

Stewardship as a Lifestyle

Living in relationship with the One who owns everything

John R. Frank

How do you begin an article on stewardship? Should I make huge promises? Say that your offerings will never be the same? Suggest that you should prepare for incredible growth?

I will let you decide if any hype is needed, but I ask you to consider my definition of stewardship in its entirety before drawing any conclusions.

I offer that stewardship is a lifestyle. We are to live our lives based on an understanding that God owns everything. We are called to be stewards of his creation. A lifestyle of stewardship produces a generous spirit integrated into following Jesus.

To understand stewardship we must first come to grips with the issue of ownership. It is easy to quote Psalm 24:1, but living it requires a huge commitment. Do we really believe that everything, I mean *everything*, belongs to God? We talk about time, treasure, and sometimes talent. But I challenge you to consider relationships, priorities, and our environment as things over which we are also called to be wise stewards. It also encompasses our ministries, our donor base, and the talents of our staff.

It's about the Journey

God is more concerned with the journey of the steward than he is with our budgets or campaign goals. During my career, I have primarily focused on stewardship, development and leadership. I have also been a worship leader, nursery volunteer and elder. In these 28 years of work, I have never seen God run out of resources. I have seen God bless many organizations with donors and million dollar gifts. However, we are often obsessed with "our" goals. We see our ministry as from God, but often view stewards as a "resource."

501(c)'s are not in the Bible

I have a challenge for my leadership friends in churches and parachurch ministries: Your organizations are not in Scripture. What you do is. To feed the hungry, care for the widow and the orphan, share the Good News, and the like are clearly in Scripture. But your organization, denomination, or local church structure is not defined in the Bible.



The steward by contrast is Scripturally defined. God cares about how we live. He is concerned with how we, as stewards, invest ourselves in frontlines ministry. We will be held accountable for our stewardship generosity in caring for God's people. (Phil. 4:17) Our churches and ministries are conduits for stewards to exercise their priorities and callings.

Where is the money in all this?

I have had pastor friends respond: "That sound fine, but we pastors get measured by bodies and buildings!" I do not doubt this sad reality. Money is a key measurement of stewardship priorities. But I challenge us to not see money as the ultimate goal.

Money is a tool. It accomplishes many good things. It also destroys lives, ruins marriages, and pulls people away from following Jesus. Yes, we must teach how to use, save, earn and give money. But, like Jesus, we must also teach and warn about the power and spirituality of money. We must help every steward understand that like time, money is a resource that God cares about.

Living as stewards

Stewardship is about a relationship. When we live as stewards we live in relationship with our Creator, who is the owner of all.

Our lives reflect a transformational view of stewardship when this is understood. People, our environment, and our daily decisions are all stewardship related. When we spend time with our family rather than at work, isn't that a stewardship decision? When we prioritize our prayer life and study of the word before the morning paper, isn't that a stewardship decision?

When we face God

I believe when we face God he will not say, "Let's see John and Susan, let's count up the church offerings you gave..." I think it will be more like, "I put you in one of the greatest times of history, in a country of great wealth, gave you an education, a wonderful spouse, children, jobs, money, talent, and a beautiful place to live. I gave you the Internet, global air travel, talented pastors, and good health. So what did you do with all of that to love my people and impact my kingdom?"

Many may be surprised to learn that we are to be stewards in all of life. Let us all seek to live a lifestyle of stewardship, and see how God is faithful to supply all of our needs through his riches in Christ Jesus.

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