STEWARDSHIP PLANNING
QUESTIONNAIRE

A Ministry of Transformational Stewardship

"So where do we go from here?" | *Evaluating where you are in your planning*

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Stewardship Planning Questionnaire

INTRODUCTION: This Stewardship Planning Questionnaire is intended to be a guide to help you answer three critical questions required to do comprehensive and integrated planning: How much is enough for us? How much is enough for our heirs? What are we going to do with what's left over?

This questionnaire has no agenda except to assist you in discovering what God desires for all He has entrusted you to manage for Him. To elaborate further on this concept of God's ownership, read *What is My Relationship to My Stuff* [page 5] and *The One Question that Changes Everything* [page 7].

The articles included in this questionnaire are provided to stimulate your spiritual, emotional, and financial thinking. Going outside the box of traditional, secular thinking and planning will allow you to consider these matters through the lens of a biblical worldview.

It is important that both of you individually work through this questionnaire and the readings. In this way, each of you can personally hear from the Holy Spirit. Once you have both completed your questionnaires, feel free to share your responses with each other.

QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR LIFESTYLE
(HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH FOR US?)

1. How much annual, after tax, income will you need to maintain the lifestyle you believe would be pleasing to the Lord? (Read *How Much is Enough?* [page 9] and *Living on Less* [page 12].)

2. What level of liquid reserves would you feel comfortable having available for unexpected needs?

3. What real property that you currently manage would need to be retained to maintain your lifestyle?

QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR FAMILY
(HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH FOR OUR HEIRS?)

4. What are your current distribution inheritance plans for your children?

5. How do you view inheritances to your children? (Read *Conducting an Inheritance Fire Drill* [page 15].)

6. How prepared are your children to wisely steward the inheritance you are planning to give them? (*Read Blessing (and Not Cursing) the Next Generation* [page 19], which outlines four Maturity Markers to help you assess your children's readiness to receive their inheritance.) How did you rate each of your children using these Maturity Markers?

7. How did you react to this statement by Warren Buffet: "I want to give my kids enough of an inheritance that they feel like they can do anything, but not so much of an inheritance that they might choose to do nothing?" (Read *When you Give, You Will Take Away* [page 24] for some additional thoughts on the impact of inheritances on your children.)

8. Read *Seven Inheritance Conundrums Parents Face in Planning* [page 26]. Are any of the seven conundrums true for you and your family? If yes, which ones and why?

QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR GIVING
(WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO WITH WHAT'S LEFT OVER?)

9. What Kingdom causes/ministries are you most excited/passionate about? Why?

10. What are your thoughts regarding outright Kingdom giving (now) vs. deferred Kingdom giving (later) vs. testamentary Kingdom giving (after death)? (Read *When is a Gift Really a Gift?* [page 27] and *Giving or Leaving* [page 31] for some practical and spiritual thoughts on giving options.)

11. What are your thoughts regarding giving your children a charitable inheritance (resources to give away) as well as a personal inheritance (resources for their personal use)?

What is My Relationship to My Stuff?

Stewardship might just be one of the most misused Biblical terms in the Christian vocabulary. If we were to poll a cross section of Christians and ask them what the word "stewardship" means, the overwhelming majority would say it has something to do with money and giving—part right and part wrong. And, as my grandmother told me growing up, "If something is *partially* wrong, it is *all* wrong."

To be fair, even though most pastors spent years in formal Bible training, few if any ever took one class or even had one lecture on the theology of stewardship. So, it should be no surprise that many churches do not have a clear and compelling understanding of stewardship either; certainly, they have never experienced the life-changing power this concept possesses when you actually do understand and apply it to daily living.

Before we look at what stewardship does mean, let's first look at what it does *not* mean. Stewardship does *not* mean a capital campaign to raise money for church expansion. Stewardship does *not* mean a series of sermons in the fall on why members ought to make financial pledges and increase their giving to the church. Stewardship is *not* about the amount of the weekly offerings or how much you personally give.

Do you see the pattern? The word stewardship is being routinely used as a synonym for giving. But, let me suggest that stewardship is *not* a *synonym* for giving. It is actually an *antonym* (a word having an opposite meaning). Here's why: *giving* has to do with what we *deploy*. *Stewardship* has to do with what we *retain*. Stewardship is not about what we put in the offering when we go to church; it is about what we are doing with what is left in our check book *after* we have done our giving. Stewardship is about what we are *keeping*.

So, what exactly *does* the word stewardship mean? Stewardship can be visualized as a three-legged stool, with all three legs being essential for the stewardship stool to properly stand.

Leg #1: The first "leg" of this stool is the fact that God owns everything because He created everything. For example, King David tells us in Psalm 24:1, *The earth is the Lord's and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it.* He tells us in Psalm 50:10-12, *'Every animal in the forest belongs to me, and so do the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds in the mountains, and every wild creature is in my care. If I were hungry, I wouldn't tell you, because I own the world and everything in it.'* He then adds in Haggai 2:8, *'The silver is Mine and the gold is Mine,' declares the Lord of hosts.* It is pretty clear, God is trying to tell us that whatever exists, and whatever we might get our hands on in this life is *His*, not ours!

Leg #2: The second "leg" of this stool is the fact that God owns us twice. Not only did God create us, but He also redeemed us from slavery to the prince of this world through the death of His son, Jesus Christ. Paul tells us in Titus 2:13b-14, *Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.* So, God owns us once because He made us and twice because He bought us back. We really have no excuse for believing that we own anything!

Leg #3: The final "leg" is the fact that God calls us to be stewards of His resources. This leg that enables the stewardship stool to stand. It repositions us as *stewards of God's* resources, being charged by Him to carry out *His* wishes for *His* property that He has entrusted us to manage.

So, "*steward"* accurately defined is, "to plan, to manage, to administer," and stewardship is, "the act of being a manager or a caretaker." So, we see that this third leg of stewardship actually promotes us from playing little gods over some tiny empire of our own making, to an exalted and honored position of a trusted and responsible steward of the King. Your promotion entrusts to you the honored task of managing a small, but strategic portion of the Owner's vast material holdings. For many believers, this idea is an absolutely revolutionary concept.

One Sunday, an older gentleman who had just completed an entire study on Whole-Life Stewardship, came up to his teacher, shook his hand, and told him, "The one thing in this entire study that has had the single greatest impact on me was the idea that God owns everything, including me." He went on to say, "I have been in the church all my life, but somehow this truth had escaped me entirely." He confessed, "I thought *I* was the one getting up each day and going to work and *I* was the one making the money. It was *mine*. But when I came to understand that God owns me and everything I have, it has changed everything in my life!"

I hear this kind of comment routinely from believers when they finally get the full, biblical, stewardship message. This radical, biblical concept of *stewardship* is easy enough to understand intellectually. But as we are going to see, it is exceedingly difficult to consistently apply and practically live out without divine assistance.

