FEAR AND UNCERTAINTY: THE GREAT PLANNING PARALYZERS

During my 35-year practice, I worked with Christian families who had a surplus of resources. It may come as a surprise to you that in most cases, the more these people had the less stewardship planning they did. Years ago, I was introduced to an affluent Christian couple who were perfect candidates for doing strategic stewardship planning. After a couple of hours of talking with them during my initial visit, they were both very excited about the prospects of eliminating their multimillion-dollar estate tax bill and maximizing their financial capacity to support Kingdom causes. The day after our meeting, the husband called their long-time and highly trusted attorney to tell him about what they had learned in our meeting and how excited they were about it.

The attorney reacted quite negatively to his client's newly discovered awareness and told him that it is impossible to eliminate all estate taxes at death and anyone who tells you that they can is "selling you a bill of goods." He sternly warned him of the significant dangers and consequences of illegal tax evasion scams. His attorney's strong, negative response so unsettled this man that he became completely emotionally immobilized and called me back to tell me that they had decided to not move forward with any planning. In a word, his problem was FEAR. He was so afraid that he might be making a mistake that he chose, instead, to do nothing – which is actually a far greater mistake.

I was once introduced to a Christian businessman who had been phenomenally successful in his particular business pursuit. Yet, as I visited with him, I learned that all he had done in the way of planning was to execute a living trust agreement, which simply allowed him to avoid probate expenses at his death. He had done absolutely nothing in regards to dealing with a nine-digit estate tax liability that would have to be paid within nine months of him going home to be with the Lord.

He had access to the highest paid estate planning attorneys, accountants, and consultants in America. In spite of that, he had done no meaningful planning with any of them. When I asked him why he had not done more planning, he gave me the classic answer, "I haven't done any planning because I don't know what I want to do." In a word, his problem was UNCERTAINTY.

Almost without exception, the families I worked with in my practice were plagued with uncertainty to one degree or another. They hear about all the great "deals" and clever strategies available but have no way to get past the marketing hyperbole and effectively evaluate and possibly use the tool or strategy that is being promoted.

They are uncertain of many things, including what resources they need to maintain their lifestyle, how much of an inheritance is appropriate for their heirs, and often how to effectively pass the family business on to the next generation. They rarely know how to determine how much they really can afford to deploy for Kingdom

support. Finally, they have no clue how to effectively address the oppressive estate, income, and capital gains taxes that they continual face. They must address such an overwhelming number of issues with no real certainty about what they should do. Often, they fear that if they do make plans, they may later realize it was a mistake and end up regretting their decisions.

In my experience, when wealthy families are fearful and/or uncertain about what to do in regards to stewardship planning, they ultimately end up doing NOTHING. When nothing happens, the family loses and the Kingdom of God loses. The families miss the opportunity to experience the indescribable joy of seeing God use them in meaningful and mighty ways with what He has entrusted to them. In fact, it could be said that the only real winner in a family's planning paralysis is the Federal Government who ends up by default collecting massive amounts of wealth in unnecessary taxes.

To get past these two massive conundrums of fear and uncertainty, families need to gain three things: (1) *Enhanced Clarity*. A biblical worldview and a holistic counseling process can help families gain a clear sense of purpose that helps them "burn away the fog" of fear and uncertainty. It helps them see what is and what could be. Once these incurable *movers and shakers* get a clear vision of what they want to do and why they want to do it, they do not hesitate to start moving and shaking in this area of strategic stewardship planning. It is fun to watch them run with the ball towards the goal line, once they know exactly where the goal line is.

(2) A holistic stewardship planning process also allows families to gain *Greater Confidence*. Stewardship planning is very complex and can be quite intimidating to anyone who is a novice in this area. This is typically not a family's area of experience or expertise. They feel vulnerable and have a sense that they are not in control of what is being done. And for people who have high control personalities, not being able to be in control is very unsettling. One gentleman said it this way, "Going through a stewardship planning process has empowered us to be able to tell our advisors what we want to do instead of us being forced to look to them to tell us what we should do." Exactly. The planning controls are turned over to the stewards of the resources and equips and enables them to "drive" the planning process as God leads them. And this is the way it should be.

(3) Being introduced to planning opportunities previously unknown to them produces dramatic *Increased Leverage* in planning. For example, two brothers who were partners in a thriving family business, before they created and implemented a comprehensive stewardship plan, had intended to give to the Kingdom during their lifetimes and at their deaths about $2.5 million. However, by developing and implementing an overall master stewardship plan for both families, their combined lifetime and testamentary giving to Kingdom causes skyrocketed to over $87 million. They could hardly believe the massive increase in leverage they had gained from developing an overall strategic, master stewardship plan. I could give you story after story like this with families who have so much greater Kingdom giving capacity than they know. It is so fun when a family realizes that they can maintain their current lifestyle, give an appropriate inheritance to their heirs, AND increase their Kingdom giving exponentially. It is an easy decision for them to seize the opportunity to take advantage of the major increases in leverage.

There is nothing magical about this stewardship planning process. It is just a comprehensive and integrated approach to life and wealth planning. When people take their time and do it right, the results speak for themselves, and families are delighted to share their experiences with those helping them in the stewardship planning process. If fear and uncertainty in planning are paralyzing you, our stewardship ministry would be honored to assist you and your advisors in optimizing the impact you can have for yourselves, your family, and for the Kingdom of God.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR — E. G. "JAY" LINK

E. G. "Jay" Link has a unique combination of being an ordained minister with a Master Divinity degree in Biblical Theology and a professional Stewardship planning coach who for over 40 years has been working with very affluent Christian families to enable them to optimize their Kingdom impact with all that the Lord has entrusted to them to manage. After retiring from his personal practice, he then served for five years as Director of Taylor University's Stewardship Planning Ministry, which he launched for them. Most recently, Jay founded Transformational Stewardship to serve Christian ministries, colleges, and churches to better minister to their highest capacity families. He has written six books, hundreds of articles and has provided an extensive training curriculum for hundreds of professional financial and legal advisors in how to provide stewardship planning services for their clients.