

# We Don't Talk About That Much Anymore

by Steve Weber

I find it amazing but tragic that the subject of “stewardship” is so little discussed and so much misunderstood in the Church today. It would seem that the many things Jesus said about the subject would make stewardship one of the most discussed topics within our fellowships. However, my extensive research since accepting the position as director of Stewardship Development Ministries for the Church of the Nazarene almost three years ago has led me to believe that many younger Christians (Nazarenes and those from other evangelical churches as well) have a faulty understanding of the importance of whole life stewardship.

I have heard stories of pastors who say, “I don't talk about finances in my pulpit,” as if such a discussion would somehow be “unspiritual.” It points to the fact that in some churches there is a prejudice about discussing finance as a spiritual concept. People don't see the linkage between giving to God and spiritual health. Unfortunately, they haven't grasped the truth that giving of time, talent, and treasure is probably the most accurate indicator of our discipleship level and, ultimately, our devotion to God.

Some limit their understanding of stewardship to only money.

## CHRISTIANS ARE MANAGERS

Many Christians today are uncomfortable with the basic premise that we are **managers** of what we have, not **owners**. God is the **Owner**. A quick examination of Job 41:11 (NIV), where God tells Job, “Everything under heaven belongs to me,” should be clear enough. King David understood this. Just look at his words in 1 Chronicles 29:14 (NIV) when the people of Israel were gathering gold, silver, and other precious materials for the building of the Temple. “Who am I,” asked David, “and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand.”

Some limit their understanding of stewardship to only money. Such a definition allows them to hoard their time and talents as if they belonged exclusively to themselves, not to God. Such persons are easily offended when ministry opportunities and needs infringe on “their” schedules. Time and its utilization are precious commodities in our society. Doesn't it make sense that if it is so precious to us, it is also of significant value to God? Limiting our stewardship to finance only may become a way of avoiding the giving of our equally significant gifts of time and talent for God's use.

Another error occurs when people limit their understanding of stewardship to the narrow concept of giving only the tithe or 10 percent of what they earn. While tithing is certainly a biblical

concept, giving to God should not be so restricted. Recently, I was discussing this concept with a young man who was obviously blessed with financial wealth. He told me the story of his own early years in the church where he received the mistaken idea that the tithe was the end of his responsibility and that the remaining 90 percent was his to do with as he pleased. Thanks to some stewardship insights he later received, he had discovered the fact that he was responsible not merely for ten percent, but for 100 percent—all that he owned as well as his entire being. He was both ashamed and challenged to learn that stewardship required more than his money. It was refreshing to see this young man so engaged in giving of himself to God in every aspect of life.

## **ARE WE SPENDING GOD’S MONEY ON OURSELVES?**

Many of our newer Nazarenes are told to “begin where they can,” at two or three percent of their income and to work toward the day when they can give the ultimate objective of the “tithe.” Certainly God is pleased at any giving from a cheerful heart, but He is also disappointed when we put ourselves and our selfish desires ahead of Him and the furtherance of His kingdom. As Ron Blue says, deciding how we should give requires an understanding of three basic generosity levels: how much you should give, how much you could give, and how much you would give (*Generous Giving*, 90). If our perspective is on the here and now, we will be less likely to give cheerfully to God, but if our sights are on God and eternity, we will see our possessions for what they are—gifts from God that we are to manage for kingdom purposes.

As an international denomination it is heartening to see that stewardship is not confined to the borders of any continent.

I do not wish to paint too bleak a picture of the state of stewardship in the church, for in many ways I am heartened by the strong commitment to stewardship by the Church of the Nazarene around the world. Per capita giving in our denomination last year was \$470—that’s among the top five highest of all Protestant denominations. Such giving enables us to have one of the strongest missionary infrastructures in the world. More Nazarenes are giving their time and talent than ever before to Work & Witness teams or serving as Nazarenes In Volunteer Service to minister to others in the name of Jesus.

As an international denomination it is heartening to see that stewardship is not confined to the borders of any continent. You can see stewardship in the lives of countless Nazarenes around the world, some of whom are chronicled in this issue—people like Rev. Hernan Osario, whose church in Bogota, Colombia, received 2,000 persons by profession of faith last year; or internationally known soccer player Paulo Silas, whose life is a testimony for Christ to his teammates and fans alike. Such people represent the many Nazarenes outside the USA where stewardship is being practiced today as never before.

However, we are at a crossroads regarding stewardship in our church.

While there are many who understand the importance of whole life stewardship, there are many others who do not. They need models of giving from established Christians. They need to hear

sermons and Sunday School lessons on what it means to be a manager—not an owner—of God’s possessions. They need opportunities to experience the joy of allowing God to be in control of every aspect of their lives. Perhaps this issue of *World Mission* magazine will be a step toward helping us to move the topic of stewardship from one that is “strangely silent” to one that is spoken of with joy and enthusiasm in our churches and homes.

**Steve Weber** is a former missionary, founder of Nazarene Compassionate Ministries, and director of Stewardship Ministries for the Church of the Nazarene. He gives much time to counseling Christians in how to get out of debt.