Faith Aflame: 360 Degrees

What Is Stewardship?

Opening Prayer

Introduction

One of the most loved Thanksgiving hymns, "Now Thank We All Our God," was written sometime during the Thirty Years War, a time of great devastation in Europe.

The hymn was written by a German Lutheran Pastor, Martin Rickart, who served a church in the German town of Eilenberg. During the war, several waves of pestilence and famine swept through the town leaving thousands dead.

At one point, Pastor Rickart was the only remaining minister in the city. As a result he had to conduct up to fifty funeral services a day. Somehow, he still found time to write 66 different hymns during that span of his life.

One of those hymns, written in the middle of such tragedy, is a powerful testimony of a man truly thankful to God for the very gift of life. The first verse says:

Now thank we all our God,
With heart and hands and voices,
Who wondrous things hath done,
In whom this world rejoices;
Who, from our mother's arms,
Hath blessed us on our way
With countless gifts of love,
And still is ours today.

What does the above story have to say about Christian stewardship?

Read the following definition of stewardship together:

Christian stewardship is the free and joyous activity of the child of God and God's family, the Church, in managing all of life and life's resources for God's purposes.

A Stewardship Prayer

O God, our loving Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier,
You are the giver of
every good gift.

Strengthen our faith
and work within us
the spirit of Christian stewardship.

Empower us to live lives full of joy
and thankfulness and praise—even
in times of
trial and temptation.

Empower us to give generously
of the time, talent and treasure You
have given us so that Your kingdom
may be spread throughout the world.

This we ask through Jesus Christ,
Your son, our Lord, who lives and
reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,
one God,
now and forever.

Amen.

What are some things that keep God's people from living out this definition?

What are some ways members of our congregation could be encouraged to live out this definition?

Paul's letter to the Ephesians talks a lot about Christian stewardship. Comment on the following passages as they relate to stewardship.

- Ephesians 1:3-10
- Ephesians 2:19-22
- Ephesians 5:15-20

What makes Christian stewardship different from the stewardship of the unbeliever?

Marcus Manthey, in his article "Christian Stewardship: Our Part in God's Plan" writes, "The unbeliever may recognize the need for good stewardship, at least in certain areas (ecology of natural resources for example). But for the unbeliever, stewardship is only an obligation. Its power is most often the threats of the law. Its motivation is either fear (of loss or punishment) or pride (in accomplishment or personal fame). Stewardship, at best, is only a peripheral aspect of the unbeliever's life. It is an aspect entirely regulated by the unbeliever's own ideas and opinions…For the Christian, stewardship is and must be something entirely different. As Paul's letter (to the Ephesians) teaches us, Christian stewardship is not merely an obligation but a privilege, a blessed opportunity from God, an evidence of His continuous grace and so, for the Christian, a source of continuing joy and satisfaction."

"What, then, is Christian stewardship?" Manthey asks. "It is the opportunity God gives to every believer to serve the cause of the Gospel by living his life within God's world according to God's will as revealed in Jesus Christ. More briefly, Christian stewardship is the part God allows each believer to play in carrying forward His plan of salvation."

Manthey calls this a "grand and glorious picture of our roles as Christian stewards!" "But," he wonders, "how many of the people who sit in our pews have been led to see that picture clearly."

- How would you answer his question?

Action Item: What can we do right now to help congregational members know and live out the "grand and glorious picture of our roles as Christian stewards?"
Be specific!

Closing Prayer

Adoration…	**P**raise…
Confession…	**R**emember…
Thanksgiving…	**A**sk…
Supplication….	**Y**ield…

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