- You see, it is no longer "How do I want to spend my day?" It is now, "God, how do you want me to spend Your day?"
- It is no longer, "How do I want to spend my money?" It is now, "God, how do you want me to spend Your money?"
- It is no longer, "How much of my money do I want to give to the Lord?" It is now, "God, how much of Your money should I be keeping for myself?"
- It is no longer, "How do I want to care for and feed my body?" It is now, "God, how do You want me to care for and feed Your body?"
- It is no longer, "How do I want to raise my children?" It is now, "God, how do You want me to raise Your children?"
- It is no longer, "What kind of house and car do I want to have?" It is now, "God, what kind of house and car do You want me to have?"

Do you see how this idea of stewardship impacts every single area of our lives? This is why I call it "whole-life stewardship" and why it is going to take some time to get your heads and hands around it—but when you do, God *is* going to radically transform every single area of your life for the better! Are you ready to embark on this exciting life-changing journey?

The One Question That Changes Everything

If you like when someone "cuts to the chase" giving you the bottom line of what they want to say without first including all the details, then you will like that we are going to boil down this quite massive subject of whole life stewardship to one simple, yet incredibly profound, life-changing question

But before you hear the question, let me remind you of the foundational truth that underlies this concept of stewardship—*God owns everything that exists, including you and me*. God confirms His ownership of everything in Job 41:11 where He is forcefully questioning Job, '*Who has given to Me that I should repay him? Whatever is under the whole heaven is Mine*.' We must keep this truth ever-present in our minds! Ponder this truth when you sit down to prepare your personal balance sheet of all you own. Your list of assets should be very short. In fact, the page should be blank because we own nothing, period. It is *all* His. We could certainly prepare a list of assets that we are managing for Him, but none of them belongs to us.

Only by accepting this foundational truth of God's ownership of everything can we be properly prepared to ask the *one question that changes everything*. Unfortunately, it is not a question that can be asked and answered once—then we move on. It is a question we must ask daily, sometimes even hourly. So, is your curiosity adequately piqued as to what this profound and simple life-changing question is?

Here it is—quite simple to ask, quite difficult to answer. "God, what do You want me to do with all that You have entrusted to me?" We are more than willing to acknowledge that God owns everything, but in spite of this fact, we still continue making decisions like it is all ours. The ultimate objective of a steward of God's property is to do with it what He (the Owner) wants us (his stewards) to do with it. Now, brace yourself for this sobering truth: what *we* want to do with our stuff is entirely irrelevant. Does this idea seem pretty restrictive – that we don't get to make any decisions about all that we possess? At first blush, it can certainly feel that way.

Let's put this "you mean, I'm not in charge" issue into a broader context. Who is our role model in how to live? Jesus, the one we are attempting to imitate, had no qualms about completely yielding His will to the will of His Father while He was temporarily dwelling on this planet. He repeatedly informed His listeners *Who* was in charge of His life. In John 12:49 He notes the source of all that He says, '*For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment as to what to say and what to speak*.' In John 8:28 He adds all His actions to this, '*...I do nothing on My own initiative*.' In other words, everything that Jesus said and did was directed by the Father. He was not saying or doing anything apart from His Father's directions.

What about when this God-man and His Father disagreed on a plan of action? For example, when Jesus had second thoughts about His pending trip to the cross? Jesus willingly yielded His own will to that of His Father. He prayed, '*My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from Me. Yet not as I will, but as You will*' (Matthew 26:39). God was in charge of every aspect of Jesus' life.

There is a question that inevitably emerges from Jesus' statements. If Jesus willingly yielded all of His words, actions, and even His very life to the will of the Father, dare we be so arrogant or rebellious to make unilateral decisions about our lives and possessions without first consulting with the Father? In other words, are we personally emulating Jesus' submission statement in John 5:30, '*I can do nothing on My own initiative…because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me*?' As the game show host always says, "But wait, there's more!" Jesus not only models this for us, He also gives us very direct instruction on how to handle our Father's property.

As Jesus taught His disciples to pray in His model prayer in the Sermon on the Mount, He told them to pray, '*Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*' (Matthew 6:10). We have no problem with God's will being done in heaven; the problem is down here on earth, isn't it? The solution to this heaven-on-earth challenge is for us to willingly allow God's will to rule in how we manage our personal lives and what we do with the possessions we watch over down here. In so doing, each believer will allow God's Kingdom to come and His will to be done in his or her little part of earth *as it is in heaven*.

Can you imagine what would happen on earth if God's people were to make their time fully available for His use? If they devoted all their talents and whatever was needed of their material resources to carry out God's purposes? If they cared for their bodies like the sacred temple that they really are? If they saw their employment and careers as an extension of God's calling on their lives and a fulfillment of their God-given purpose? If all their energies were clearly focused on knowing and following their Owner's agenda, and being the most obedient and effective managers of what He has entrusted to them?

Can you imagine how your personal life would change if each morning as you rose from your bed, you were to genuinely and humbly pray, "Okay, Lord, *all* that I am and *all* that I have are at your disposal today. What are Your plans for me and Your stuff that I manage today? Not *my* will, but *Thy* will be done today."

There is no better way for us to someday hear, '*Well done, good and faithful servant*' from our Father, than for us to be continually asking Him this one question that changes everything, "God, what do You want me to do with what You have entrusted to me?" And as He reveals His plans for us, and for the things He has put under our care and management, we need to obediently carry out those plans as faithfully and as well as we can. We need to be *good and faithful servants* regardless of how much or how little we have been entrusted with, or how much or how little we ultimately accomplish for Him.

Can you now see why this one "simple" question, "God, what do You want me to do with what You have entrusted to me?" really does change everything? When we faithfully discern and follow His directives, we will, in a very real and tangible way, allow God's Kingdom to come and God's will to be done *on earth as it is in heaven.*

How Much is Enough?

Asking the question, "How much is enough?" seems almost un-American, doesn't it? Whatever our current salary or income, we want more. However much we have invested, we want it to grow to become more. No matter how big our business, we want to make it bigger. "More" is woven into the very fabric of the American psyche.

The multimillionaire, John D. Rockefeller, was once asked the question, "How much money is enough?" He answered quite transparently, "Just a little bit more." In other words, "I will never have enough." Might this be our conscious, or unconscious, mindset as well?

Let me ask you a probing question, "Is this 'never enough' mindset a spiritually healthy place for a believer to dwell?" The answer is not as black and white as it might seem at first. In fact, the answer might be, "It depends." How we answer this question is really dependent three important issues.

1. Restraining Our Greed

Read Luke 12:15 and you may notice something you have never read before. Jesus says, *Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions*. Have your ever noticed before the phrase *every form of greed?* Jesus is informing us that there are multiple manifestations of greed.

The word *greed* literally means "wanting more" or "eager for gain." Greed is as open-ended as Rockefeller's answer. With greed, enough will never be enough. Greed always wants more. It is not limited to just material things either. Greed can come in the form of more money, power/control, pleasure, leisure, food, or fame. It can be like drinking salt water—the more you drink, the thirstier you become; it never satisfies.

