

THE SEASONS OF STEWARDSHIP

Monthly Stewardship Thoughts

Ernest D. Standerfer

Stewardship is not seasonal in the sense that it is to be mentioned only at prescribed times. It is both appropriate and needed throughout the year. Stewardship is indeed a truth for all seasons. God made us stewards, managers. Managing life and resources for God is a year-round opportunity and responsibility. While it is necessary to focus more intensely on subjects or emphases at certain times, many people may be more open to stewardship truths as they are presented throughout the year. The following stewardship thoughts may jump-start a longer presentation, provide pre-offertory thoughts in worship, or be appropriately placed in the church newsletter or bulletin.

January The First Month, the First Day 1 Corinthians 16:2

Resolutions or not, there is a sense of beginning again in this first month of the year. That's good. We could let the weeks pass without much thought, but we need times to reflect and look ahead.

The Scriptures do not speak about the significance of the first month, but they do focus on the importance of worship on the first day of the week, the Lord's Day. Paul advised the Corinthians to prepare for giving to the special opportunity he was encouraging. "On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income."

This first month of the new year provides a marvelous opportunity to begin giving on the first day of the week through your church. That would be an important step and a blessing to you and your church. If you presently give regularly on the Lord's Day,

thank the Lord for working that conviction into your heart. In this first month, make Him first, and resolve to give on the first day.

February Genuine Love, Genuine Giving 2 Corinthians 8:8

You can give without loving, but you cannot love without giving. While not a new statement, this still merits our consideration. Genuine, sincere love involves giving, and giving expresses our love. John wrote, "For God so loved the world, that he gave. . . ." We have numerous opportunities to give time, energies, and money through our church. Paul confessed to the Corinthian church that he wanted "to test the sincerity of your love."

We are not members of the Corinthian congregation, but Paul's counsel still is wise. If we love God, love our church, and love the new life we have in Christ, we will give. If genuine love motivates our giving, we will give like God—our best.

What is shaping your giving? Are other motivations, less biblical and inspiring, determining your giving pattern? Let giving be a primary means of expressing the sincerity of your love.

March When the Spirit Moves Acts 4:31-32

March winds are part of our normal weather pattern. We anticipate spring. We fly kites. A new season is "blowing in." How thankful we are when we sense the Spirit of God moving among us like a refreshing wind.

The early church experienced it, and Luke

recorded it in Acts 4:31-32 (NIV): “After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly. All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had.”

When we recognize God’s ownership of all we have, pray and witness boldly, and sense a desire to minister to others through giving, be assured: the wind of the Spirit is moving in us. May the breezes of spring come, and may the Spirit of God bring spiritual refreshing to our life and church.

April **Loving Money** **1 Timothy 6:6-10**

What do you think about genetic research? We have already developed the ability to do things we only imagined a few years ago. One lingering fear of this research is expressed in the oft-repeated statement, “Someday someone will create a monster,” meaning that the research could become detrimental to humankind rather than make a positive contribution.

The Bible affirms love—the love of God, for God, and for others—as perhaps the greatest attribute of God and His children. What about loving money? Think of all the hospitals, church ministries, and mission efforts made possible by the giving of money.

But to love money is to “create a monster,” an attitude, a way of life that holds no promise for good. Holy Scripture counsels, “People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs” (1 Tim. 6:9-10, NIV).

Let us love God supremely and use money to help people and honor the Lord.

May **Happiness Is . . . ?** **Acts 20:33-35**

This month is a happy one for many. Graduation has come at last; the summer vacation is just ahead; and the weather is much more pleasant. All of these marks of

the season we anticipate and enjoy.

While enjoying the benefits of the season, note that the apostle Paul pointed to one way we can experience happiness all year long. “Remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’” (Acts 20:35, NIV).

Other translations make it even clearer. “It makes one happier to give than to get” (Acts 20:35, Williams).¹

“More blessings come from giving than receiving” (Acts 20:35, CEV).²

These words are not to be taken casually. “It is more blessed to give than to receive” are the words of the living Christ. They’re true. Happiness is giving—giving yourself to serve others in Jesus’ name and giving your financial resources through your church to help others know the kind of happiness that only the Lord Jesus makes possible.

June **Standing Tall** **Luke 19:1-10**

Memories of early Vacation Bible Schools include both the story and song about Zacchaeus—“a wee little man was he.” Bible students remember that Zacchaeus had gotten wealthy at the expense of others. And even more, we remember that Zacchaeus was a short man and had to climb a tree to get a glimpse of Jesus. But later, after Jesus spent time with him, Zacchaeus stood tall. This is not to suggest that he grew physically, but we admire and rejoice in his change of attitude, his spiritual growth and commitment. He said, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount” (Luke 19:8, NIV).

Whatever our physical disadvantages may be, we can stand tall in our willingness and commitment to give. What was Jesus’ response to Zacchaeus? “Today salvation has come to this house” (Luke 19:9, NIV).

