

# A Word In Due Season - September 2011

By Russ Gressett

## Stewardship - Part 1

So often when we hear the word “stewardship”, as Christians, our thinking goes straight to the thought of “giving”. It’s not that stewardship has no part that relates to giving (it does), it’s just that when its focus rests entirely on the shoulders of “giving”, some of the true characteristics of stewardship tend to get overshadowed, and stewardship many times gets relegated to mere mechanics and repetition. Vines Expository Dictionary characterizes stewardship/steward (oikonomos) as follows: “*Primarily denoted “the manager of a household or estate” (oikos, “a house,” nemo, “to arrange”). Manager and managing is the heart of stewardship ... managing something that belongs to another. In this sense, a revelation of ownership becomes the key in understanding stewardship. That which is accomplished by stewardship is accomplished on behalf of the owner.*”

As it relates to Christianity, the question then becomes, “Who is the owner?” That’s a pretty simple question and pretty simple answer. I think most would whole heartedly agree and declare the owner to be God. But, how does this play out in our daily lives and how do we really perceive what we have been placed as steward over? We as Christians today really need to camp out on this concept for a while and meditate on it because it is a huge and powerful revelation that is foundational in the new covenant. Things such as marriage, families, jobs, money, employees, businesses, church family, responsibilities, time etc... all come to mind as aspects or parts and pieces of our stewardship. Are these areas viewed by us as “owned by me” or “managed by me for another”? If you are anything like me, there is some work that needs to be done in these areas for sure.

In this article, let’s begin on the side of stewardship that does relate to giving and couple it with the important ownership question to which we just alluded. Later, we will talk about other characteristics and ministries of stewardship.

I recall a conversation I had with a good friend of mine years ago. In the conversation, I posed the following question: “If I gave a \$1,000 dollars to a church or some other ministry organization, would the Kingdom of God be increased financially?” Think about that question for minute. What would your answer be? It’s kind of a trick question, but many would answer “yes” on the face of it. However, if true, and the Kingdom was increased financially speaking, the point would follow that when the money was in my stewardship prior to the transfer it must not have been “in the Kingdom”, at least not in my belief system.

What is our “reality” view of when something truly becomes the Lord’s? This is a big step toward a proper understanding of stewardship. Forget about when someone else views it as becoming the Lord’s, when do we individually view what we have in our hands as becoming the Lord’s? Is it only when it leaves our hands and ends up in the hands of what man proclaims as a “church” or a “full-time ministry”? No, a proper revelation and belief system of stewardship would recognize that the \$1,000 transfer did not change the ownership, only the stewardship (i.e. it was already “in the kingdom”). If I had done the gifting based on the leading of the Holy Spirit, the money

was moved from Stewardship A to Stewardship B to accomplish something that the Owner wanted accomplished, at His direction.

We can't give something to God that is already His, but we can allow Him to manage what is His through us (including ourselves). We do this through relationship. It is what we typically refer to as "ministry" ... God working through us to accomplish the work that He has on His agenda. Jesus patterned this for us exactly in his earthly ministry.

On occasion, I hear the phrase, "God is finished doing all that He is going to do." Nothing could be further from the truth. He has finished the work of making a way for us to be forgiven, reconciled, set free and delivered through Christ ... true. But, He has not finished speaking to us, directing us, encouraging us, training us and ministering through us once we enter sonship. Everything God has done in the past He has spoken. So if he is still speaking, then He's not finished ... and He is still speaking (Hebrews 3:7-9, Acts 22:10, John 16:12-13, John 10:2-5, Acts 8 & 9). Thank goodness for that, because we, as His stewards and His children, need to hear His instruction, direction, guidance and correction on a consistent basis.

