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BAPTIST CONVENTION

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Stewardship... God's Way

Adult Edition

6. I can entertain, and there are new people on the block
7. I have large segments of time alone
8. Unchurched friends and I like to play same sport
9. I have constant contact with public
10. I can draw, write, or design, and the church needs these abilities
11. I have musical talents
12. I have access to the internet, and can maintain a web site
13. I like to cook and believe I have the gift of hospitality
14. Volunteers are needed for a short mission trip

Which of these circumstances are possible fields of opportunity for you to serve Christ?

Clearly, just from the standpoint of our time and opportunity, there are tremendous possibilities for us to exercise biblical stewardship in our lives. If we really believe that God has been wonderfully good to us, and we should give the first fruits, and if we really believe God will bless in return, meeting our needs and more, we have our work cut out for us.

Let's pray about what we've learned:

***F**ather, there's no doubt what You have done in Jesus Christ demands, as the hymn writer said, "my soul, my life, my all." When I go into church and put a first fruits offering in the plate, help me to say in the bottom of my heart, "This is me I'm giving, not just a check." And when I go out today, help me to see all my life through different eyes: every minute of time, every turn of the corner, as a possibility for You. Transform my hours and days, and transform me, to be a faithful steward. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

His little speech may not have done any good, but some find out too late they didn't make anything of the opportunities they had, and they won't be able to go back and do it over.

That's the thing about opportunity. It is gone the moment it appears. The principle of *seizing our opportunities is this: The Christian must train himself to recognize the opportunity to serve God, and seize it as God may providentially guide.*

Review the Material

Briefly review the material in the member's study on Opportunity Knocking, and add these observations:

Why would any of us fail to seize opportunities God lays before us? In Jesus' parable in Matthew 25:24-25, the servant who failed to invest his "talent" was unfaithful for several reasons [Write the main points and possibly sub-points on the dry-erase board or chalk board]:

- **The interference of fear.** We also can fail to invest time and opportunity in the Lord's work or service because of fear:
 1. Fear of insignificance ("What can I do?")
 2. Fear of incompetence ("I might mess things up.")
 3. Fear of failure ("It won't make any difference.")
- **The interference of self.** Our preference to spend our time and opportunity on our own interests.

Consider a list of possible opportunities for service:

1. Fellow workers are unsaved
2. Supervisor or boss is unsaved
3. Neighbors are unsaved
4. Friends need encouragement
5. Church needs a teacher and I have ability and time

Leader's Guide

Unto Him is Due — What?

Stewardship Study – Part 3

Study Goal: To communicate effectively the biblical principles of first fruit giving and the promise of God's response to it, and to cause the group to think deeply about the use of time and opportunity as a part of overall stewardship of life.

Teaching Aim: To show how the principles of stewardship in the Bible speak to the everyday lives of Christians today, and place a demand on our use of every resource.

Preparation:

- Review the member material and be prepared to review study content with them.
- Construct a simple "journal" to hand out as a substitute for the suggestion in the member study under "How we spend our time."
- Bring or prepare for use a dry-erase board or chalk board for notes.

Introduction

Introduce the idea of the study with the following illustration:

All of us have been in restaurants where we saw behind the cashier a frame on the wall containing a single one-dollar bill. A few times someone will put a "2" or a "5" there, but usually just a picture of George Washington — a dollar. It's there to remind the business owner of his beginnings in business, because it's the first dollar he took in in sales.

If we were to take this idea back into Bible times, this single dollar would be what we call a "first fruit." The



Bible teaches us about the first fruits of our “increase,” and other principles about stewardship which we will be looking at in this study. Our purpose in this study is to learn what God wants us to do with the first of what we make or profit in, and how His principles teach us our lives should honor Him with everything we consider ours.

The basic scripture for our study is Deuteronomy 26:1-22. (Have someone read the entire background passage. Comment that in addition to bringing the offering they should notice the words God told Moses to have the people say. They were words of worship, remembrance, and thanksgiving. They implied the people believed what they were doing was a symbol of the gift of their entire lives in service and devotion to God.)

First Fruits Giving

The focus of our study is on verses 2 and 10, which mention the first fruits basket, and instruct people to make the offering and to then **bow down**. What does bow down mean? In this context—the context of stewardship and first fruit offerings—what did bowing down mean? How do you think “bowing down” translates into today’s worship activities in church? - especially with reference to offerings?

Review the Material

Review the material in the member study under “First Fruit Giving.” Add the following comments:

Many people today consider the idea of giving to God “off the top” of our income as preposterous, excessive, unreasonable, unmanageable, even ridiculous! Even among Christians there is not a unanimous belief there should be any obligation to give in the manner which “first fruits” suggests. Some would say it is legalistic, or it was for the Jews of an ancient day, and not for today.

single sheet of paper, folded in quarters, stapled like a book, and slit open on the folded edges. Write in as many lines as it takes to cover the entire day, like this:

6:00 – 7:00 am _____ and so on, up until either 11:00 p.m. or 12:00 a.m. (for night owls!) Instruct group members to fill out the lines as their member materials suggested, for two days. Agree to discuss at the next meeting how their experiment turned out, and ask them to be prepared to be humble and open about what they learned — so everyone will learn from each other.

Another area in which we need to be subject to the principles of first fruits and returns is our unique opportunities. I say “unique” because no one has quite the opportunities you have, or I have. Every one of us is unique. No one sees the same people in the same order, has the same job or the same connections, lives in the same place or has the same neighbors, etc. What God can do with our opportunities is unique for the same reasons. There are people whose lives we need to touch, that no one else can touch, or not in the same way. Nobody can fill your shoes. That’s why each of us must walk in his own shoes the way God leads.