Greed has two illegitimate children that you have likely met at some point in your life—their names are *Envy* and *Covet*. *Envy* makes us unhappy because we don't have what others have. Envy drives us to "keep up with the Joneses." It is what makes us discontent until we can get the same things others have. We cannot rejoice when others get something because *we* don't have it too. *Covet* is the more sinister of the two. It actually wants to take from another person what he/she has. In other words, my gain will be at your loss. Ahab coveted Naboth's vineyard (I Kings 21). He didn't want a vineyard *like* Naboth's (*Envy*); he wanted Naboth's vineyard (*Covet*). In Exodus 20, we are told not to covet our neighbor's house or his wife. It is not that we want a house or a wife *like* our neighbor (*Envy*), it is that we want his very house or his very wife (*Covet*). David coveted Uriah's wife, Bathsheba (II Samuel 2). He didn't just want a woman *like* Bathsheba (*Envy*); he wanted Bathsheba (*Covet*).

One of the most effective ways to restrain greed and its illegitimate spawn is to set very clear finish lines and make them known to others, so they can hold you accountable. Some finish lines to consider might be capping your lifestyle consumption or your net worth. Once you meet, or exceed, the finish lines, these additional resources will be used for other purposes. We will address this later.

2. Learning to be Content

Greed and contentment are total opposites. A greedy person will never be content, and a content person will never be greedy. So while we learn to restrain our greed, we need to simultaneously learn to be content. The New Testament gives us three areas where we need to be content:

1. With our current *possessions*: (Hebrews 13:5, *be content with what you have.*)
2. With our current *provisions*: (I Timothy 6:6, *If we have food and covering with these we will be content.*)
3. With our current *paycheck*: (Luke 3:14, *be content with your wages*.)

If we get a handle on these three areas of our lives, we will experience a level of financial, spiritual, and emotional contentment and freedom beyond anything we have ever known before. Keep in mind there is a huge difference between being financially *independent* and being financially *free*. Many very wealthy people who are clearly financially independent are anything but financially free. They are "slaves" to their possessions. There are also people who do not have "two nickels to rub together" and are anything but financially independent. Yet, they are entirely financially free.

Our goal is to be financially free. We may never realize financial independence in our lifetime. But let me ask you, what would be wrong with living a hand-to-mouth existence if it is *God's hand* to *your mouth*? The most effective way to truly become financially free is to restrain greed and learn contentment

3. Deploying Our Surplus

What if God continues to bless your hard work and careful management of His resources with more than you need? What should you do with what exceeds your enough-is-enough limit? The answer should be obvious…give it away—all of it. If you fail to set any finish lines, you will not know what surplus is, and consequently, you won't be inclined to deploy it.

More than one financially independent person has expressed a concern that he/she might need all they have later in life. They were unwilling to deploy their "surplus" because there was a chance, however remote, that it might be needed later. John Calvin responded to this concern long before America was even founded.

Looking too carefully and far forward (contemplating the dangers that *may* occur) can make us more close-handed than we ought to be. When we are excessively cautious and careful we calculate too narrowly what we will require during our whole life, or how much we lose when the smallest portion is taken away. The man that depends upon the blessing of the Lord has his mind set free from these trammels and has his hands opened for beneficence. Obviously, as Solomon said, *There is nothing new under the sun* (Ecclesiastes 1:9).

For those of us who are driven and gifted to make money, it would be a real loss to stop making it. However, once we cross our personal finish lines, our desire to make more can now be focused on getting more to the Kingdom, rather than just having more for ourselves. Randy Alcorn says it this way, "God prospers us not to raise our standard of *living*, but to raise our standard of *giving*." This should be our goal,

to "live conservatively so we can give liberally." Giving is no doubt one way in which Christians ought to be "liberals."

So the question is, "Is this 'never enough' mindset a spiritually healthy place for a believer to dwell?" It depends. If our "never enough" attitude is focused on advancing our own personal kingdoms, then the answer is, "No, this is not a good place for a believer to dwell." If our "never enough" attitude is focused on advancing and funding the Kingdom of God, then the answer is, "Yes, this is a very good place for a believer to dwell."

How much is enough for you? Are you ready to (1) restrain your greed, (2) learn to be content, and (3) deploy your surplus? If so, then get ready for some exciting and radical changes in how you think and how you live!

Living on Less

Here is an incredibly thought-provoking statement: "You can live on less when you have more to live for." This statement so struck me when I saw it in an email that I literally stopped my expeditious handling of all my emails and simply pondered what I had read. Notice, this is not a statement describing an involuntary "belt-tightening" when economic circumstances force one to reduce a preferred lifestyle. It refers to someone who chooses to voluntarily reduce his/her current lifestyle—a willing reduction. Routinely, one of the primary objectives in financial planning is to be sure you can maintain your current lifestyle in your later retirement years. The key word here is "maintain." The statement would look like this: "I would be willing to be as charitable as possible with my "wealth," as long as it does not negatively impact my current lifestyle.

However, the statement above suggests that there might actually be reasons why a person would want to reduce his rate of personal consumption (what I call the "burn rate") to intentionally "live on less." What might happen for a person who could live on more—possibly much more—to feel led to happily and willingly choose to live on less? The quote indicates they have found something "more to live for," something that is more valuable and more fulfilling to them than self-consumption.

In pondering this statement, we should ask ourselves: "What would it take for me (or anyone else) to willingly choose to live on less?" In order to choose to live on less, something would have to change in at least one of these three areas: one's **Perspective**, **Priorities**, and/or **Purpose**.

A Change in Perspective

I travel a lot and in order to avoid feeling claustrophobic on the plane, I try to get an aisle seat. But on occasion, I can find myself "trapped" in a window seat. If there is any redemption to a window seat, it is the view. There is nothing that gives a person a more realistic perspective of life than looking at the world from 35,000 feet.

Elevation seems to give us a substantially different perspective on the "things of earth." If we could pile up all of Bill Gate's and Warren Buffet's "stuff" in one place, it might not even be noticeable from 35,000 feet. How much more insignificant are things when viewed from the footstool of Heaven. If a man were to see the trappings of his current lifestyle from the perspective of Heaven, he might just conclude there is undoubtedly something "more to live for."

Matthew 13:44-46 gives us a picture of what happens when someone's perspective changes. Jesus said, *The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.*

His perception of the value of his current possessions was totally redefined when he discovered something he perceived to be of far greater worth. There is an old riddle, "Do you know how to get a bone out of

a dog's mouth? Offer him a bone with more meat on it." We will gladly "live on less" when our perspective is reoriented and reveals something "more to live for." By downsizing, we would actually be upgrading!

A Change in Priorities

We all have a list of priorities. They are seldom put into writing and placed on the refrigerator, but we all have them stored away somewhere in the recesses of our consciousness. When given a choice between two options, our list of priorities kicks in and we choose the one highest on the list. This is true with our time and our treasures.

If your child has a ball game and you also have an opportunity to go play golf with your best friends, which you choose will demonstrate your priorities. If you had to choose between helping your child with his/her college expenses or buying a new car, your pre-set priorities will determine which choice you make. Likewise, when given the choice between deploying your material resources for Kingdom purposes or buying a bigger home, or the latest luxury car, your priorities will determine your choice.

Years ago, I worked with a younger couple who had done extremely well professionally and financially. The husband and wife came from nothing and as their businesses grew and their income skyrocketed, so did their lifestyle. They found themselves owning an extravagant home, the newest and most expensive vehicles, and all the toys and trappings of a family who had "made it."