Owners direct their managers. God is no different. As His stewards, we should expect His direction and correction, even more so because we are His own children to boot. We should expect a detailed and conversational relationship in all areas of our lives with God. Each of us has a role to play and a position assigned in His Body. A bride and groom style, intimate relationship is spoken of in the scriptures. The question is, do we really think of ourselves and all we have at this moment as being His? Or, are there areas that kind of are and areas that are kind of not? Stop and really think about that. On a real and practical basis, most of us don't tend to think of it all as being His. What we tend to do is give lip service to that concept, but in the background this other concept of "this part is mine and this part is Yours" still hangs around. We need to actually give everything to Him, and then begin to truly think and talk and believe and operate in a manner that recognizes the truth of our having actually done that.

A good example that I am sure will stir the religious pot out there a bit is the doctrine of tithing. Over the course of my life time I have heard this said many times, "It is all His anyway, but we are giving this portion back to Him." Have you ever heard something similar to that? Again, stop and think about that statement. Is that even possible? If it is all His anyway, how are we to give a portion back to Him? Are we to first take it back from Him so we can then turn around and give a portion back to Him? The follow up question to that is, "Whose are we?" If we take it back from Him so we can give it to Him, then while "we" have it back, whose are we? It makes no sense. Someone that is His is taking something that is His back from Him in order to give back to Him something we say is His anyway. And, supposedly the way we do this is by transferring it from our stewardship to someone else's stewardship. That's what I mean when I say that we don't practically think of all that we have as being His. Now, don't get me wrong. I am not opposed to anyone bringing 10% to their local church of which they are a part. What I am opposed to is Christians not understanding ownership and what is truly going on in that process. Not understanding this builds up religion, not relationship.

If we operate in a “this part is mine and this part is God’s” mentality and belief system, we have not entered into true stewardship yet ... not like the stewardship that Jesus walked in during His earthly ministry. Listen, if it was 10% in the old covenant, it should be expected at a much higher level in the new covenant - but not just in percentage ... in relationship, in heart, and in motive as well. A much higher level as in 100% versus 10%. We must understand that there is a difference between old covenant and new covenant believers (Galatians 4). The threat of a curse and consequences to not obeying the law was needed in the old covenant. Why was that? It was because their nature was not “born again”. Their nature was covetous ... not generous. Now, our “new nature” is born again, and this new nature of ours is generous, not covetous. Big difference. In the new covenant, we are to be “led by the Spirit”. In the old covenant, they were “led by the consequence” (new covenant = want to, old covenant = have to).

At the cross, we were purchased. There is a dividing line there in time. A new and better covenant was ushered in. Jesus was the first born among many brethren. We are the “many brethren” that have been reaped from His sowing. Did Jesus give 10% or 100% of himself? That’s an easy answer, I know. The point being that we are his brethren and expected to do the works that He did, to operate as He did, to walk with God’s agenda as He did. I doubt any of us have arrived at this, but the path toward this level of sanctification starts with an understanding of whom we belong to in total, not in part. We need to become firmly established in this area of our view toward ownership and not just give it lip service. The compartmentalization of our lives kills the advancement of true stewardship. We really need walk with the practical understanding of a true steward if that is how we want God to view us and use us. This is a true difference between the old and new covenants that needs to be rightly divided because it makes a big difference both in our faith and in the anointing on our stewardship actions.

For clarity, let’s take a real world example. Let’s say that I own a Radio Shack store and you manage it for me. I come into the store one day and you go over to a shelf and pull a camera, a phone and some speaker wire and bring it to me and say, “I’d like to give this to you.” What am I to think as the owner dealing with my manager / steward? I expect my first thought about you is going to be, “This person I have as manager here needs some training because they obviously do not understand ownership, among other things. Maybe I should put someone else in as manager until I can get this person properly trained.”

Listen, we as stewards have become accustomed to the thought that we give to God by writing checks. However, that line of thought blinds us to the understanding that we first need to give to Him in our hearts beginning with ourselves followed by everything else (2 Cor. 8:5). When we truly give all to him, it doesn’t mean we come and dump our physical net worth out at the altar of the local church, or anywhere else. It means we make a heart decision to give all to Him. It’s only then that we can become a true steward, managing that which is His from that point forward. Then, when giving is on God’s agenda for us as His steward (which it is all the time), instead of us giving to Him, He gives through us that which He has placed in our stewardship. Our response in that situation

becomes a ministry act flowing from relationship and it is highly anointed and very powerful (2 Corinthians 8:4). There is much more than rote mechanics involved in the proper transfer of wealth and provision in and around the kingdom of God in order to get all the Family's business accomplished. The Body of Christ is designed to work in unison and is very fluid and dynamic in its abilities, just like our physical body (Romans 12).

