

Devotional



Day One

GOD'S CALL TO STEWARDSHIP

"And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will." - II Corinthians 8:5

Paul gives the strongest stewardship lesson in the Bible in II Corinthians 8 and 9. The churches in Macedonia were weak. They were poor, yet they distinguished themselves by begging for opportunities to give and then giving out of their poverty far more than anyone could expect. (II Corinthians 8:3) Their attitude defies logic. You would expect them to be begging for welfare, rather than becoming the fountains of such magnanimous and sacrificial charity.

Some preachers try to shame church members into giving more by reminding them that every year Americans spend almost as much on peanut butter as they give to missions. While such admonishment may make us squirm, it never develops a deep stewardship awareness in a church.

Stewardship does not begin with the question, "How much shall I give?"

The first question of giving is, "Who is the real owner of everything I have?"

Even before this question, there is another that is more foundational: "Who owns me?"

The understanding of stewardship revolves around the fact that I am a steward holding all that I have, including myself, in trust for God, the God of the Bible, the Creator of the universe. It was this single revelation that sparked the giving of the Macedonian Christians (II Corinthians 8:5). They first gave themselves to God. They didn't give only a part of their lives and possessions; they gave everything. They belonged entirely to God; therefore, they gladly gave everything to God.

For a long time, Helen Rosevere has been one of my favorite missionaries. So many missionary biographies describe missionaries as so perfect they seem almost sanitized. Helen's two autobiographies are more realistic, actually more like the Bible. Helen tells of God in all His glory and grace, but she also exposes the good, bad and ugly of human life.

When Helen graduated with a medical degree from Cambridge University in 1952, she went to serve in a part of the Congo (Africa) with a population of over 200,000 and not one doctor in the whole area. This meant she was tied to a 24/7 job long before anyone had coined the term. A brick surgical ward was a necessity in such a hot, humid climate, but there was no one to make the bricks. She prayed for a builder, but none came. In the middle of a busy surgery schedule, she got busy making bricks out

of mud and straw. One day while she was shaping bricks, an emergency arrived at the dispensary. With bleeding hands, she scrubbed for surgery. The pain was excruciating! When she returned to the brickyard after the operation, one of the nationals said, "Doc, we know now that you love us and care for us. When you enter the operating room wearing your mask and gown, you frighten us, but when you come out here and work with the rest of us and bleed the same as we do, we realize that you are one of us."

Helen quit praying for a builder. She realized that the main reason she had come to Africa was not to be a medical missionary. She had come because she belonged to God, and He had called her to Himself. It was her life more than her particular acts of service that impacted the people.

Until we get this right, we will never get the rest of stewardship right. God does not want ten percent or even 50 percent. He wants 100 percent. He wants our lives, "lock, stock and barrel." The old gospel song has it right: "Jesus paid it all, all to Him I owe." What we do with the portion we don't put into the offering plate is as important as what we give. It's all God's Money.

As you consider your faith promise commitment, tell God that nothing is off limits to Him. It is all His already. Also, ask the Holy Spirit to give you the gift of generosity (See Romans 12:8). It is not easy to get.

Finally, ask God to make the behavior of the Macedonians real in your life.

PRAYER:

*Please, God, help me to give myself first to You. Before everything else in my life, make Your presence a reality. Don't let other things squeeze You out of the center of my daily affairs. Rather, become the true center of all that I do.
Amen.*

QUESTIONS:

Mother Teresa said, "You will never know that Christ is all you need until Christ is all you have." Consider what you are facing today. If the only resource you had was Christ, how would it change the way:

- * you feel right how?
- * you approach your responsibilities?
- * you meet disappointments?
- * you respond to successes?

"It is possible to give gifts to people and to God and yet keep yourself at a distance. Money, which ought to be an expression of personal commitment, can actually be a substitute for personal commitment. Paul does not want that kind of money. Of first importance is to give ourselves to God and to God's people" - John Piper