But something happened to this couple along the way. God began to burden them with the call of the great commission and the need to extend the gospel while there was still time—before Jesus' return. The husband had decided that instead of becoming rich, he wanted to become one of the greatest Christian philanthropists in history. In order to do this, they began to cut their lifestyle consumption by multiples in order to have more available to deploy for Kingdom work.

They sold their "mansion" and moved into a modest home. They started buying cheaper, used cars and intended to drive them until they could not be driven anymore. Now, his goal is to build and grow as many businesses as he can so he can give as much as possible to the Kingdom during the rest of his life. Talk about a change in priorities! For a man to choose to "live on less," it will require a radical reordering of existing priorities. These newly reordered priorities likely will reveal to him that there is much "more to live for."

A Change in Purpose

"What on earth am I doing with all my stuff?" This intriguing question is imminently practical and important for each of us to answer. How we answer that question will be reflected by what we choose to do with our material possessions. Did God entrust us with excess material possessions to increase our lifestyle or to increase our Kingdom impact? Did our Father furnish us with surplus resources so we could be "rich in lifestyle" or so we could be *rich in good deeds* (I Timothy 6:18)?

There is no more powerful and vivid example of the statement, "You can live on less when you have more to live for," than the life and death of Jesus himself. II Corinthians 8:9 tells us, *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.*

Jesus was the richest "man" in the universe and yet faced a divine purpose that collided with His exalted place in Heaven. He willingly *humbled Himself* and *made Himself nothing* (Philippians 2:6-8) to come to a dirty, sin-filled, remote planet to accomplish His divine purpose. He downsized from a throne in Heaven to a cross on Calvary.

Jesus was pursuing a purpose that required Him to radically reduce His preferred lifestyle in order to carry out a grand and noble purpose—the redemption of the entire human race. What does Jesus intend for us to do with those riches we have gained from His voluntary poverty? None of us can escape this probing question, knowing that Jesus, being rich, became poor so that we could be rich. This must be soberly pondered.

For a man to choose to "live on less" it will require a radical reorientation of his life purpose. It will reveal to him that there is indeed a greater life purpose, which will give him even "more to live for." Maybe each of us should humbly reconsider our current **perspective**, **priorities**, and **purpose**. It may be that if we honestly assess these three areas of our lives and humbly attempt to align them with Christ, we might just find, to our surprise, that we will be glad to "live on less" because in doing so, we have actually found "more to live for" –much more.

Conducting an Inheritance Fire Drill

Wealth is like a blazing fire; it can cook and warm, or it can burn and destroy. And which it does to your heirs depends, to a great extent, on how you hand it off to them. This very real danger is commonly recognized by families with wealth, which is why so much of heirs' inheritances are locked up in trusts doling out the funds in ways and at times that hopefully will do more good than harm—but who really knows. As one inheritor told me, "Trusts are really vehicles of distrust." A rather profound observation, I think.

With this imagery of wealth in mind, it would be time well spent for parents, as they contemplate the amount and timing of their heirs' inheritance, to conduct an inheritance "fire drill" to determine how prepared their heirs are to receive an inheritance, and how well thought-out the timing and the amount really is. Before we get into the actual fire drill, it would be wise to get a biblical perspective and understanding on the topic of inheritances. Much of what the Bible says about inheritances is found in the book of Proverbs. Keep in mind that a proverb is not a command on what we should do, but merely an observation of what man does, and its outcome. So, the following verses will be instructive, but not directive.

Proverbs 13:22 says, *A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children.* We see two things here: One, inheritance-leaving is done by good people, and two, their inheritance carries an impact even to their grandchildren (affectionately known in the legal world as the "skipped generation"). It is interesting to note that the word "inheritance" and its' derivatives "heritage" and "heir" are all related to the Greek word for "bereaved." In other words, by the very meaning of the word, an inheritance is something received by survivors at the time of death of a parent. The challenge in planning is there is no certainty when a parent's death might occur. Consequently, there is no certainty when an inheritance might be received.

Proverbs 19:14 says, *House and wealth are inherited from fathers, but a prudent wife is from the Lord.* This verse is often used as a directive that fathers have a biblical obligation to leave wealth to their heirs. But if you read this verse carefully, you will see that Solomon is comparing what fathers give (wealth) to what God gives (a prudent wife), emphasizing that God's gift is vastly greater than a father's gift. This verse is really addressing a man's wife, and not his inheritance. Solomon only notes that affluent fathers do give inheritances to their heirs.

Proverbs 20:21 may be one of the most instructive verses for us. It observes, *An inheritance gained hastily in the beginning will not be blessed in the end.* It is fascinating to read what commentators have to say about this verse, if they comment at all. Even though this verse seems somewhat unclear, it does note that the outcome of this "hasty" inheritance is not a good thing. But what is a "hasty" inheritance?

Allow me to paraphrase this verse to give us better clarity of what I think Solomon was observing, "An early inheritance received before an heir is prepared for it will prove to be a curse and not a blessing in the end." This observation is further supported by Proverbs 19:10a, *It is not fitting for a fool to live in luxury*, and Proverbs 17:16, *Of what use is money in the hand of a fool, since he has no desire to get wisdom?*

The solution to the "hasty" inheritance problem is found in Ecclesiastes 7:11, *Wisdom along with an inheritance is good and an advantage to those who see the sun.* If you are going to give your heirs an inheritance, make sure you give them the wisdom to know what to do with it. In other words, give them wisdom, or don't give them wealth. Solomon reinforces this dilemma in his own personal wealth transfer situation in Ecclesiastes 2:18-21. He confesses,

Thus I hated all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun, for I must leave it to the man who will come after me. And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the fruit of my labor for which I have labored by acting wisely under the sun. This too is vanity. Therefore I completely despaired of all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun. When there is a man who has labored with wisdom, knowledge and skill, then he gives his legacy to one who has not labored with them. This too is vanity and a great evil.

Give them wisdom, or don't give them wealth. It is quite obvious which of these two inheritances is the most difficult to give. In truth, if you give them wisdom, you probably won't need to give them your wealth. Sadly, most parents have concluded it is easier to set up trusts than it is to attempt to impart practical and biblical wisdom.

I have referred to the story of the "rich fool" (the farmer who decided to tear down his current barns and build bigger ones) on occasion in my writings, but I have never mentioned what it was that led Jesus to share this parable. It was precipitated by an appeal of a man who came to Jesus pleading, *Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me* (Luke 12:13) –an inheritance conflict. The dad was dead and one brother was feeling slighted and wanted "justice." Solomon was right. There is "nothing new under the sun." Having this biblical background, let's begin the inheritance fire drill.

STEP #1

DISCERN YOUR VIEW OF AN INHERITANCE

This first step is critically important to the fire drill, but is almost never addressed by parents, or the traditional estate planning approach. I ask you this important question: Is an inheritance an *inherent right* or an *unearned privilege*? Because your children are your children and you are affluent, do they have an inherent right to an inheritance simply because they happened to have "popped out of the right womb?" Or, if they receive anything they did not work for is it an unearned privilege—an unexpected "bonus?" Can you see why this question is so fundamentally important?