I'll give a tiny but powerful example from not too long ago that totally blew me away. We have one of those black ceramic cook tops in our kitchen. One of the larger burners on the unit went out and for about 6 months we just used the other three (it was on the "honey-do" list for way too long guys). Well, after some time, the other large burner went out (to put it mildly, momma wasn't happy). I quickly and efficiently came to the realization that I couldn't put it off any longer (typical male, I know). After looking at it, I decided the culprit was the burner switches underneath the knobs, so I got the model number and searched for the parts on the internet. In the search, up pops this complete unit that is for sale in Houston on Craigslist. The owner had placed the model number in the advertisement. It turned out that I could buy this complete unit from this couple for basically the same price as the new parts and have additional parts for later, if needed. So, I went with buying this one and put a call in to the owner. A lady answered the phone and we subsequently made a deal.

In the course of the conversation, I find out that they had recently had their house foreclosed on and were selling a number of the items they own. We decide to meet the next morning and complete the transaction. The next morning, I go by the bank to pull the cash out. While doing so, I sense in my heart the Lord speaking to me to give them an extra \$50 on top of what we had negotiated. So I pull up to our meeting place and she and her husband are in their vehicle. He gets out, we introduce ourselves, he shows me the cook top and I put it in my back seat. His wife is in the car and we are standing there to the side of their vehicle. I said, "The price was \$150 right?" "Yes", he said. I said, "Well I am a Christian man, and you may think I am crazy but God put it on my heart earlier to give you guys an extra \$50. He loves you guys and is mindful of you. So here is \$200." The lady starts crying immediately. The man was visibly impacted as well. He said, "Thanks, I really appreciate it, I really do, things have been extremely difficult lately". We say a few other words and then I leave. About 30 minutes later I get a text from the wife. She said "You have no idea what that did. At the church, we have been praying for my husband to get born again for some time now. He has really taken our financial struggles hard and is bitter. He has always resisted God. Your gift put him over the edge. We prayed just now in the parking lot and he is born again!" Wow! I thought. Praise God! I almost needed to get out of the truck and run around it a few times. It was only 50 bucks! But, it was the relationship of simply getting involved with what was on His agenda at that moment in time that added the power and conviction needed coupled with what another part of the Body had already been doing.

From a stewardship standpoint though, the question is what if His instruction had been to add \$500, \$5,000 or \$50,000 instead of \$50? Or better yet, what if \$50 was all that I had? Does He own it all? Am I a 100% steward? Are my ears even open to a directive to actually give it all were that directive to come? The problem is that we tend to be like the rich young ruler (Matthew 19) when we hear that kind of direction. The rich young ruler heard, "Take what you have, give it to the

poor, never to have anything again, and come follow Me.” He inserted that “fear phrase” in what he heard. But Jesus never told him he would never “have” again. He never told him his stewardship would not be replenished and increased. In fact, it would have been. I am afraid that the stronghold that plagued the rich young ruler back then remains prevalent in the lives of Christians today (including myself).

The funny thing about that story ... about a week later, I was driving down the road and something finally dawned on my lightning quick mind. I asked God, “Father, did our cook top go out so that guy would get born again?” I didn’t hear a voice, but in my heart His reply was, “Yes, they were praying weren’t they? I answer prayers in all kinds of ways and I know just how to reach people. Plus, I also knew it would take both burners going out to get you off high center to move on it!” Ouch!

