

CHURCH LEADERSHIP

Why Church Leaders Should Be Concerned About Financial Stewardship

By Dick Towner

LET ME BEGIN with a disclaimer. I'm a stewardship nut. It's God's call on my life. More than 40 years ago, I became involved in stewardship as a layperson. I left the marketplace 29 years ago and stewardship became a major part of my vocational ministry. It's been 100 percent of my ministry for the last 13 years.

Maybe I'm a bit "over the edge," seeing stewardship demons in places they don't exist. You decide. But if you conclude my points are well taken, then wrestle seriously with the implications for your church and church leadership.

Some would say the essence of existence is the unfolding epic battle between good and evil, dating back to the expulsion of Lucifer from heaven. John Eldredge contends that life is: "set in the midst of a life-and-death battle... a battle for the human heart."

I contend that in today's world a primary arena of that battle is financial stewardship. Consequently, preparing our people for this area of their lives should be a top priority of church leadership.

The ramifications for the church are many:

■ **Money is the chief rival god and our failure to address that issue sacrifices the spiritual well-being of our people.** In the words of Ben Patterson, there's no such thing as being right with God and wrong with money. Our people's hearts and thoughts will be focused on their treasure (Matthew 6:21); they can't serve God if they're serving money (Matthew 6:24); the deceitfulness of riches will choke out God's word in their lives (Matthew 13:22); and the love of money will lead them into all kinds of evil (I Timothy 6:10).

■ **Ministry costs money.** Given our fallen nature and the press of culture, people will not innately tend to generously support God's work in the world unless church leadership has taught, trained and encouraged them to do so.

■ **The church has often failed to address such a large part of peoples' day-to-day lives.** Money is a huge issue in most people's lives. We spend a major portion of our lives making money, spending money, protecting our money, worrying about money or fighting over money.

To be relevant, the church must address what has been too often the “great silent subject.”

Stewardship in a Global Context

The first bullet point above presents more than enough rationale for stewardship to be at the top of leadership’s agenda. But allow me to speak further as to how the global issues of our day are, at their core, stewardship issues that cry out for the church to articulate a biblical response.

Major global issues of our time include the protection of the environment, the plight of the poor, conflict and war—issues that should be of great concern to Christians. Let’s look at each in the context of stewardship:

■ **The environment:** Clearly a significant factor leading to destruction of the environment is a result of over-consumption and wastefulness—that’s a stewardship issue.

■ **The poor:** That same over-consumptive lifestyle requires that a significant portion of the world be poor to provide the goods and services at prices the developed world wants to pay. That’s also a stewardship issue.

■ **Conflict and war:** A major cause of much of the world’s conflict has at its root the growing gap between the rich and the poor – and that, too, is a stewardship issue!

The Value of Life

One last connection between stewardship and a major ‘global’ issue is that of the value of life. What determines the value of a single human life and how is that associated with financial stewardship? There was a time when life was viewed as dependent upon a greater “Other.” It was a gift from God. But what happens when God for all practical purposes is removed and commodity categories take over? When we view each other not as humans, but as consumers—as we’re commonly labeled?

Pastor David Henderson of the Covenant Presbyterian Church in West Lafayette, Ind. said: “We think in consumer categories, weighing benefits against cost, value against outlay, money gained against money spent... it’s more and more as Consumers, not as Created Beings, that we view each other, weighing the value of a life in utilitarian, bottom-line terms... When we view each other through consumer eyes, we come to value only those who benefit us, and we grow to lament those who cost us, even if only a little.”

The Bottom Line

Church leadership must awaken to the all-encompassing importance of stewardship in day-to-day, spiritual and global terms. And the church may just be the last place where matters of stewardship can be discussed in non-marketplace terms. Let us not miss the opportunity, the necessity, the calling of God, to do so.

Dick Towner is executive director of Good \$ense Stewardship Movement, Willow Creek Association, South Barrington, Ill and CMA's section leader (2003-2005) for the Church Leadership Resource Commission. You may email him at dtowner@willowcreek.org or call (847) 765-0070.

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