Let me ask it in another way. Is an inheritance a *required obligation* we owe our heirs or is it an *optional gift* we can freely bestow on them if and when we choose? Many parents feel that their children have a right to an inheritance and feel obligated to pay them what they owe. I think this is the reason a certain bumper sticker has hit such a responsive chord in all of us. Have you seen it? It says, "I am spending my children's inheritance." Interesting idea, isn't it? The implication is that the children already own their inheritance and Mom and Dad are spending the kid's money on their lifestyle. What bizarre thinking. However, this is the kind of thinking that is all too common among affluent parents. Don't move on to step #2 until you are clear on *your* view of an inheritance.

STEP #2

DETERMINE THE PURPOSE OF AN INHERITANCE

If you believe you have a required obligation to give your heirs an inheritance, it may simply be to pay what you owe them. Rather, if you believe that an inheritance is an unearned privilege (a gift that is optional), you are free to decide on any amount and purpose that you deem to be wise and helpful to them.

Do you want your children's inheritance to fund *lifestyle* or *opportunity*? This is a critically important question because the difference between wanting to provide them with assets and income needed to maintain a desired lifestyle and providing them with the funding to give them greater opportunities in life is massive. Do you want to *assist* them along the way, or do you want to *carry* them along the way?

The reason this question is so critical is because it addresses two vital issues, the *amount* and the *timing* of an inheritance. If you want to help them get a good start in life (by helping them with college, getting their first house, getting a business started, maybe helping send their kids to a private Christian school, etc.), it needs to be done earlier in life, not when parents finally eternally relocate at 85 and the children are 60. What is an inheritance going to do for them then, supplement their retirement income?

If parents are looking to fund opportunity, the idea of lifetime inheritance planning becomes essential and the children's inheritance will be given in planned amounts, for specific reasons, to help them along the way as the needs and opportunities arise while the parents are still here to observe, monitor, and coach their heirs. If parents are looking to fund lifestyle, you can be sure that their heirs will grow financially dependent on them and their wealth for the rest of their lives and beyond.

Would your life be the same as it is today if you had received a substantial inheritance at some point earlier in your life? Would your life now be better or worse because of it? Interesting questions, aren't they? I think it is safe to say that all of us would agree that our lives would not be the same as they are now. What we cannot say is if whether they would be better or worse. Let me now ask you, what will happen to your children's lives when they receive what your current inheritance plan will provide for them? Will their lives be better or worse? Here is the fundamental question: "Specifically, what do you want your children's inheritance to do for them?" Don't go on to step #3 until you determine the *purpose* of an inheritance.

STEP #3

CALCULATE THE TIMING AND THE AMOUNT OF AN INHERITANCE

Now that you are clear on your view and the purpose of an inheritance, you are ready to calculate how much of an inheritance would be appropriate, and when it would be best to give it to them. After over 30 years of working with affluent families, I have compiled a list of the ten most common reasons for inheritances.

On the next page, using today's dollars, put in the amount you believe would be needed to provide the various inheritances you want each of your children to have, and when you would want them to have it. You will want to do this exercise for each child since the needs, abilities, and maturity of each are likely different. As we all know, our children are not created equal. What may be good for one may actually be bad for another.

OPPORTUNITY INHERITANCES

1. Family business: $_____ When?_____
2. Funds available for new business start up: $_____ When?_____
3. Funds for a first home (down payment or mortgage payment): $_____ When?_____
4. Funds to establish an emergency reserve (personal, medical, etc.): $_____ When?_____
5. Funds for tuition (partial or total cost), children/grandchildren's education: $_____ When?_____
6. Funds for increased charitable giving: $_____ When?_____

LIFESTYLE INHERITANCES

7. Funds to provide ongoing income for a pre-set desired lifestyle: $_____ When?_____
8. Family property, or the funding for other personal property (boats, cars, motor home, plane, etc.): $_____ When?_____
9. Family residence/farm/homestead/vacation home: $_____ When?_____
10. Funds to provide ongoing income due to special needs/disabilities of heir (physical or emotional) $_____ When?_____

Blessing (and Not Cursing) the Next Generation

The most difficult planning challenge for the affluent centers around this complex question: "How much of our wealth should we leave to our heirs?" This dilemma has nagged at wealthy parents for millennia. Even King Solomon (possibly the richest and wisest man who has ever lived) struggled to answer this for himself. In Ecclesiastes 2:18-19, 21 NIV Solomon laments, *I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me, and who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the work into which I have poured my effort and skill under the sun. This too is meaningless…For a man may do his work with wisdom, knowledge and skill, and then he must leave all he owns to someone who has not worked for it. This too is meaningless and a great misfortune.*

Affluent parents innately know that wealth is dangerous. Like a blazing fire, it can cook and warm or it can burn and destroy. How it will affect their heirs depends, to a great extent, on how effectively they hand this "fire" off. There are real and serious dangers to heirs who gain excessive access to unearned wealth. The wealth that parents leave their heirs is meant to bless, but it can, and often does, curse instead. Jessie O'Neill's excellent book, *The Golden Ghetto*[1], tells us five "bitter fruits" that can manifest themselves in heirs who have been given unearned riches. Below are the five bitter fruits and my comments on each.

BITTER FRUIT #1

LACK OF MOTIVATION TO WORK

When an heir has all the money he or she needs, what motivation is there to go out and get a job or do something meaningful with their life? Some years ago, I was discussing this issue with a wealthy mother and she said she understood this problem well. She had been chiding her high school son to buckle down and start getting better grades so he could get into a good college, get a good education, and get a good job. Her son responded, "I don't need to get good grades in high school or college, because I don't need to get a good job, because when I turn twenty-two I get the money in the trust that Grandma set up for me."

Whether it may seem like it or not, all of us need that proverbial "carrot on the end of the stick" to motivate us to earn our own way in the world. It tells us we are capable human beings who can add value to the world in which God has placed. Although everyone dreams of endless material comforts, only the wealthy know the downside of actually experiencing that and losing sight of living for any larger purpose than just pleasing themselves. By leaving too much of an inheritance, many wealthy families—especially if they are first-generation wealthy—rob their children (without even knowing it) by taking away their need and motivation to work,.

BITTER FRUIT #2

LACK OF PERSEVERANCE

When people have sufficient financial resources, they do not have to endure hardship. They can simply bail out and go on, or just throw money at problems to make them go away. They do not value the money

[1] O'Neill, Jessie H. The Golden Ghetto: The Psychology of Affluence. Center City, MN: Hazelden, 1997.

they have lost because they never worked to earn it in the first place. If they want something, they can buy the best. They do not need to work hard or persevere through difficult circumstances to resolve them. Thus, they only reach a certain level of discomfort in any situation before running away; with enough money, they can be running away their entire lives.

BITTER FRUIT #3

PROBLEMS WITH RELATIONSHIPS

Relationship problems can be the most bitter of all fruits. Consider the exposure unplanned wealth can create for heirs. Suddenly, your heirs are wealthy. How can they know whether people are genuinely interested in them or merely interested in enjoying the benefits of their wealth? Remember, the wealthy will always have many "friends." (See Proverbs 19:4) An heir may eventually begin to question: "Do you love me or my money?"

