.

The second aspect of giving we are looking at this morning is its purpose, its *functional* purpose. For convenience, I am breaking this down into two broad parts. The first is to provide for church ministry. I am using this phrase *church ministry* very broadly—it includes the whole range of ministries and resources.

Prior to the church God’s witness, His *agent* in the world was Israel. Israel was to be a lighthouse, a testimony to the world to draw people to God. God directed a stewardship of giving to all the people of Israel including tithes, offerings and alms. God’s witness, His *agent* in the world now is the church.

Paul addressed giving for ministry needs including workers in the church in his first letter to Timothy, “The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing,’ and ‘the laborer is worthy of his wages’” (5:17-18). The *double honor* refers to respect and wages.

The practices cited in Acts chapters 2 and 4 of people sharing, having things in common in a difficult time, demonstrate the church’s ministry to help care for each other. 2 Corinthians chapters 8 and 9 present many principles with respect to giving, and deals also with the support of the needs and needy in the Jerusalem area at that time. For example, in chapter 8 verse 14 Paul wrote, “at this present time your abundance being a supply for their need, so that their abundance also may become a supply for your need, that there may be equality.” Here we find caring for the local church ministry and helping others.

The ministry of the church, Biblically, can be divided into four areas: worship, teaching, caring, and outreach. Now these four broad areas multiply into many specific ministries, depending on the church and situation. The money for all the ministries provides for resources, people, property, supplies, and encouragement. God’s plan to reach Edmonton is based on the church, including this church, and every church that knows and proclaims Jesus Christ, God the Son, the Savior. Our stewardship of giving is an important part in our faithfulness to His plan.

The second part of the purpose for our stewardship of giving is to provide for missions ministry. The history of missions support begins in Acts 13 when the church at Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas out as the first *career missionaries*. Paul was supported by churches as he spent the next several decades in missions ministry. Listen to his warm words to a church which was very close to him and supported him financially, the church at Philippi,

“But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity. Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. Nevertheless, you have

done well to share with me in my affliction. You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs. Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account. But I have received everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God. And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:10-19).

Again, he wrote to the church at Corinth,

“Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you without charge? I robbed no one by taking wages from them to serve you; and when I was present with you and was in need, I was not a burden to anyone; for when the brethren came from Macedonia they fully supplied my need, and in everything I kept myself from being a burden to you, and will continue to do so” (2 Corinthians 11:7-9).

The churches in Macedonia supported him in this *church planting* work.

At other times, Paul supported himself as the need was there, or for a clear testimony in new areas, rather than draw support from new believers. He told the elders from the church at Ephesus when he met them for the last time,

“I have coveted no one’s silver or gold or clothes. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’” (Acts 20:33-35).

Now let’s move from the New Testament church to our church. Our needs and responsibilities still fall in these same two areas: providing for church ministry and for

missions ministry. If we believe, are convinced that God has called us to be here together as a church family, then this stewardship of giving is ours. In our next looks at this, we will move to the motives, the plan and blessings of carrying out this stewardship.

Conclusion.

You and I are stewards in giving whether we have been aware of it before today or not, whether we have been faithful in it or not. We, and all of God's people, are stewards in giving.

As we close this time taking a few moments to come to God personally, ask yourself, "Do I really see myself as a steward in giving?" Remember, the purposes of giving are not based on other people's expectations, trying to earn favor with God or even habit or guilt. The purposes are to support the ministry in the church and in missions. I challenge each of us to commit ourselves to these purposes, to fulfilling our stewardship of giving.

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