God is looking for “100 percenters” to work through as stewards. That is the path of sanctification we should all be moving along on. I’m not there, you are not there, but it is the path we should be moving along on. That is why we don’t find a concentration of teaching on a law of tithing in the New Testament. God did not want to convey a less than 100% ownership to us. We are bought with a price, and are not our own. There is nothing wrong with giving 10% regularly, except if we are doing so out of fear of what will happen if we don’t, or out of a lust of what will happen if we do, where in both cases “me and mine” is the motivation. Those motives are the wrong motives for stewardship activity. Those kind of motives actually address our soul and flesh, not our new nature. Those kinds of motives will never sustain over time because they do not recognize the truth of what has been suffered us to have freely. There is a higher level of motivation we should move toward ... a love based motivation. These other motives reflect us doing the giving, not God doing the giving through us as His stewards. God is after relationship with His managers in every single aspect of our lives.

I remember God speaking to my heart as clearly as He has ever spoken to me early one morning. I was studying about the tithe, and I really hope this revelation puts stewardship and ownership into a proper new covenant / old covenant perspective for you. I had seen what the tithe was used for, which was actually a number of things, but primarily for supplying provision to orphans, widows and the priesthood (Numbers 18:21-24, Duet. 14:28-29, 26:12, Nehemiah 10). The conversation that came up in my heart went something like this, “Son, in the old covenant the tithe was holy unto Me, right? And, you have seen what I used it for, right? Given that, let me ask you a couple of questions. If you lived back in the days of the old covenant and were a typical Jewish believer and you made \$10, how much would have been mine?” I replied, “\$1.00, Lord”. He continued, “Okay, now forget about the other \$9.00 and let’s concentrate on that \$1.00. How much of that \$1.00 is mine?” I replied, “All of it, Lord ... 100%.” He responded, “What I’d like to ask you is this, why don’t you make a choice to become that \$1.00 and truly become all together Mine? Would you make a choice to become the tithe yourself? If you will, I’ll be able to use you to do the same thing I used the tithe for in the old covenant. Namely, to minister to the orphans (those without a father – Me), to widows (those without a husband – Jesus), and to those who actively minister the

gospel (by the way, not limited to what man refers to as "full-time" ministries)."

I really had a new perspective after this encounter! I was beginning to understand something about ownership and how it touches other aspects of my Christian life in ways I had never seen before. It was a powerful encounter in the secret place. I now understood how to divide the Word that in Matthew 6 speaks about the birds that neither sow nor reap but are provided for, but in 2 Corinthians 9 speaks that if you sow sparingly, you'll reap sparingly. It has to do with the heart attitude and viewpoint of ownership that we take in approaching the Father as His stewards and as His sons. If we view our sowing and reaping as "Kingdom sowing and reaping" as opposed to "personal sowing and reaping", it then makes all the sense in the world and we take on a proper view of stewardship. But if we view it as "personal sowing and reaping", we actually slander the work of the cross and proceed with a wrong base motive as those who are not truly operating as owned stewards who are members of the family of God (Phil. 4:19, 2 Cor. 8:9).

Ultimately, I saw that giving is a ministry operation of God's stewards (one of many actually) ... not an investment tool for me and mine (Romans 12:8, 2 Corinthians 8:4). Jesus was God's investment tool for us, and the sowing and reaping of Jesus was more than enough to supply all our collective needs. We do not need to re-sow and re-reap for those needs. We can rest in the truth that our Father provides for us because we are his and He has wonderful ways of doing so which we all play a part in. I don't know of a single other revelation that can truly release us on the world as His stewards as much as this one can. We see pictures of it working in the early church (Acts 2:40-47, Acts 4:32, Acts 5:3-4, 2 Corinthians 8 & 9), but that's a whole other revelation we can touch on another time. However, I would recommend that you dive into these scriptures and begin to see the kingdom operating.

What is our true view of stewardship? Is it a view of just a few things we mechanically do on occasion, cross them off the list and we are good to go for another month? Or, is it part and parcel of our everyday life where extraordinary and wonderful works are accomplished through us as God Himself ministers through us His agenda in the earth? Truth be told, I think we have only scratched the surface of what true stewardship would unleash on this world system and the people who live in it if we were to all truly step over into a 100% ownership revelation. Amen.

## 2 Timothy 2

<sup>20</sup> But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. <sup>21</sup> Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.