

Legacy Giving: *An Act of Stewardship*

Do you see yourself as a steward who is accountable to the Master? Stewardship is not just something we do when the offering plate is passed on Sunday morning. Stewardship is a lens through which we view our whole lives as kingdom people. Stewardship means God has given us, his redeemed children, an important role to play in his redemptive mission. The Master expects his stewards to use the resources he gives them – tangible and intangible – to further his kingdom in a broken world.

Here are some biblical principles that inform our role as God's stewards.

1. *God owns everything* (Psalm 24:1). This is the fundamental principle of stewardship. We own nothing! Everything, including our very lives, belongs to the Creator. Followers of Christ must stop thinking of themselves as owners, but as servants called to serve the true Owner's interests.

2. *We have a stewardship responsibility over whatever God puts into our hands* (Matthew 25:14ff). Whatever you have – money, abilities, opportunities, time – are on loan from the Lord. They are all to be used in ways that honor him and further his kingdom.

3. *There is a reward for good stewardship* (Matthew 25:21,23). There will be a day of reckoning for all stewards. The Owner will call us to account. There will be an actual cost for poor stewardship and an actual reward for good stewardship. The Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25 shows three aspects of that reward: Commendation from the Lord, enhanced stewardship over more of the Lord's kingdom, and a special joy to be shared between the faithful steward and the Master. The bottom line is that our stewardship has eternal significance. It matters greatly what we do with the Owner's assets.

I hope you practice biblical stewardship in the present, starting with the tithe to your local place of worship (an Old Testament principle Jesus affirms in Matthew 23:23). I hope your present stewardship extends to all the time, talents, resources, and opportunities God puts into your hands. However, there is one aspect of stewardship that is often neglected even by committed kingdom stewards. This neglected part of stewardship is actually the most significant single stewardship opportunity you will likely ever have. The name for this neglected area of stewardship is *Legacy Giving*.

Legacy giving is *giving that will support kingdom causes beyond the steward's earthly lifetime*. For most believers this is accomplished through bequests in their will. It can also be accomplished through strategic gifts made during a believer's lifetime and through various types of trusts. However you do it, the important point is this: As the Lord's steward, you have the opportunity to make a kingdom impact that will last well beyond your earthly life. It simply requires you to be proactive now about what will happen to your estate upon your death.

As the Lord's steward, who do you want to determine how your estate is distributed? You have worked hard and hopefully have exercised faithful stewardship in this life. When you die, do you want state and federal law to determine how God's resources are used? That is what will happen if you die

without a will. Wouldn't it be much better stewardship if your values and passions as a follower of Christ determined the disposition of what He put in your hands? You can make sure that happens with a little planning.

There is another neglected aspect of stewardship that bears mentioning. When we do consider legacy giving, we often think of large institutions (colleges, charities, para-church organizations) that had important influences at moments in our lives. These are good things to support and I am not arguing against them. However, *local* kingdom work is often overlooked in legacy giving, yet it is local churches and ministries that likely have had the most sustained impact in your life. These are also the ministries that will have the greatest kingdom impact on your community – among the people you know and love and live with - after you are gone.

So here is the main message I want to get across: ***As the Lord's stewards, we should practice legacy giving and make sure we strengthen local kingdom work in the process.*** All of us can do this no matter our level of assets. You can express your passions through legacy gifts to your church, association, and other local kingdom partners. You can steward your estate (i.e., what you have when you die, however great or small) so that your local kingdom impact will last well beyond your earthly life. You can and you should.

After making appropriate provision for your heirs based on their age, maturity level, and kingdom-mindedness, how would you like to leave a legacy? How can you impact local kingdom work in areas you are passionate about? Begin praying about this. Let the Spirit of God guide you, then put that guidance into action through an estate plan. It will cost you a little time and money to do this, but the disposition of your estate will likely be the largest single act of stewardship you will ever make. It's worth the effort!

On that day of accountability with the Master, may we all hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master."

God bless you, fellow stewards.