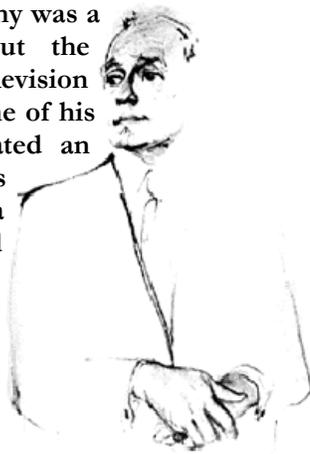


Each of us wants to give more of our time, talent and treasure to God. Some are hindered by debt; others by low income. All of us struggle with an attitudinal tug of war going on in our hearts — a conflict between faith and flesh.

In “real life” Jack Benny was a very generous man. But the persona he created for television was that of a miser. In one of his comedy routines he related an occasion when he was mugged. The thief put a gun to Benny's back and told him to stick up his hands and give him all his money. Jack just stood there, so the mugger jabbed him with his pistol and insisted, "I said, your money or your life!" Jack Benny said, "I know what you said. I'm thinking it over!"



Where are our priorities? We want them to be where God wants them to be. But that is often difficult.

A well known text that is often neglected is 2 Cor. 9:7. God loves a cheerful giver. Giving is designed by God, not to be a drudgery, but rather a blessing — not only to us, but also to God and those we are able to serve through His resources. And that's all money is — a resource. Until we realize this, we cannot be cheerful givers.

We don't want to be miserly, but generous and cheerful givers. So let's consider three ways we may become better and more cheerful givers. Believe it or not, it has very little — really nothing at all — to do with how much money is in your checking account. It has everything to do with how you think, how you act, and how you feel.

I. THINK LIKE A GODLY SERVANT (A GOOD STEWARD)

The foundation of faithful stewardship is the consciousness that God owns everything and reserves the right to give money and possessions to his servants. See Ps. 24:1; 50:10; 1 Cor. 4:7. Our job is to manage it well. The owner has all the *rights*; the steward all the *responsibilities*. We must decide to use what God gives to serve Him and bring Him glory rather than to simply satisfy our desires (1 Tim. 6:18).

Understanding God's ownership gives us balance. If our income is up we praise God and serve Him faithfully without pride or greed (Deut. 8:18; 1 Chron. 29:12). The tendency, however, is to think of ourselves as successful and we begin to think like an owner instead of a manager. That results in our thinking that we can use the money as we wish. Thinking like a steward balances our

attitude and outlook because we know all will be well if we simply follow the owner's manual. Thinking like a steward helps us deal with the ups and downs of materialism because it doesn't matter how much or how little we have. See Phil. 4:11, 12.

When we think like a godly servant we will act like a trusted manager of God's resources.

II. ACT LIKE A TRUSTED MANAGER

Jesus says our hearts and our money are tied together (Matt. 6:19-21). Every spending decision is a spiritual decision. The manager God trusts invests his physical wealth in spiritual things, for heavenly investments cannot be stolen, devalued or destroyed. There is no such assurance with earthly investments.

There is a direct and definite correlation between making spiritual financial decisions and possessing a spiritual heart. A person's checkbook register reveals to what extent his heart is set on heaven.

Ron Blue, a prolific author and consultant in the field of biblical stewardship, says you can't fake stewardship. A Christian may fake prayer, Bible study, evangelism, going to church and the like. But he can't fake what his checkbook reveals!

In his letter to the Corinthian Christians (1 Cor. 16:1, 2) the apostle Paul provides a practical outline by which we may act like a trusted manager. He instructs us to give

- Regularly— “on the first day of every week”
- Personally— “let each one of you”
- Systematically— “set aside” (planning)
- Proportionately— “in keeping with his income”

III. FEEL LIKE A PRECIOUS HEIR

By training us in matters of financial stewardship God is preparing us for our heavenly inheritance. The faithful steward is portrayed as receiving a heavenly reward (Matt. 25: 14-30). God gives us resources and the freedom to use them, anticipating that our faithfulness will result in eternal blessings He desires to give to us. His desire is that we will be rich in good deeds and willing to share so that we may take hold of life that is truly life (1 Tim. 6:18-19).

In view of our promised inheritance and the faithfulness of our Divine Provider, we may trust Him implicitly. Because we know His supply is boundless and unlimited, we know He will satisfy our every need. Some exhibit fear by saying they will trust Him if God *provides*. God instructs us to trust His *promise* to provide everything we need. The Bible doesn't tell us how God blessed the poor widow who gave all she had (Mk. 12:41-44). But because she sowed generously we have every confidence she reaped bountifully (2 Cor. 9:6-11; Mal. 3:9-10; Lk. 6:38).