



Partners

in diaconal ministry

1-2-4; 5-10: Double Your Investment

"The man who had received five talents brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you have entrusted me with five talents. See I have gained five more.' His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things!'" (Matt. 25:20-21)

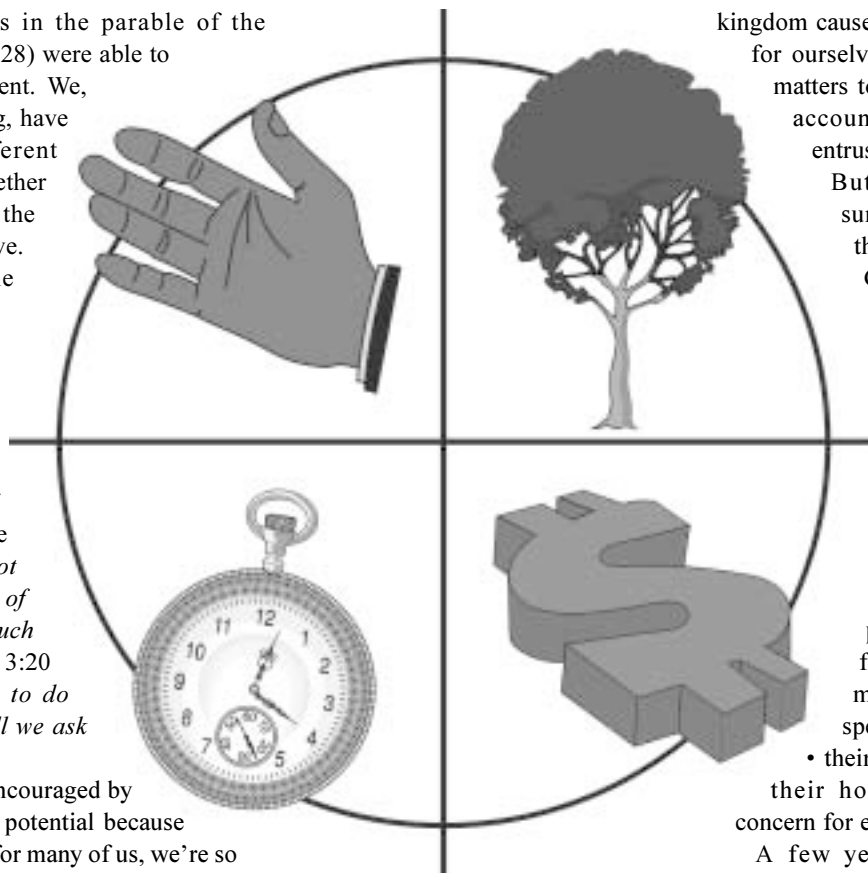
Two of the servants in the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14-28) were able to double their investment. We,

like all servants of the King, have been entrusted with different amounts of resources—whether that be our skills, time or the environment in which we live. Will we be able to double God's investment in us? What we do is significant. The doubling that the parable illustrates seems a bit far-fetched but not out of line with other scriptural teaching. Just think of Malachi 3:10, especially the words, "... see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing..." or in Ephesians 3:20 "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine...."

As Christians we are encouraged by Scripture to tap into God's potential because there is so much to do. But for many of us, we're so busy with our own lives. We've got bills to pay, kids in Christian school or perhaps we're retired on a fixed income with limited ability to do anything. "What can I do in God's kingdom work?"

Simply, everything! Much of what you do now is included. It's part of God's plan if we allow ourselves to see it that way. The totality of our lives is meant to be used in service. Raising our children in the fear of the Lord is as important to the kingdom of God as is our time, talents and gifts for specific ministries in the church. Being a prayer warrior behind closed doors is as important as serving on the front lines.

It all matters because Christ matters. All that we have and do makes a difference in God's kingdom. The master in the parable expects everything to be used and cared for in keeping with his purposes. This is our stewardship. If we think that the 10% that we set aside for church and



kingdom causes is for God and the rest is for ourselves we are wrong. All of it matters to God and He will hold us accountable for all that He has entrusted to us.

But there is also a happy surprise. As we do our part, there is joy and celebration. God wants and loves cheerful givers, people who are willing to give themselves to ministry:

- their **time** - volunteer service, functions in the church;
- their **talents**- using their skills for neighbours and members in the church;
- their **money and possessions** - tithing and faithful giving, hospitality ministry, participation in special projects;
- their piece of God's **creation** - their homes, farms, businesses, concern for environment.