July **When the Time Is Right** **John 12:1-8**

Some of you are enjoying the seasonal opportunity to “grill out” and fix special meals that you enjoy. This summer many churches have special homecoming services that usually involve “dinner on the grounds” where the favorite dishes from all the good

cooks in the church are sampled.

The Gospel writers tell us about a special dinner “in Jesus’ honor” (John 12:2, NIV). The food was good, I’m sure, but what made the occasion extra special was something unusual that happened. Mary, one of the hosts, poured “expensive perfume . . . on Jesus’ feet and wiped his feet with her hair” (John 12:3, NIV). The disciples objected and thought it wasteful, but Jesus replied, “Leave her alone” (John 12:7, NIV). Why? Why did she do this? Why did Jesus give His approval? Why? Because He knew that this represented her desire to give Him her very best. Her purpose was not to make a scene but simply to express her devotion to Christ.

The time is always right when we commit our best to the Lord Jesus. Will you give your very best to the One who gave all for you?

August Camping Out Genesis 28:16-22

Do you enjoy camping out? Many people do. Some invest in expensive equipment so that they can enjoy the outdoors and have some comforts of home at the same time.

One of the early Bible personalities, Jacob, had a unique “camping out” experience. As he was running from home, nighttime came, and he stopped to rest. Having no camping equipment, he took a stone, “put it under his head and lay down to sleep” (Gen. 28:11, NIV). During the night God spoke to him through a dramatic dream. When he awoke, he confessed, “Surely the LORD is in this place” (Gen. 28:16, NIV). He took his “pillow,” the stone, and used it as a place of worship. Then Jacob made a promise to God: “Of all that you give me, I will give you a tenth” (Gen. 28:22, NIV).

Isn’t it marvelous that God can speak to us wherever we are? Outside under the stars or in a quiet place—wherever, we can pray, listen, and make commitments that honor the Lord. Even a commitment to give a tenth of our income to the Lord.

September Back to School Malachi 3:8-10

We’re in the beginning of “back to school” days. Administrators, teachers, parents, and students are doing those things needed for a productive and enjoyable year.

The prophet Malachi would understand the back-to-school feeling. He called Israel back, not to school, but to God; but there were important truths he wanted them to remember and practice. The truths were not new. The people had forgotten them or put them aside, thinking they were unimportant. Malachi knew they were essential in relating to God.

One of those truths focused on giving. “I the LORD do not change. . . . Return to me, and I will return to you. . . . Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse. . . . Test me in this. . . and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it” (Mal. 3:6-7, 10-11, NIV).

Do you need to return to this truth that God wants you to know and practice? Begin now to give a tithe of your income to God through your church. You will be learning and living as God instructs us. He will be pleased, and you will be blessed.

October Opportunity! Philippians 4:10

Though asserting that God would take care of him, the apostle Paul “rejoiced greatly” for the generosity and concern of the Philippian congregation for him. He cited a new opportunity as the reason they could express again their long-lasting concern for him.

A Christian lady shared her regret that she once had an opportunity to give to the Lord much more than she presently could, but she let the opportunity pass. Now she planned to use her present opportunity to give all she could. “I love Him too much to do less.”

Opportunity missed often brings regret. Opportunity taken brings relief. What opportunities are available to you to express your Christian concern? What opportunities to give generously do you have to provide ministries to others? Maybe the best opportunity you will ever have to give is now. Seizing your opportunity will enable others to rejoice greatly and provide you with a sense of having the wisdom and the insight to see the opportunity God has given you.

November Truly Thankful Deuteronomy 8:10-18

I enjoy the time of thanksgiving worship when the congregation joins in singing,

Come, ye thankful people, come,
 Raise the song of harvest home!
All is safely gathered in,
 Ere the winter storms begin;
God, our Maker, doth provide
 For our wants to be supplied:
Come to God's own temple, come,
 Raise the song of harvest home.
 —Henry Alford

As appropriate as that is, could it be deceiving? We can enjoy the congregational feeling and singing but miss the importance of being truly thankful.

Moses reminded Israel, “When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands . . . But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth” (Deut. 8:10-11,18, NIV). If we are thankful, we may sing, but we will certainly adhere to God's teachings and remember that God is the Source of our strength, our skills, and our material blessings.

December God Has Given You a Gift 2 Corinthians 8:9

“Do we have to buy her a present? Him, too?”

“You don't need to get him/her a real expensive gift.”

“Well, they gave me a gift last year.”

Have you heard any of those comments during the Christmas season? Our motives for buying some gifts may be based on courtesy, duty, or tradition—all of which may not be bad but certainly fall short of motives such as love or “because I want to.” Sometimes we may not be sure what our motives are; we just think we have to give a gift.

The Bible makes clear that Christ's motive for giving Himself to and for us was that we “might become rich.” The gift has been given—verified in history, recorded clearly by all the Gospel writers, and experienced by multitudes of believers. God gave His Son, who willingly gave Himself for us. His motive: that we might become rich—rich in faith, rich in Christ, rich in hope, rich in eternal life, and rich in love. There is only one explanation for such giving: grace, unearned and undeserved love of God for us. What a gift! **LW**

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