

MANAGING GOD'S RESOURCES

Closely related to servanthood is stewardship. Servanthood is the faithful commitment of ourselves to the needs of another; stewardship involves the faithful use of resources that belong to another. An important part of following Christ is the use of our material resources for God's purposes and to meet the needs of others. In fact, Scripture is clear that our use of our resources is an indicator of the sincerity of our commitment to Christ, and our trust in His promises. Consider 2 Corinthians 9:6-8:

"The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all contentment in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work."

The faithful use of our resources takes us back to the opening point of this lesson. All that we are and all that we have now belongs to God. From an eternal perspective we do not really own anything. We are dependent on God for what we have, and we won't take anything we presently have with us when we leave this life (See the Parable of the Rich Fool, Luke 12:16-21). On this earth we are merely stewards (overseers or managers) over things that belong to God. The only question is whether we are faithful or unfaithful stewards. Materialism, selfishness, greed, hoarding, anxiety over money — all of these reveal that our trust lies not in God but in money. In the same way, generosity and faithfulness reveal that our trust is in God. By such things we confess that God — not our possessions — is the source of our life.

God has revealed Himself as "the one who provides" (Jehovah Jireh - Genesis. 22:14). He has promised to use His unlimited resources to care for His people. But in addition to meeting our physical needs, God provides material resources to further the work of His kingdom through the local church. So when we "give," we are actually "giving back" that which God has already provided.

Giving Tithes

Throughout salvation history, God has called His people to support His work through giving. In the Old Testament, God's people were to give a tithe, or the first tenth, of their income to God. This practice predated the giving of the Law (Genesis 14:20; Genesis 28:22) and was later formalized in the Law of Moses for the maintenance of the temple and provision for the priests and Levites who served there (Leviticus. 27:30-32; Deuteronomy 14:22-24). Tithes are also called "first fruits" (Deuteronomy 26:2) in the Old Testament. By giving the first of one's income, the one giving the offering demonstrated a commitment to God above all other commitments and a trust in God's character for gracious provision (See Exodus 23:19).

The tithe was given in the house of God as an offering to God (Exodus 23:19). With Jesus' sacrificial death, the temple with its sacrifices and priesthood have been replaced by the church as the center of God's activity in the world (Ephesians. 3:10; 1 Timothy 3:15). The church where believers are fed God's Word and deployed in His service has become the repository of the tithe. Hence, we bring our first fruit offerings of one tenth of our income into God's house for the promotion of His work to glorify His name in the world through the church.

God uses the tithe in the local church to sustain the work of ministry in the church. The tithe meets the needs of the people of the church (Acts 4:34-35). It supports the elders of the church so that they can give their time and energies to serving the church (1 Corinthians 9:13-14). The tithe supports the extension of the Gospel in the life of the church and outreach of the church

(Philippians 4:15-16). Scripture indicates that, while we may give to many worthy causes, the tithe is specifically reserved for the local church where we receive care and training (1 Timothy 5:17-18; Galatians 6:6).

While we believe that Scripture encourages all believers to tithe in their local church, at Covenant Fellowship Church we do not consider tithing a requirement of membership. This does not mean tithing is simply “personal preference.” It is a privilege of believer obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ, a fundamental principle of good individual stewardship. With tithing comes an extraordinary promise of Scripture in Malachi 3:10:

“Bring the full tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.”

Giving Offerings

The principle of first fruits indicates that tithing is a regular and planned approach to stewardship, based on our receipt of provision from the Lord through regular income. We may also give offerings over and above the tithe to provide for specific ministries, special needs, care for the deserving poor, and expansion of the Gospel (See 2 Corinthians 9 for an example of how this was carried out in the New Testament church). Some of the regular opportunities the people of Covenant Fellowship Church have to exercise stewardship through offerings include:

- Giving to the ministry of Sovereign Grace Ministries, which supports church planting.
- Giving to the Covenant Fellowship Church Mission Fund, which exists to further the particular mission of this local church.
- Giving to Covenant Mercies — the mercy arm of our local church. The work of Covenant Mercies will be discussed in Lesson 10.

We have already discussed how this local church approaches the issue of giving. In a world that looks with suspicion on any discussion of “money and church,” we are committed to unapologetically preaching the Word of God as it addresses our lives. Since the concept of money and possessions is one of the most frequently addressed subjects in the Scriptures, our service to the church is to faithfully preach what the Bible teaches and call for responses which are consistent with the Scripture’s claim on our lives.

Financial Integrity

We are also committed to financial integrity, responsible reporting of our finances, objective standards of operation, and outside evaluation our financial practice through professional accountants. We do this because the church itself is a steward of the resources that come to it through people being faithful to God. This is a trust that the elders of the church hold deeply and are committed to maintaining in the fear of the Lord. 50

Financial Peace University

Lastly, if you would like help in becoming a better steward of the resources that God has entrusted to you, we offer a course called *Financial Peace University*. In this course, you will learn how to live on a budget, pay off debt, save for large purchases, and more. It has helped many men and women in our church become debt-free and has enabled us to give more of our resources to the Kingdom of God.