BITTER FRUIT #4

SELF-WORTH STRUGGLES

What we accomplish is one of the main ways we build positive self-images for ourselves. Getting good grades, practicing hard to be a starter on a sports team, building something with our hands, becoming a member of an honor society—whatever we accomplish in life—contributes to building a positive self-worth. But what if your greatest accomplishment is that you just happened to be born into a wealthy family?

When this is the case, children often struggle to know if they are able to accomplish something on their own, without the backing of the family money, name, reputation, or influence. The silver spoon they are born with can be great for taking care of basic physical needs. However, it can also be a stumbling block to persevering through the struggles and character building challenges that come with not having everything you need easily provided. It is simply not true that having everything a person wants can give them a healthy self-esteem.

BITTER FRUIT #5

POOR UNDERSTANDING AND MANAGING OF FINANCES

A child will never learn to manage money well if it can never run out. He will not need to budget or invest wisely. He will not need to save up for something he has been dreaming of buying. Because of this, when he gets what he wants, he seldom appreciates it. Even what he gives to others means little because he did nothing to earn it.

Such heirs risk becoming obsessed with self-consumption. Their whole world can begin to revolve around their individual wants, turning them into the well-known and little-regarded "spoiled, rich kid." The younger an heir is when they receive their unearned inheritance, the greater the chance of this as an outcome.

LEAVING GOOD FRUIT TO YOUR HEIRS

I like what the billionaire investor, Warren Buffet, said about his inheritance plans for his loved ones. He said, "I want to give my children enough of an inheritance that they feel like they can do anything, but not so much of an inheritance that they may choose to do nothing." What Warren Buffet is really saying is that he wants to fund life-opportunities for his heirs, but not lifestyle. (And there is a huge difference in the amount of an inheritance depending on which of these you choose.) When I share Buffett's statement with Christian parents, they universally nod their heads in agreement. If this is a valid guideline, we must attempt to determine what level of inheritance will allow them to feel like they can do anything and what might de-motivate them from developing meaningful and productive lives.

Within these parameters, we can create a broad philosophical starting point to begin our decision making concerning the amount to leave each person and the best ways to leave it. I remember a father once said to me, "I do not know what to do about an inheritance for my son. He is such a fool." I told him, "If that is indeed the case, then the answer is very simple." Solomon tells us in Proverbs 19:10a NIV that, *It is not fitting for a fool to live in luxury*. He goes on to say in Proverbs 17:16 NIV, *Of what use is money in the hand of a fool, since he has no desire to get wisdom?*

I added, "If your son is indeed an incurable fool, then let him be a poor fool, do not make him a rich one." The definitive word in my statement is *incurable*. The traditional planning process sees a problem with an heir and attempts to address it by putting a bandage on it (i.e. if a child cannot handle money, their inheritance would be put into a trust with a spendthrift provision to keep them from wasting it all). A superior approach is to seek to solve the child's foolish attitudes and behaviors. Much of this needs to happen before you leave them anything. This can be a great opportunity to work on your relationship with your child to fully enjoy the time you have with them.

In other words, if a son is bad at handling money, Dad needs to invest the time and set up opportunities, while he is still here, to help his son learn how to better handle money. Just because he is your son does not mean that he has your knowledge, experience, or your natural aptitude in these areas. The first planning objective should be for parents to equip their heirs with the needed wisdom regarding how to properly and effectively handle their inheritance, however much it will be. Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 7:11-12a, *Wisdom along with an inheritance is good and an advantage to those who see the sun. For wisdom is protection just as money is protection.*

Parent's planning mantra should be, "If we are going to leave our heirs wealth, let us also leave them the wisdom to know what to do with it." If you are not going to give them both, do not give them either. If you give them wealth without wisdom, the blazing fire of wealth is going to burn and destroy them—it will be a curse and not a blessing. To help assess how well your offspring are exercising wisdom, let me suggest these four Maturity Markers. They will give you a hands-on, practical way to proactively address and work to correct any problem areas in your heirs' lives.

Spiritual Maturity Marker #1

(An Heir's Relationship with God)

Signs for this Spiritual Maturity Marker would include an heir who is…

(1) growing as a personal follower of Jesus;

(2) developing in godly character; and

(3) ministering to others.

Emotional Maturity Marker #2

(An Heir's Relationship with Himself)

Signs for this Emotional Maturity Marker would include an heir who is…

(1) taking responsibility for his/her actions and seeking to correct his/her mistakes and sins;

(2) controlling his/her anger, frustration, disappointment, and stress appropriately; and

(3) avoiding chronic problematic and self-destructive behavior.

Relational Maturity Marker #3

(An Heir's Relationship with Others)

Signs for this Relational Maturity Marker would include an heir who is…

(1) developing and maintaining healthy and meaningful long-term relationships with friends and family;

(2) treating other people with respect and dignity; and

(3) making personal sacrifices for the benefit of others.

Financial Maturity Marker #4

(An Heir's Relationship with Money)

Signs for this Financial Maturity Marker would include an heir who is…

(1) living financially independent of parents;

(2) exercising consumptive self-control in spending; and

(3) engaging in enthusiastic and generous giving.

A Place to Start

These maturity markers should better equip you to have real and meaningful dialog with your children, enabling you to establish measurable and attainable standards by which to make more objective inheritance decisions, instead of having those decisions driven primarily by emotion and guilt.

For this reason, I strongly believe that the solution to this inheritance dilemma will be achieved far more effectively by what you do in your living room with your family than by what you do in a conference room with your lawyers and advisors. It is far more important how you prepare your heirs than how you prepare your legal documents. This is why having open and honest family meetings—bringing the heirs into the planning process so they can know what is happening and why—is so critically important.

Start now, while Mom and Dad (or Grandma and Grandpa) are still alive. Begin the mentoring process of preparing the next generations for what is coming. I am convinced that personally revealing your plans to your heirs in an organized and thoughtful way, before you relocate to heaven, is vastly more effective in successfully transferring wealth than having attorneys reveal your plans to them after your funeral.

When You Give, You Will Take Away

The statement, "When you give, you will take away" is an intriguing maxim, isn't it? At first blush, it almost sounds contradictory. Let me give you some simple examples to illustrate its truth. If you give food to a man, you will take away his hunger. If you give love to a child, you will take away his loneliness. If you give the gospel to a woman, you will take away her "lostness." When you give work to a man, you take away a feeling of uselessness. When we talk about giving someone "life essentials," it does not seem like a particularly profound truth, does it? In giving, there will always be something gained and something lost. In the above cases, what was gained was good and what was lost was bad.

What makes this statement anything but simple, however, is that once you go beyond "life essentials," it is often a considerable challenge to be sure what you give is good and what you take away is bad. Without careful attention to this maxim, we could easily find ourselves giving a "bad gift" (I know, sounds like an oxymoron) because it will take away more good from the recipient than it bestows. This is where God has a decided advantage on us. James 1:17 says, *Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights…* God knows how to give the perfect gift. If we were all knowing and all-loving too, we would be a lot better at this gift-giving than we are. But, as mere mortals, this can prove to be a very tricky business.

