

STEWARDSHIP – _____

Disciplined use of money....an _____ of our maturity.

Why is the biblical use of our money and resources so crucial to our growth in godliness? For one thing it is a matter of plain obedience. A huge amount of scripture deals with the use of wealth and possessions. But as much as anything else, the reason that our use of money (and the things it buys) is one of the best indicators of spiritual maturity and godliness is that we exchange such a great part of our lives for it. How we use our money expresses who we are, what our priorities are, and what is in our hearts. As we use our money in a Christian way, we prove our growth in godliness. All that has been said about the disciplined use of time also applies to the use of money and possessions so we would do well to review them in relation to our use of money ... Let us now look into the scriptures as they relate to the use of our money.

1. God _____ everything you own.

In 1 Corinthians 10:26, the Apostle Paul quotes Psalm 24:1, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it." God owns everything, including everything you possess, because He created everything. In fact, the words "my" and "mine" are symptoms of a sin disease (see "The Blessedness of Possessing Nothing" from The Pursuit of God – A.W. Tozer). "The whole earth is mine," the Lord says in Ex. 19:5. He repeats this again in Job 41, "Everything under heaven belongs to Me."

That means that we are managers or, to use the biblical word, _____ of the things God has given us. My favorite Old Testament character is Joseph – as a slave he was a steward when Potiphar placed him over his household. He owned nothing, for he was a slave. But he managed everything Potiphar owned on his behalf. The responsibility was to use them for Potiphar's interests. That is exactly what we are to do. I am convinced that as the favorite son of Jacob, Joseph knew how to be a spoiled spender, but he had to learn to be a shrewd steward ... if he was to fulfill the great plans that God had for his life.

We do not own anything. God owns everything and we are His managers. We would all say that we believe that, but our giving and our stewardship shows us how authentic (or fake) we really are.

God has specifically said that He owns, not only our cars, clothes, and house, but even the money under our name, and the currency in our wallets. He said in Haggai 2:8, "The silver and the gold is Mine, declares the Lord Almighty."

So the question is not, "How much of my money should I give to God?" but rather, "How much of God's money should I keep for _____?" We need to look at the clothes we buy and figure out if that really is the way God wanted His money spent. We need to check how often we eat out (usually costs 300%-500% the cost of eating at home) and discover if that is how God chooses to use His resources. We need to stop feeling so unusual of noble when we give out of our abundance because we realize that we are giving away somebody else's money ... in fact, it needs to become unusual to hold back so much. Let's all say what we really don't yet believe: All I have really belongs to God.

2. Giving is an act of _____

In Phil. 4:18 Paul thanks the Philippian for the financial gift they gave in support of his missionary ministry. He writes, "I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received ... the gift you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God." He calls the money they gave an offering and a sacrifice, Old Testament terms of worship. Just as much as singing and lifting our hands, giving is a true form of worship.

3. Giving is a _____ (Mark 12:41-44) – Miraculous comes from sacrifice

The proportion that we give back to the Lord is a distinct indication of how much we _____ Him to meet our needs. This is illustrated in the story of the widow and her mite. This woman was willing to give "everything – all she had to live on" because she believed God would provide for her.

We will give to the extent that we believe God will provide for us. The more we believe God will provide for our needs, the more we are willing to risk giving to Him. And the less we trust God, the less we will give.

4. Giving should be _____ and _____

The Apostle Paul gives another illustration in 2 Cor. 8:1-5 when he tells of how the poor Christians in Macedonia sacrificed to give generously to him: "Now brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability."

These were people that Paul described as living in extreme poverty and yet it welled up to rich generosity. Let me remind you that giving is not sacrificial unless it is a sacrifice. Statistics confirm again and again that the more money Christians make, the less generous they become. I have never known anyone who gave sacrificially who regretted it. Sure, they missed having some of the things they could have had if they'd spent the money on themselves.

5. Giving reflects how _____ we are

This is wild insight into the ways of God's Kingdom that Jesus reveals to us in Luke 16:10-13. "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much ... so if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with _____? And if you have not been faithful with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?"

This is a deep passage. Notice that it refers to "true riches" which are to come. In other words, we are simply being tested right now to see who should get the real stuff. Your money is a test! Think about it. On its best day money gives us temporary pleasure.

The American church has not taught us how to pass the "riches" test of the kingdom. We must cry out to God with a sincere and repentant heart that He would give us foresight, wisdom, and self-control – or we will be judged harshly in the sins of our land. Money is how God tests us to see who will get the true riches.

Also notice that there is a strong assumption that these "possessions" belong to somebody else. God wants to give us things that will be "ours." One day He longs to unload an inheritance upon us that we will call our own – but not yet! We must fight against this flesh and its desire for "stuff" (houses, cars, clothes, music) and comfort (better cars, eating out, nicer things) or they will vex our righteous souls.

Vexation without representation

Notice the words of 2 Peter regarding the effect of Sodom on Lot: "(God) condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah ... and (He) rescued Lot ... whose righteous soul was vexed ... by the things that he saw and heard ... day by day ..."

Is it not possible that the United States of America and our modern culture is under the sway of a wicked, greedy, and undisciplined use of money? If this culture is controlled by such forces, is it possible that our "righteous souls" will also be vexed and tormented to be shaped into an image much like our culture.

If our brothers and sisters in lands of poverty saw the way we live ... with our luxury ... our abundance ... our comfort ... I must wonder if they would not be disgusted. With situations like: people dying from a lack of basic dietary necessities, families sick from lacking basic health care, and ghettos full of people with no ability to read and no money to hire tutors, mothers taking buses to go to work and purchase groceries because of no working vehicle ...

We really have to stop and ask, "Does God really want me spending His money the way I am right now? Or is it possible that my spending is being influenced by the nauseating, Christ less culture in which I live?"

In light of the fact that people might sacrifice to support us in our ministry ...

In light of the example of believers in Macedonia of old, or China today ...

In light of eternity ...

How are we spending our money? His money?

Are we separating ourselves to the gospel ... or simply choosing the career that best fits our preferences.

Hear me: The calling to the gospel of Jesus Christ is the highest of all callings and the lowest of all lives. It is the calling to a lifestyle of simplicity, sacrifice, and absolute dependence on God alone. Do we want the ministry? Or will we settle to be a good American christian? There is a difference – count the cost.