

The Spiritual Practice of Sharing Abundantly

Stewardship Emphasis Sunday

2 Corinthians 9:6-15 Galatians 6:7-10
College Hill Presbyterian Church, Tulsa

Rev. Todd B. Freeman
November 2, 2014

Sometimes I wonder if there's anything new to say about good stewardship. Maybe there's not. And perhaps that's okay. It's one of those topics that come up each and every year, and most preachers throughout the country, usually during the fall as churches are putting their budgets together for the following year, struggle to be clever in order to motivate their congregations to give generously of their time, talents, and financial resources.

The Presbyterian twist on good stewardship tends to emphasize our response to God's abundant grace, and to tone down trying to put a guilt trip on anyone. This morning, however, instead of getting into a big theological discussion on stewardship based on the biblical concept of reaping what we sow, I want to make just three quick points.

First. **Being a generous person is actually an important foundational spiritual discipline and practice.** Generosity is a choice and can become a way of life. And as with any spiritual discipline, its purpose is to not only live according to the values taught and modeled by Jesus, but also as a means to draw closer to God. When we give of ourselves, and I'm referring as much or more so to the giving of our time and abilities as to financial resources, we often do experience a very real sense of the presence of God working in and through our lives. That's why **volunteerism, in all aspects of our lives, is actually a form of spiritual growth.**

This is related to the second point I want to make about good stewardship. **Our stewardship conversation should not begin with the church's need to receive, but rather with our individual need to give.**

Yes, the church needs your generous giving in order to fulfill of our mission and ministry. And the proposed budget for next year is a reflection of our mission and ministry priorities – which in itself, then, makes our budget a spiritual document of what we hope to accomplish in the year ahead to further the realm of God in our midst.

Saying that, whether we're talking about church or not, there is an innate human need to give and to contribute to the well-being of the whole. For it is in giving that we reflect our care and compassion for the people and needs around us. This rightly shifts the primary emphasis of stewardship away from simple fundraising once a year in order to meet our proposed budget for next year, to an act of conscious, joyous, and disciplined generosity.

Perhaps you've noticed that during our offering each Sunday, it does not state in the worship bulletin, "We will now collect this morning's tithes and offerings." Instead, and there is theological intentionality behind what it does state, "In gratitude to God, let us now receive our morning tithes and offerings." Do you hear the difference? In the first, there is the act of the church taking and collecting – something is pulled away in order to benefit the church. In the second, the church receives and embraces a gift

from those who freely give it. And all this is done in and through our gratitude to God. So again, our generosity can become a way of life.

The third point I want to make this morning is that **the theology of good stewardship is the church's antidote to some of the greatest temptations of our age: materialism, consumerism, and acquisition.**

The apostle Paul writes in his second letter to the church in Corinth, "And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work" (2 Cor. 9:8). This should prod each of us to ask of ourselves: Do I really have enough so that I may share abundantly? This, in turn, helps us to differentiate between what we truly need, and what we simply want. Which leads back to that age-old question: **How much is enough?** I don't know about you and your home, but when I look around my house I realize I have acquired more than enough – sometimes much more than enough.

What could have been accomplished, who could have been ministered to if more of the resources of our time, talents, and financial resources had been redirected away from ourselves.

Sharing abundantly, as an act of good stewardship, is indeed a spiritual discipline and practice – both in how we respond to the goodness of God, and to our call to minister to others, including to each other. It reminds us of our need to give and contribute, and to be a generous people. And it acts as a corrective to the temptation to acquire more stuff, simply because we can.

May sharing abundantly of our time, talents and abilities, and financial resources continue to be an intentional way of life for each of us.

Amen.

Resources:

Rev. Karl Travis, "On Why The Stewardship Conversation is Necessary, Now More Than Ever"