Let me tell you a story. I live in a pretty blue-collar, interracial, tract home part of town. Last summer, I was standing in my driveway sweeping up some yard debris when up my street, driving very slowly comes a man and his young teenage son in a brand new, black, convertible, BMW sports car. I am not a car enthusiast at all, but even I could not help but notice this beautiful car coming towards me especially since this is not the kind of car you ever see in our neighborhood. I had no idea who they were, but I still smiled in their direction as they drove slowly toward our house.

Then, to my shock, they turn into my driveway and pull right up to me. I am now feeling real pressure because I am sure I should know them. Yet, seeing their faces clearly only confirms I have absolutely no clue who they are. The dad is sitting there, smiling at me, like we are old friends. (I just hate it when this kind of thing happens to me!) I walked slowly around the car over to the driver's side thoroughly examining this automotive masterpiece, trying to buy myself a few extra seconds for my aging, mental hard drive to find the file on who this guy is sitting in my driveway, smiling at me. I walk over, smile and say in a friendly tone, "Nice car." He said, "Yep, just drove it off the lot. I bought it for my son who is turning sixteen next week. I am showing him what all it does."

It was obvious. He didn't know me from Adam. He simply pulled in my driveway to impress me, a total stranger, with the car he just bought for his son. His son, sitting in the only other seat in the car, didn't look like he was more than thirteen. He just sat there looking more overwhelmed than delighted by all this attention. I was so taken back with this spontaneous encounter, that the most profound thing I could think to say in response was, "Well, this is a really nice first car."

The dad beamed proudly, "Yep. Well, gotta run." Putting the car in reverse, he backed out and drove off in the same direction he came—making it seem like he had driven over from wherever it was he lived for the express purpose of showing me the car. Now, with his mission accomplished, he was going back home.

As he drove off, I just stood there. What was that all about? Then, as almost always is the case with me, I come up with the definitive response that I should have made to this father. Unfortunately, it was about three minutes too late. (If this ever happens again, however, I am ready!)My response to this proud father should have been, "You realize that by giving your son this as his first car, you could ruin him for the rest of his life." I doubt my wise and insightful response would have made any difference to this dad, assuming he even understood what I meant by it. I have thought often that I might have been the only person in this part of town that could have seen his gift for what it really was. Of all the driveways he could have pulled into to show off the car, he picked my driveway, and I was just too slow on the draw to think how to warn him. But, maybe all this happened for your enlightenment, not his.

Back to my maxim. If you give your son a brand new BMW convertible for his first car, you will take away…what? This dad has likely taken away his son's ability to ever be content with any less of a car. He probably has taken away his ability to set realistic controls on his spending, not buying what he cannot afford. He certainly has taken from his son the opportunity to experience the satisfaction of working hard and methodically saving up to buy his first car and appreciating what it really costs in time and money to own a car like this. He may have also taken away his son's ability to appropriately connect a healthy work ethic to its corresponding material rewards. He might have taken away any sense of humility in him, now that he owns the nicest car in both the student and faculty parking lots at his high school. (I don't know about you, but it would have been very hard for me as a sixteen year old to be driving a brand new, BMW convertible sports car and remain humble.)

You see, the first car this boy will ever own may be the finest car he will ever own. His "car life" going forward will always fall below the standard now set for him by his father. Admittedly, this father was giving his son a very generous gift. In so doing, however, he was likely taking away several experiences that would be far more valuable to his son in the years ahead than the car. This gift, by my calculation, will produce for this young man a net-loss life-effect (i.e. more loss than gain). I have seen these kinds of gifts made many times by oblivious, well-intentioned, loving parents and doting grandparents who have given generous and loving gifts to their heirs that only ended up producing a net-loss life-effect for them.

Before we decide to give something to someone beyond "life essentials," it would be in our and the recipient's best interest to carefully consider this maxim and whether the gift we are considering might produce a net-gain or a net-loss in the life-effect on the recipient.

"When you give, you will take away." Make every effort in your giving to ensure that your gifts do not unintentionally take away more than they provide.

Inheritance Conundrums Parents Face in Planning

Of all the issues that affluent parents confront in planning, none consumes more time and emotional energy than that of inheritances—and for good reason. There is no area of the planning that could be more devastating to a family than an ill-thought-out or ill-timed inheritance.

#1: The "Unready" Conundrum

Our children are not wise enough or mature enough to handle the inheritance we want them to have.

#2: The "Equal vs. Fair" Conundrum

We love our kids equally, so we want to treat them the same. But some of our children really need more than others.

#3: The "Black Sheep" Conundrum

We have one child that is not living a lifestyle of which we approve. This significantly affects how we are able to plan for our "good" children.

#4: The "Family Dysfunction" Conundrum

Our children are extremely different and do not get along well. If we simply divide all our assets equally among them, serious family conflict will be inevitable.

#5: The In-Laws/Out-Laws Conundrum

Should we treat our in-laws the same as we do our own children? If they split up, we wouldn't want our children to lose half of their inheritance to a divorce.

#6: The "Good Steward" Conundrum

We have tried to be good stewards of all the Lord has entrusted to us, but we are not sure that all our heirs will also be good stewards.

#7: The "Generation Skipping" Conundrum

We would like to leave our grandchildren an inheritance, but we do not want to override the influence and control of their parents by giving an inheritance directly to them.

As you can see, these are all exceptionally complex issues and there are no quick solutions. The good news is that every one of these conundrums can be very successfully addressed and overcome. To do so, however, takes a commitment of time, prayer, and a number of very pointed, heart-to-heart conversations. This will enable you to come up with a well-thought-out and strategic inheritance plan that will honor the Lord and bless your heirs.

When is a Gift Really a Gift?

Interesting question, isn't it? The answer depends on who you ask. If you ask this question to the IRS, they will tell you, "A gift is a gift on the day the post office postmarks the envelope containing your check to a nonprofit." Ask a ministry this question and they will answer, "A gift is a gift when the gift actually becomes available for us to use." Ask a starving child in Haiti, he might answer, "A gift is a gift when I can actually put it in my mouth, eat it, and for a moment not be hungry." Ask an older couple this question, and they might respond, "A gift is a gift when we sign our new wills, giving assets away to Kingdom causes when we eternally "relocate".

On the surface these answers may not all seem so different, but I assure you, they are substantially. Let's get practical: How would *you* answer this question? Think carefully. How you answer this question will have a huge effect on your giving.

FOUNDATION GIVING

Family Foundations (both public and private) have become widely popular for families with a surplus, but for many, their understanding of the function of their foundations is not clear. Many folks believe that by transferring cash or assets into their family foundation, they have actually made a gift. This belief is supported by the IRS, who is telling them that they have made a tax deductible gift. Notice, I am using the word "transfer" not "give" to your family foundation; this is not unintentional. Once the transfer has been made to the foundation, a family could unconsciously relax and think, "Okay, we have now made a gift. We have done the good deed. It is finished." But we must ask, "Is transferring funds into a family foundation, other than for income tax purposes, really a gift?"

This very issue came up in an annual meeting with one of former client families years ago. Every member of this extraordinary Christian family is a believer. They are a loving and functional family, living to please the Lord and serving Him in every way they can. They have been "tithers" for decades and been on a short-term mission trip. (I share these details so you will not assume they had a shallow commitment to Christ or marginal interest in giving to expand the Kingdom.)

