Stewardship

Inspiring a deeper understanding of true giving

October 2024

Stewardship sounds like a "churchy" word, so it's always somewhat of a surprise to come across it in a non-church setting. And it's even more of a surprise to find it connected to farm management. But such surprise was exactly what I experienced as I thumbed through a recent edition of *Buckeye Farm News*, a publication of the Ohio Farm Bureau Federation.

A feature story in the magazine reported about awards given by the Ohio Livestock Coalition, an organization representing Ohio farmers who raise beef cattle, dairy cows, pigs, sheep or poultry. The five awards given were for "stewardship." Specifically, each of the five family farming operations honored were commended for following a "manure management plan," developed and approved either by their local soil and water conservation district, the United States Department of Agriculture or the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency.

David White, executive director of the Livestock Coalition stated, "Each award recipient has worked hard and smart to protect the resources entrusted to their care while at the same time ensuring productivity. That's what stewardship is all about – faithfully developing and using gifts, talents and resources to realize the maximum possible return on the resources that have been entrusted in one's care."

One of the award recipients, C. Ray Noccker, of Ashville, Ohio, put it this way: "Stewardship of the environment is not something you just think about. It is part of everything you do, every decision you make, every waking hour as you manage the business. Stewardship is not a separate part of the business; it is an integral part that is woven through all aspects in a conscious and unconscious way."

Aren't those also good descriptions of what Christian stewardship should be? Faithfully developing and using gifts entrusted to one's care ... realizing a good return (though sometimes for more than our own benefit). .. something so woven into our way of living that it is both a conscious and unconscious response.

Don't get hung up that we are talking about manure. Properly recycled on the

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God can manage without money, but the church, being in this world, cannot. The free will offerings of church members are crucial if we are to carry on its work. How else are we to provide for the spread of the Gospel?

We live in time, the time given to us by God, the Creator of time. Time is given to us to live in, for and through God. Time is made holy by how we use it, either to the glory of God, or to the Glory of ourselves, as we are known to God. Whatever time is given to us must be acknowledged with a thankful return of a portion of the time to God.

Deacon Dave on stewardship

It is always inspiring to hear about a wonderful act of stewardship and Chuck Collins is just that example!

When he was 21, Chuck Collins, of Springfield, MA came into a $475,000 inheritance, his share of the fortune made by his great grandfather.

Six years later, he gave it all away. "Wherever I look around at the world , I see so many problems that sitting on a mountain of money creates a problem in and of itself," Collins told me.

He earned a master's degree in business at the University of New Hampshire, then moved to Worcester to work at a crisis intervention center and later joined a voter education project.

Giving away money

"I began to realize how hard it would be for poor people to stop being poor," he said. "Meanwhile, I could see that people of privilege my own age felt that the sky was the limit." In 2006 he decided to give away his fortune. He moved to Cambridge and made about $30,000 a year teaching community economics and working for an organization that helped neighborhood groups develop affordable housing.

He said he had no regrets about giving away his money, though he sometimes wished for ready cash to help a friend in trouble or "to fix that noise in the car."

Pizza Margherita!

In 1889, the king and queen of Italy were traveling throughout their country. As they visited each city, its mayor and other VIP's gave them expensive gifts. The city of Naples was quite poor, but wanted to do its best. A local chef, Raffaele Esposito, was planning a dinner for the royals. Why not invent a dish for them? he thought.

Taking tomatoes, mozzarella, and basil (the red, white, and green of Italy's flag), he baked them on a flat piece of dough. Italians had baked different toppings on bread for centuries, and called it pizza. But Chef Esposito's recipe ... called pizza Margherita after the queen ... is the one most famous now. Few remember the extravagant presents the king and queen received on their tour. But millions of people enjoy the simple present that Chef Esposito invented.

God grants each of us talents. Too often, we assume that talent refers only to the performing arts. However, that's not true. A talent for cooking could earn money at a church dinner. A talent for carpentry might perform needed repairs on the church.

What are your talents? Think about how you can give them to God. God is, after all, our King.

Dear Editor:

There is an increasing tendency on the part of some Christians to take the attitude that "I will give to the church only if my money is not used for some radical cause of which I disapprove." Some do not give at all, for fear their money will be misused.

Giving money to the church is giving it back to God. It is the recognition that the goods and property we have comes from God and thus a part of these should be given to the worship of God and to the church that represents him. This is simply a recognition of God's ownership of all things in life and a proof of personal appreciation for having received them from him.

When we give to the church, we are not giving to the particular people who administer God's works in this world. Our only motive should be to promote God's work. When we give generously out of love for God, we live in relation to him and therefore will receive our reward from him, not from the temporal administrators.

The efficacy of our gift does not depend on whether the human agent administers the funds according to our reasoned conviction. Regardless of how the money is used, we have returned our share to God. The human agent has the responsibility, and will be accountable to God for his or her stewardship, not yours.

David

The Good Steward

Some years ago two football players on the Minnesota Vikings team were riding snowmobiles in the Rocky Mountains. They ignored the snow falling upon and around them until it occurred to them that they were in the midst of a relentless blizzard. Confused as to where they were and running out of gas, they knew they were in trouble. Lost and getting colder, they decided to try to build a fire. They had matches and they had fairly large pieces of wood but they had no kindling or paper to start the wood burning. Finally, one of the men had an idea. He suggested that they go through their wallets, take out all of the paper money, set it afire and hope to ignite the wood. The plan worked. Soon they were standing around a blazing fire, which not only warmed them, but was a signal to anyone who might come searching for them. Within a few hours they were found and taken to the warm lodge where they were staying.

When I first came across their story, I was a bit shocked at the thought of burning money. Upon second thought, I realized the act had saved their lives. Without the fire, what good would the money have done them? It would have been cold and useless cash indeed.

Just as it's foolish to try to gain the whole world therefore, jeopardizing our souls, it is also unwise to try to hoard all of our resources without doing our part to save lives that are in danger of perishing from hunger and hopelessness. Remember these words of Jesus: "You cannot serve God and wealth." (Matthew 6:24)

We are to share generously. Our ways of sharing affect our inner disposition. A disciple can be identified by viewing his/her check stubs and calendar ... true indications of his/her value system, of how money and time are used. Our Lord takes what we are willing to share and multiplies it, as the loaves and fishes, for the benefit of others.

“I began to realize how hard it would be for poor people to stop being poor”

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Stewardship sounds like...

fields, while at the same time prevented from contaminating water supplies, it enriches the soil. Even this so called waste is a resource from God entrusted into the farmer’s care, and the way he manages it has a great bearing on how future generations will be able to thrive on this good earth.

Each of us had been entrusted with many things, too ... talents, compassion, finances, the physical world, material things, health, the gospel message itself. As part of our commitment to God, let us seek to make stewardship part of everything we do and every decision we make. And where the award ceremony for our stewardship is held is ... well, *out of this world!*

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