

Recently I had the opportunity to teach a lesson to our young married Bible study class on the topic of stewardship. As I began, I told them all to relax because I wasn't going to put them on a guilt trip about whether or not they were tithing. You see, for much of my early life as a Christian any time I saw the word "stewardship" in a sermon title or Sunday school lesson title, I figured I was going to hear more about giving and usually I was right. But stewardship is so much more than just giving our tithes and offerings back to God. As I told the young marrieds, if we will understand and embrace Biblical stewardship in all areas of our lives, giving offerings won't even be an issue.

As I prepared my lesson, I referred back to a book I've had for a long time – "How To Manage Your Money" by the late Larry Burkett. Much of the rest of this article is adapted from Larry's thoughts on stewardship.

God is concerned with our attitudes about money and possessions. Neither our abundance nor our lack on money affects our relationship with Him, but our attitudes do. For God's people wealth should mean much more than just the accumulation of material possessions. If wealth alone brought happiness, then the wealthiest people should be the happiest. Evidence shows that the exact opposite is often true. God's plan is that we should have **true wealth**. Wealth in itself is neither moral nor immoral. So then, what is the real danger of wealth? The answer can be found in 1 Timothy 6:10...*"The love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows."* **God opposes the misuse of or the preoccupation with wealth – not wealth itself.**

The key to understanding God's will in finances is the proper understanding of stewardship. The dictionary says that a steward is one who manages another's property. In Genesis, the Bible clearly tells us that **everything belongs to God**. Then in the Psalm 24:1, David wrote that *"the earth is the Lord's and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it."* We are merely stewards or managers of God's property. He can choose to entrust us to manage as much or as little as He desires, but **in no case will we ever become owners. Quite simply, God owns it all – always has – always will !**

Probably the best Bible passage illustrating stewardship is found in Matthew 25:14-30. This is the Parable of the Talents. In this parable Jesus tells the story of a master who, before leaving on a journey, entrusts money to three of his stewards (managers). They each received different amounts. Upon the master's return, he found that the two managers who had been given the most money had done well in investing and doubled his money! But the third manager, who had received much less, had not even attempted to manage his portion. He became preoccupied with worry and had simply hidden the money and then just returned it to the master. What do you think the master's response was? He rewarded the two faithful managers with promotions and even more funds. And the third manager? As Donald Trump says, "You're fired!"

This parable teaches us that **we are to use our abilities, manage the Master's resources well, and then return them to Him**. You see, God cares about how we manage **all** His money, not just our 10% tithe. He cares just as much about the other 90%!

Quite often God uses money in our lives as a means of direction, because it is an area in which most of us are sensitive and vulnerable. I know in my Christian walk, the area of finances was one of the last strongholds I surrendered to God. But when we become open to God's plan, He promises to supply His wisdom and direction.

Often however, His plans for us are not the same as our desires. So, **we must be willing to accept His plan**. We may be tempted to strike out on our own path without clear direction from God and then expect Him to make everything work out for us. In effect, that is asking God to bless our priorities and plans over His own! When we fail to yield to God's direction, we have decided that our wisdom is superior to His. It never is, and learning this lesson sometimes can be very costly. The price we pay can be money, time, and peace!

In the next lesson on Stewardship – Part 2, we will look at how poor stewardship can result in the peril of becoming enslaved by money and then what we can do to gain our release from bondage and experience financial freedom.