Tell this story: A Christian teacher was in a science class where two thirds of the class slept or talked. Only about a third paid attention and some were sassy, defiant, even openly hostile. Near the end of the hour, he decided to stop the class, and address those who had done nothing. Here’s what he said:

“It’s very easy to make a failing grade. All you have to do is sleep, or goof off. It’s also easy to do well. All you have to do is do the work. It’s not even very hard work.” ‘There are several students here who will not pass this course. In fact, there are some sitting here who will flunk out of school, go in and out of jobs in the months following, live off others, and eventually go to live in one of our state’s fine institutions of last resort — a prison. I can prophesy about the future because some of you are headed that way right now. Good luck when you get there. High school is heaven by comparison.”

Tell this story: A German preacher named August Franke founded an orphanage in Halle, Germany, in the 1600s. There were times when it was difficult for him to continue the work, because of the lack of money. One day during one of these times, he was approached by a Christian woman, a widow, who asked him for one gold ducat coin. Being strapped himself, he declined, with regret and apology. When he did, she sat down and cried. Franke felt he should do something, and told her he would go up into his house to pray. In prayer, he felt strangely moved to give the woman the gold coin. God's Spirit seemed to say that, though Franke could not afford it, God would provide for him. He came down and gave her the coin.

Two days later he received a note from the woman saying that because of his generosity she had prayed for his needs to be met, too. Later that day, he received not one but twelve ducats from several people. Then, he also received word that a prince who was also a benefactor had died, and in his will had left the orphanage five hundred gold pieces. Some things God never expects us to keep, but to sow where needed. He will take care of our needs if we are obedient to Him.

Putting the Principles to Work:

How We Spend Our Time

These two principles say a lot about how our lives should be conducted. Here are two areas: our time and our opportunities.

Review the Material

Review the member's study on "How We Spend Our Time." Pass out the pocket calendar. You can make one from a

Ask the group what their opinions are. Note no mention of "tithing" has been made so far. In fact, tithing will be covered in the fourth study of this series and has deliberately not been mentioned. Attempt to steer conversation away from tithing if it is raised, in order to save the discussion for the final study time. There is a specific point here, which is to lay the foundations for the subject of tithing before coming to teach what it means.

After asking what group members' opinions are, ask if they believe it is a matter of opinion, after all!

The reason for the first fruit offering was explained in the words they were to say when they brought it. They were to rehearse their deliverance from Egypt "**with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.**" The centerpiece of this deliverance was what? The death of the firstborn of Egypt, which finally convinced Pharaoh to let the Hebrew slaves go. The sacrifice of firstborn animals, and the substituted offering for the firstborn of people, was a holy, somber recognition and thanksgiving to God for the salvation of the Jews from bondage.

It's difficult to take an attitude of resistance to giving first fruits when we realize it is the divinely ordained response to God's deliverance. While the Jews were delivered by the death of firstborn Egyptians, and from physical slavery only, the Christian has been delivered by the death of the firstborn of God, the only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, and from slavery to sin and eternal doom. There is no comparison. ***If anything, we owe more to God than the Jews!***

A wise pastor once wrote in his church newsletter:

"Prayerfully consider what proportion of your income should be given to God. Let your response be indicative of your love. It probably is anyway."

The Blessings of Giving

First fruits giving is all about what we give God, of course. Is there a principle in the Bible about what God gives *us*? Of course, there is, and we've reviewed one already — the principle of divine source, God shares what is His with us. There is another which comes into play when we talk about giving offerings right off the top of what we make:

The Principle of Returns: Generous giving of self and means, not hoarding what God has lent, ultimately returns more than what was given.

Review the Material

Review briefly the material in the group member study. Add these observations and information:

Some people believe that no good deed goes unpunished. This is a humorous way to look at the curious observation that often people who do good suffer for it instead of being rewarded. Is it true as a rule? Isn't there some promise of God which says people who serve Him will be rewarded?

There is, and this principle of returns states it. It can be found many places in the Bible, including the passage in Luke 6:38 where Jesus promised much more in return for our giving than we gave in the first place.

Jesus once told His disciples they need not worry about having left all to follow Him. In a sense they were talking about what they had "given" to go follow the Master. Jesus said, "No one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father

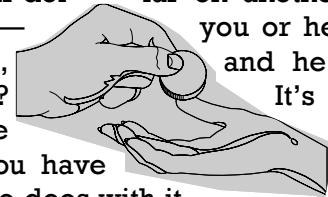
or children or friends for Me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age... and in the age to come, eternal life" (Mark 10:29-30). God intends to make certain those who give, or give up, anything to Him or for Him will not go unrewarded.

In your study you read this must not be in the spirit of "getting" but the spirit of "giving." In other words, we must not be looking just for what we can get out of it. There are some people who give to the church only if they are certain they can get something out of it — influence, power, notice. **Even giving just for tax deductions is the wrong spirit.** We can't claim the return if we give for the wrong reasons.

The principle of returns implies our giving is to be *selfless*. One of the best ways to exercise selfless giving is by giving to those who *cannot* give back to us in and of themselves. Jesus said when we give a feast to invite the poor, not the rich.

Consider the man who stops you on the street and asks for a dollar to get something to eat. For a moment, forget any discussions you may have had before about what this man's conditions may be. Taken by itself without any other knowledge, what do you do?

If you give him the dollar, though he has beer on his breath and may spend your dollar on another can, who really has the problem — you or he? It's he. If you deny him the money, and he goes hungry, who has the problem? It's you. In any case, if you give, because you believe you are helping, you have done what is required of you. What he does with it is up to him. He will answer to God for his honesty. You and I will answer for our generosity, or lack thereof.



Developing a personal or church policy about handouts and charity is a bit more complicated, since we must consider what is good stewardship of personal or church resources. You see the principle. We must err on the side of generosity, not stinginess, on the side of grace instead of discipline.