

# STEWARDSHIP

## IT'S NOT ABOUT FINANCE, IT'S ABOUT LOVE



So often the approach to stewardship is very businesslike and administrative. I know that as a team, we are often seen as the tax reminder that lands on your doorstep, which immediately you put to one side and pick up only when you must. In reality, giving to the church has been around for a long time. Historically, we see back in Exodus the Sanctuary Shekal given by fighting men aged over twenty. The proceeds from this, were used to service the Tent of Meeting. The place people gathered to atone for sins and worship God.

However controversial that might have been, it was a form of funding for the ministry of God. Then looking to the New Testament, we see in **Luke 8**, Jesus and the disciples were being church, travelling from village to village preaching the Gospel. It mentions the twelve and also three women, who are mentioned by name. These women were helping to support the disciples out of their own means.

The early Church needed supporting, and the inclusion of the words “own means” in the passage, alludes to monetary support. The early church needed good stewardship and was funded by believers.

We are told the women had a reason to be there. They were cured of diseases and evil spirits. Their giving, we can perhaps agree, came from gratitude for the ministry of Jesus. They had first-hand experience of his saving grace and were prepared to share it through service and giving.

Their legacy has allowed us to hear the gospel all these years later. They took the responsibility once they had found Jesus. Now it is our turn.

So why is giving or stewardship sometimes such a contentious issue? What really gets in the way for some of us? God is clear that he wants us to give generously and with the right heart. Back in **Exodus 25:1** God says this ***“The Lord said to Moses, tell the Israelites to bring me an offering. You are to receive the offering for me from each man, whose heart prompts him to give.”***

We are to give, and we are to give from a willing heart. It shouldn't be out of duty or be coerced. It is to be given freely and with a blessing. It's not a matter of long pockets and short arms, or 10% before or after tax. If we find it hard to give, or are asking those questions, then the question we should probably ask ourselves is, “am I right with God?”

# STEWARDSHIP

## IT'S NOT ABOUT FINANCE, IT'S ABOUT LOVE

The Gospel is very simple, but so often can be misconstrued. We are saved by grace, nothing we do can earn it or pay for it. That is the start of our journey. However, the new covenant is an agreement between two people, God and us. Of course, Jesus and the Holy Spirit are integral in this. We have a part to play, our decision is to believe be obedient and follow, and out of that comes the gratitude to serve. Giving is part of that.

Some would suggest the institution should pay for the running costs of the church out of glebe land or its income. Some state the Church of England is very wealthy so should spend its own money. Whatever institution we belong to, there is a system to survive financially. As we worship within the Diocese of Peterborough then we must trust in its financial management. Our churches are the only institutions that exist for its non-members. Our giving provides for the future advancement of that Gospel.

God is clear on the matter. From the Israelites to modern day, it is clear that the responsibility for the outpouring of Gods message (and for funding it) is from those who believe in it. Why would we have Sky television and expect someone else to pay for it?

I have heard so many times people suggest we should have jumble sales, raffles and tombola's. We should fundraise in the town or village. Most of these things have a place and are valid areas of funding. However, it is up to us to take responsibility for funding the advancement of the Good News. It is down to those who believe in the Gospel message. We should be keeping "our own house in order"; that is good Stewardship!

The women I talked about at the beginning of this narrative clearly had reason to be grateful for the ministry they had received from Jesus. We are told they had been cured (made whole) from evil spirits and diseases. In fact, Mary Magdalene had been released from seven demons. More important, was their attitude and response to the love and help they had received from Jesus. In the passage, we see the early Church evolving, moving forward. That is our shared purpose, living out the Gospel through our lives and winning souls for Christ. We are to be signposts to Jesus through the things we do and how we behave.

These women in my quoted passage were clearly tending to the early churches needs in both service and monetary ways.

In fact, if they had not taken on that attitude or taken the responsibility to fund God's purpose on earth, where would our Churches be today, more importantly where will it be in the future if we don't take up the same attitude. It is clear in Scripture that God wants us to take responsibility for his ministry.

# STEWARDSHIP

## IT'S NOT ABOUT FINANCE, IT'S ABOUT LOVE

There are many reasons to argue against that, and I think I have heard every one of them. We can criticize the institution, vicar or service. The cry can be “I’m not getting my monies worth” or “my contribution is giving of time”. We can sometimes hold back money because we disagree with someone or something that is going on. All these, are reasons for conversations and may need airing, but are not in God’s plan and are certainly not valid reasons not to give generously and with a willing heart.

It is all about the heart and legacy we are leaving. What we desire now and what are we leaving for others, we give in gratitude for the grace we freely receive.

As a family, we give a percentage of our income to our church. We give that on the first of the month by direct debit. There was a period just recently that we did not attend our church for six weeks as we were elsewhere. The same could be said for the Covid lockdowns. We didn’t attend for months. If the argument was, “I am not getting value for my money”, I would have stopped our giving. However, the giving continued.

We are far from getting it right. But , with others of a similar attitude and approach to giving, my vicar and church community could continue to do Jesus ministry in our local area.

It is not about us as a family, we are not consumers, getting the most from our spending. It is about others that might come through the door to find Jesus. Taking the responsibility to keep the kingdom moving forward should be our legacy and should be our heart for giving.

It all sounds like a big sacrifice, and financially it does not make sense. We are paying for something we are not receiving. That is clearly a worldview but can and is readily used as an excuse for holding onto our money.

We need to take ourselves out of the picture. It is about a man who came to save us all by dying on a cross, who freely gave his life for his Father’s will to be done in our lives.

The wife of Chuza, Herod’s household manager in Luke 8, had every reason not to give. Her husband worked for Herod, who despised the thought of having another king around. He tried to stop Jesus by killing off the babies at his time of birth. He was well aware of the prophecy around Jesus’ birth.

What would Herod say to a close staff member’s wife funding the ministry of someone he hated or wanted dead. We can only surmise and imagine the dinner table conversations and the implications for the family. A brave move that points to a huge step of faith and trust in Jesus.

# STEWARDSHIP

## IT'S NOT ABOUT FINANCE, IT'S ABOUT LOVE

We all have reasons to give or not to give, but if we all gave at least 1 or 2% more, the difference would be very noticeable. We must stop being consumers of the Gospel and start becoming partakers of it.

We need to take up the responsibility, take up our cross and follow Jesus. What we have, we have received because of his grace and goodness. We are custodians of that gift, and are to be good stewards of that gift moving forward. In the story of the widow's mite, the woman gave out of her poverty not her wealth. She gave everything she had. There was no money left to buy food. You could say she had signed her own death warrant from starvation, but in reality, she gave it all to the kingdom, trusting God would provide. Now that is money given in faith and with the right heart.

That's a challenge for us all. Stewardship is not talked about like a tax return, it's about giving for the advancement of something we believe and trust in. It is not coerced or done out of duty. It is out of love shown through Jesus. Gratitude for the grace freely given.

