I will be a faithful steward of my time and gifts, my money and possessions, my body, my mind and my spirit, knowing that I am accountable to God.

THE basic idea of this statement in the Soldier's Covenant is that we are stewards who are accountable to God. Being a steward means that what we have does not really belong to us, but is temporarily entrusted to us, so we can take care of and use it for God’s glory. In the end, as stewards, we will give an account to God as to how we have used our time and gifts, money and possessions, body, mind and spirit. As examples of stewardship, I will focus on the subjects of money and time.

MONEY AND POSSESSIONS
Jesus knew the importance of money when he said: 'For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also' (Matthew 6:21). The use of our money reflects our priorities and, at times, the idols in our heart. Some of the first things that come to mind when considering the use of our finances for God, are the offerings and giving we make to those who are in need. These are commands given to us by God and important expressions of our faith.

Practising tithing has been one of the most important aspects and driving forces in the development and growth of the Korean church which, today, is known to have one of the highest percentages of Christians doing so. Tithing and giving to others are commendable, but there is still a need to go further. Our offerings to God and our generosity towards others are only the beginning stages of our stewardship and not the final ones. This means, our duty as a steward does not end with the act of giving tithes.
As paramount as it is to give, the way we use the rest of the money in our possession is also equally important. It must be used for the glory of God, even when we are spending it for personal means. Some people think they can use the rest of their possessions however they choose, because they have given their 'due' to God. However, we need to remember that everything belongs to God and was given to us for his glory. This does not mean we should not spend any money on ourselves, but we should do it in a way that brings glory to God.

Larry Poole – in his article 'Why I Quit Tithing (and Why You Should Too)' – urged that he was not against tithing itself, but against legalistic ways of tithing (www.churchleaders.com). He wrote that he was against treating tithing as some sort of a tax scheme in which we are obliged to pay a certain percentage. Rather than asking, ‘How much should I give?’ he began to ask the following question that radically changed his life: ‘God, how much should I keep?’ This was a new perspective on the use of his money.

This question can only be asked if we truly believe that everything belongs to God. Let us stop seeing tithing or giving to others as the only ways to use our finances as stewards who fulfil their duty as Christians. Instead, let us start thinking about how we can use all of our money for God’s glory. Once we do that, we are tapping into the true meaning of stewardship. Again, tithing and giving to others are not the final stages of stewardship but only the beginning.

TIME AND GIFTS

When we talk about using our time and gifts for God, many only think of serving in their local church. In a similar way to tithing and giving, some people think that once we have given our time in service, we can spend the rest of it however we wish to. There is no doubt that serving the local church with our time and gifts is truly valuable for the Kingdom of God, yet that is not enough. The next step is using the rest of our time in our work, school or family to serve God and bring glory to him.
In Isaiah chapter one, we see that God is furious with the Israelites for coming to him with different forms of festivals. God says, ‘The multitude of your sacrifices – what are they to me?’ (v 11). He continues, ‘Stop bringing meaningless offerings! … New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations … and your appointed festivals I hate with all my being’ (vv 13-14). Then God tells them the reason why he is unhappy with their worship: ‘... I am not listening. Your hands are full of blood! Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight; stop doing wrong. Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow’ (vv 15-17). God calls them to not only spend their time before him in the Temple, but in the world, seeking justice and doing good in every area of their lives.

The good news is that this chapter of Isaiah does not end with God’s rejection of the Israelites. Verse 18 promises restoration for them and the forgiveness of their sin. These are not words of condemnation, but a call to bring the entirety of our lives before God at every moment and in every place.

Sometimes, we separate Church and the world; one sacred, the other secular. Once we have spent time on the sacred, we give ourselves permission to live our normal lives without God in the secular world. The truth is, each place is sacred when the presence of God is there. We have not only been called to the Church, but also to love and serve the world God created. Our offerings of time and gifts to our local church are not the final stages of our stewardship, but the beginning point of living as people of God. Once we have given our time and our gifts to God through our service, we are called and sent into the world as God’s chosen soldiers to serve the world and the people around us.

THE CALL TO STEWARDSHIP
The call to stewardship is not easy to follow. It requires not a partial, but a full commitment in every aspect of our lives. At the same time, it is a not a matter of being easy or difficult. It is a matter of understanding that God owns everything and that we
are stewards of his goods. It is hard to give when we still have the mindset of trying to give what is 'ours'. We should not be mistaken – none of it was ours in the first place and all is temporal. Our possessions and time have been entrusted to us for a short while, so we can use them for God's glory. With this understanding and with this confession, let us each recommit to 'be a faithful steward of my time and gifts, my money and possessions, my body, my mind and my spirit, knowing that I am accountable to God'.

FOR REFLECTION

➤ How are you giving your tithes and offerings as well as your time and talents to your church?
➤ How are you using the nine-tenths of your money after tithing?
➤ How are you using your time and talents outside your church during weekdays?

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