

STEWARDSHIP--BEYOND MONEY, TIME, AND TALENT

The word STEWARDSHIP is familiar to most of us. We associate it mainly with thing related to the church. But, I have noticed lately that the term is showing up in the industrial world also. Associated with stewardship is a concept being promoted that is called Responsible Care. You may have even seen billboards around the area that speak to this.

When you look for a definition of stewardship, the idea of carrying out responsible care for something that has been entrusted to us captures the basis meaning quite well. If we were to take inventory of our lives we would find many things that have been entrusted to us. During stewardship emphasis times, such as this, we tend to think mainly in terms of faithfulness with the money that has been entrusted to us. Sometimes, we also are lead to think in terms of our time and talent as we expand the horizons of our thinking.

I like to take us a step beyond that level and to NOT think of money, time, and talent as those things that have been entrusted to us. I believe that something far greater is entrusted to us for which we must exercise responsible care or stewardship.

Looking at the broader picture, it is rather sobering to realize that God has entrusted to us the job of bringing lost people to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. He has entrusted to us the care of the homeless, the feeding of the hunger. Let's bring it closer to home -- he has entrusted to us the very future and success of our Church. Will it be a vigorous soul-winning church that is growing or will it be something else?

Many years ago God entrusted to me a group of men that were known as the Men's Bible Class. I saw initially that I was to provide leadership in Bible study for them. The class was made up of men that had been teachers, some had been pastors, and many had been the leaders that had helped build our city. They were thinking that I was too young and inexperienced to be their teacher, and I was thinking that they might be right.

I was accepted after a while. They were getting a fresh look at the Scripture and I was learning that what had been entrusted to me was far more than preparing and teaching a Sunday School lesson each week. Responsible care meant that I needed to visit a member who was in the local nursing home, and the wife of another member who was also in that same nursing home. It meant praying for, encouraging and visiting still another member each week when he was sick for so long and rejoicing when he was able to get up and get around. Responsible care meant going to the hospital and teaching the lesson to a charter member of the church because he couldn't come. It meant taking the entire class to the home of another member for Sunday School because he could not come to us. Responsible care calls for being at the funerals of those that have gone on to glory and even conducting and participating in these services.

Seeing stewardship as responsibility to wisely use the resources of money, time and talent to care for that which has been entrusted to us can also be fun, satisfying, rewarding and enriching. We have fun together in our annual picnic for Nancy's class and my class. Working with this class is satisfying in that there is not another group that I have ever encountered that are so appreciative of what is done for them. It is rewarding in that I have learned so much in the course of teaching them. It is enriching in that my life has been blessed from having known such people as have made up the Men's Bible Class.

Seeing stewardship as just giving money to the church or even if we have expanded our vision to include investing our time and ability in what is happening, then we may be missing the bigger picture of recognizing that the results of what we are doing is the really important thing. The question is not "did we give money to the church?" the question is "are souls being saved?" It is not a question of did we spend time in church related activities but did we care for the homeless and feed the hungry.

As we capture the bigger picture -- or maybe as it captures us -- then we will realize that money, time, and talent was just the resources by which we exercise the responsible care of what has been entrusted to us.