

Developing a Stewardship Culture

By Doug Turner

Stewardship is more than an activity; it is an identity. Stewardship isn't just something you do, but it is who you are. It can never be confined to a process or a program, but is inextricably part of our journey to be a "new creation" in Christ.

Relationship Orientation Over Need

Matthew 22:34-40; Matthew 7:7-12; 2 Corinthians 8:4-5

Hand extended, too often we get into the habit of begging and pleading for the needs of the church to be met. This scenario defines leadership as nagging others to simply perform a household function. God's people, on the other hand, are created to enjoy God in relationship. Biblical stewardship is an immediate opportunity to experience God.

In fundraising, the main goal is to raise money to meet a need. Meeting the needs of others, while a component of stewardship motivation, can never stand alone and still be Christian stewardship. Individuals can give to a multitude of causes that meet needs that are not even remotely Christian. While it may be philanthropic and good, it just isn't biblical stewardship.

Biblical stewardship goes beyond meeting needs to relationships. The goal of stewardship is to connect with God to realize eternal purposes – purposes for the time, talent and treasure that He has given each of us. That is a goal that inspires believers to trust in spiritual realities that invade the moment and, as a result, lead to extreme generosity. Because we have relationship with God, giving of all areas of our lives, like all disciplines, is about seeing and understanding God. This is the distinctive of the church.

Vision Centered

Ezekiel 37; Joel 2: 28-32; Hebrews 11:1

While connecting with God in relationship serves as the motivation of stewardship, connecting with the body of Christ in the local church becomes the target. In fact, this process, in a very healthy sense, becomes a "line in the sand" moment to connect a congregation to their vision.

Unfortunately, the church often reflects the fragmented lifestyle that permeates our culture today. Families fight the tyranny of overworked schedules and activities with so little time together as a family unit. The postmodern church fights the same battle of communicating and involving a fragmented congregation. Few ministries in church life bring the majority of people together at the same time to contemplate a common vision for that congregation. Building consensus around that vision is usually left to bits and pieces of information with little platform for true consolidation of the people around a common purpose.

Furthermore, fewer church attendees begin their relationship with the church out of a sense of calling. More and more church leaders are challenged with a congregation that is consumer driven. What services does this church provide for my family and me? Discussions on vision fall on deaf ears because that is someone else's responsibility if I am only a consumer.

The beauty of the stewardship process is the merging of these elements into a deep connection of a compelling vision. Knowing the vision intellectually is a key first step towards that connection, yet it only dangles unfulfilled in some ethereal existence of our minds until everyone in a congregation is challenged to resource that vision; in short, moving church members out of a consumer's mentality into an owner's mentality. Challenging individuals to know,

pray, and give, melting in to God's purposes for that church. To steward the vision God has given them as a people. Pulling together all of these component parts is the unique grace of the stewardship process.

Assimilation

1 Corinthians 12: 12-20

Stewardship thrives in an environment where clear path assimilation takes place; moving people into involvement and servanthood. Once again, it facilitates people moving from spectator to participant; from a consumer to an owner of the vision. As a spectator and owner, each person desires for investing gifts and resources to make a vision into reality.

Stewardship Beyond Budget

Luke 25-37; Matthew 25: 31-45

Relationship is central to growth in stewardship, and ministry becomes the agent that brings about life change to others. Unfortunately, too many churches present stewardship as a budget-driven process. In reality, stewardship goes beyond accounting.

Yes, it is true that God has blessed each of us with earthly wealth which he desires for us to use for His glory. But He has also given us time which He wants us to use to connect with Him in a more intimate way and gifts and talents, which can be His hands and feet here on Earth. When church members see stewardship as a giving of their life, not just their money, they will achieve a life of peace and fulfillment that can only be found in God.

Stewardship as Journey

Matthew 25: 14-30; 2 Corinthians 8:7

Why is it important to recognize the spiritual nature of stewardship as a journey? It is important because every journey is ultimately defined by the destination. If you want to raise money to meet a budget or build some buildings and that's your destination, then your methodology will match that goal. If, on the other hand, you want to raise up good stewards, to stretch and grow people in their faith, to make this about something transcendent and noble and not simple mundane and rudimentary, if you want this to be about heart and not simply wallets, if you want this to be about God and not simply buildings, then you will need to define your destination first.

As a pastor facing these kinds of challenges, realizing I was conflicted between our need for a new facility and my natural aversion to pain, I still remember the angst of entering into our first capital campaign. With a stiff upper lip and whimpering held to a minimum (I was the pastor, after all), we moved forward with the campaign.

To my surprise, what ensued was a catalytic event that dramatically changed the spiritual landscape of our church beyond just finances. The stewardship process created an atmosphere where individuals would be encouraged to take personal inventory in their lives and then, instead of simply asking for donations for a budget or a new building, challenged them to coalesce around a compelling vision for our church. Was it painful? Whenever people are asked to change priorities and value systems, an obvious inertia must be overcome. That will always be accompanied with levels of discomfort. This was not, however, taking medicine to simply get well or maintain status quo. This was exercising faith that produced new muscle for ministry.

No longer the 98-pound spiritual weakling, the stewardship process was a workout regiment that created a discipline to trust God, not merely in theory, but in the reality of serving God. This isn't about the pain, but about God building something for the future. Frankly, the most important thing constructed will have nothing to do with brick and mortar.

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