A few years ago, Ingersoll CRC (Ingersoll, Ontario) was struggling to meet its budget and ministry shares. Through a program of stewardship and tithed giving they were able to turn that around so that last year they celebrated a budget surplus and paid out more than 100% in ministry shares. Enthusiasm and excitement about the church and its ministries are high in Ingersoll. Living Hope CRC in Peterborough, Ontario has a similar story of joy and excitement in ministry through a strong program of biblical stewardship and tithed giving. Call these churches and find out more.

When people experience the joy of using all that God has entrusted to them for His purposes, they are motivated to live disciplined and stewardly lives. They are more open to other opportunities for ministry and are more readily willing to make their resources available.

The return on investment is double or more. God is able and He is waiting for all of us to invest.

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Establishing a stewardship program in your church

Step 1: Analyze/review your present situation:

- What is the understanding of stewardship in your church? Is it limited to money?
- Are key stewardship lessons being taught to children, youth, young adults and seniors? Are teachings coming from the pulpit?
- Are there needs/opportunities for ministry that are not being addressed because there was no budget for it?

Step 2: Vision:

- What do we want to see: All members of congregation, from young to old, joyfully engaging all their God-given gifts of time, talents and treasures? The church's ministries flourishing with abundance of resources--people and material?

Step 3: Get the support of leadership:

- Who will provide leadership in the area of 'stewardship'?

Step 4: Plan/set goals:

- Plan to develop stewardship educational goals for Sunday School, GEMS/Cadets, youth, catechism, newlyweds, empty nesters, cell groups and seniors.

Step 5: Review and Reflect:

- What works well? What should be repeated and how often?

Step 6: Set New Goals:

- Pray for God's blessing as you set new goals and hold people accountable for them.

Key biblical principles

The Bible has a lot to say about stewardship and giving. These are some of the key teachings that can provide a biblical vision for a Christian Stewardship education program.

Principles of Stewardship:

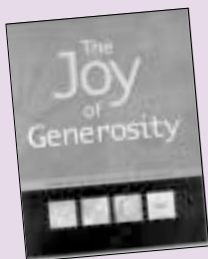
1. Everything we have is God's. We are stewards accountable to Him. *Lev. 25:23, Ps. 50:10*
2. God wants nothing to become between Him and us. *Ex. 20:3-5; Matt. 19:21b*
3. We are to use what God has entrusted to us for His purposes--to bring Him glory. *Matt. 25: 14-28, 2 Cor. 9:8,11*
4. God is looking for us to take initiative and blesses us accordingly. *2 Cor. 9:6*
5. God looks for trustworthy stewards who can handle what God entrusts. *Luke 16:10*

Principles of Giving:

1. God exemplifies giving (John 3:16). Our giving is important to him. *2 Cor. 9:7*
2. Giving or offering is an act of worship from the heart. It is to be the first and best. *Gen. 4:4,5; Micah 6:6-8; Heb. 11:4; Prov. 3:9; 1 Cor. 16:2*
3. Tithing/proportional giving is expected. *Deut. 14:23-29; Luke 12:48b*
4. We are not to rob God from what He expects but trust that He will provide. *Mal. 3:8-12; Matt. 25:40,45*

More Resources on Stewardship

The library of materials on biblical stewardship is growing. We have listed a few here, all available through Faith Alive Resources (CRC Publications). For more information or more resources, please call 1-800-730-3490.



BOOK: The Joy of Generosity

This program will help members of your congregation--from preschoolers to adults--realize that stewardship means taking care of God's world (trees) and using our time, talents and treasures to serve God and others.

VIDEO: A Season of Contentment

Wealth. Success. Fun. Possessions. Are these the stepping stones to contentment? This episode of *Primary Focus* looks at the lives of four people who demonstrate that true thanks comes from giving. (30 min)

STUDY: Stewardship: Keeping Faith with God's Gifts

Is "our stuff" really ours? Or is it just on loan from the One who really owns it all? Take a look at what the Bible says about stewardship--the management of God's property.

WEB: www.csservices.ca

Christian Stewardship Services is a charitable organization dedicated to serving Christian people with stewardship issues in practical ways.



Stewardship resource person: Rick DeGraaf



The stories in this issue of *Partners* were written by Rick DeGraaf, stewardship education resource person for Christian Stewardship Services. He is under contract with the Christian Reformed Church to provide its congregations with free advice in the area of biblical stewardship that honours God. Rick has plans to be in your area so please contact him to arrange a visit. Telephone: (519) 620-2242; e-mail: rickd@csservices.ca

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