They had transferred a substantial amount into their family foundation a year earlier and over the next twelve months had not deployed any of the funds. During our annual review meeting, I asked why they had not yet deployed any of those funds. They looked at me, a bit bewildered, and said, "Well, that is principal and you never give away principal." I was taken back by their comment and then responded, "Who said that money was principal?" They just looked at me with a blank look—speechless. I went on to ask, "If you gave a check for $10,000 to your church, would you expect them to put that money in the bank and only use the interest it earned for ministry? They answered, "Well, of course not." "Then why," I asked, "should you think of your family foundation any differently than you do your church?" I had asked the unasked question. In one minute, my question changed their entire mental paradigm about their foundation giving.

It never occurred to them that the money they were transferring to their family foundation was for deployment, not for stockpiling. They had just assumed they would only give away the income from the "principal" in the years ahead. They came to realize that even though their tax return from the previous year said they did, they had actually not given anything away. Before the evening was over, the entire family had gathered to designate specific amounts of the foundation funds to each member for Kingdom deployment within the next four months. The stories I heard about the gifts they made have been inspiring It was a moving experience for this family.

This leads me to my final point—I have yet to have anyone share with me what a moving experience it was to transfer money into their family foundation. The joy of giving comes not when the tax man says you have made a gift, but when your heart tells you that you have made a gift. You will know when you have actually made a gift because somebody's life will be touched by it. Jesus said it this way, *For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me*. (Matthew 25:35-36) When your giving impacts a life—this is when you have really made a gift. The money that sits in your foundation is nothing more than money sitting in your foundation, waiting to be given—waiting to change a life.

DEFERRED GIVING

Deferred giving is a term used to describe when someone intends to make a gift in the future. Deferred gifts can come in many forms: will bequests, remainder gifts from various trusts, charitable life estate agreements, gift annuities, etc. Any comprehensive, strategic Master Stewardship Plan will undoubtedly contain deferred gifts. Truthfully, deferred gifts, like foundation gifts, are not really gifts, even though the IRS may give you a current income tax deduction today for a future gift you will make much later.

This notion of deferred giving can be dangerous for Christians with a surplus because they can be seduced into thinking that since they have made plans for making future gifts after they eternally relocate, they are somehow being generous today.

In other words, we should not feel good about ourselves simply because we intend to be generous once we can no longer personally possess our "stuff" any more—i.e. because we can't take it with us. If a person is worth $1 million and they need all those assets to maintain their lifestyle, giving that $1 million away once they leave this world may be the best they can do to make a major Kingdom gift. But for the family worth $10 million or $50 million or more, whose pile of stuff is well beyond what they or their family will ever need, it may not be generous at all.

Even though Andrew Carnegie was not a follower of Jesus, his philosophy on wealth, in my opinion, was very biblical indeed. His goal was to give all his wealth away during his lifetime. In his book *The Gospel of Wealth,* he makes a sobering assessment of those with wealth. "The man who dies leaving behind him millions of available [surplus] wealth, which was his to administer during his life, will pass away 'unwept,

unhonored, and unsung,' no matter to what uses he leaves the dross which he cannot take with him. Of such as these the public verdict will then be: 'The man who dies thus rich dies disgraced.'"

In spite of his efforts to divest himself of his wealth to do good and help others, Carnegie still died quite rich. He simply could not give his wealth away faster than he was creating it. R.G. Letourneau, the inventor of heavy earth moving equipment and a committed follower of Jesus, realized the same joyful frustration in his giving. By the end of his life he was giving 90% of his income away each year, as well as significant portions of his wealth, yet he continued to grow richer and richer. When asked how he could be giving so much away and still be so rich, he responded, "I shovel it out and God shovels it in, but He has a bigger shovel!" How sad it would have been for all of us if these men, and scores like them, would have simply chosen to give their excess wealth away after they left this earth—deferred giving. And even more so—how sad for them. They would have been deprived of the earthly joy and blessing that the giver receives when giving, as well as lose additional rewards in heaven believers are promised. (Matt. 19:21, 6:19-20)

I like the statement, "Do your giving while you're living, so you're knowing where it's going." Giving substantial surplus wealth away while we are here requires faith which God will bless and honor. Deferred giving, on the other hand, requires no faith at all. The ultimate mindset is this, "Once I am gone and I have had all my needs and desires met for my life, I will give what is left to the Lord." This strikes me as "last-fruits" giving and not "first-fruits" giving.

My encouragement to all of us with surplus resources is to take the time and make the effort to answer these three important stewardship questions. Once you have answered them, start proactively deploying your excess wealth for Kingdom purposes now so that your giving will not just have a Kingdom impact someday, it will have a Kingdom impact today!

Ministry Giving

Periodically over the years, I have heard stories from frustrated donors who made a gift to a ministry only to realize their gift didn't end up doing what they intended. Maybe the most extreme example is a client who told me that his former Pastor approached him about donating $50,000 to the church to underwrite a mission project. Instead, the donated funds were used to install an elaborate chandelier in the church foyer. The unhappy client told me, "That's the last money that church will ever get from me!"

The same thing happened during the Katrina disaster. Concerned Christian families donated millions of dollars to Habitat for Humanity to help rebuild New Orleans, but Habitat did not have an operational model to do mass home renovations, demolitions and reconstruction projects. (Their model is to build one home at a time using volunteer labor.) These compassionate donors had a great idea and great intentions, but the money they donated to Habitat did very little to achieve what their gift was intended to achieve—help Katrina victims.

With some regularity, I hear from affluent Christians that they are not entirely satisfied with their giving outcomes. Not really knowing if their gift actually accomplished its goal has lead them to become, at best,

quietly frustrated with many of the charitable gifts they make. Unfortunately, we cannot assume that just because we made a gift directly to a reputable ministry it really ends up accomplishing what we wanted.

To help give us some guidance on effectively making impactful gifts to ministry, I contacted my friend and colleague, Al Mueller, President of Excellence in Giving, and asked him for some insight on this matter of ministry giving. His organization assists high-capacity donors in making strategic and effective gifts to ministries. Al suggested that there are four questions a donor should ask to create guidelines before making a gift to a ministry.

1. *Do I have a clear idea of what I want my gift to do?* You have heard the old saying, "If you don't know where you want to go, any road will get you there." The first task in making a gift is knowing exactly what you want your gift to accomplish. If prior to your gift, you do not have a clear sense of what outcome you want this gift to produce, you can expect it will "miss the mark." If we want our giving to be more than just giving for the sake of giving (if we want it to do something that really matters) we first need to be clear on what we want our giving to do.
2. *Is there a reasonable probability this ministry can use my gift for the purpose for which I am giving it?* The Habitat example above is a good example of generous people wanting to help others, following this natural disaster. Unfortunately, they chose to give to a ministry whose model of operation was not conducive to helping with this kind of disaster. It was the right idea, but the wrong organization for the job. Many times folks will make a gift to a ministry they like and ask them to do something with their gift that they either do not or cannot really do.
3. *Is this ministry both effective and efficient?* We must assess prior to our giving whether a ministry is both effective (doing the right things) and efficient (doing them well). I think we would agree that the most efficient ministries are not necessarily the best promoters of themselves, and the best promoters are not necessarily the most efficient. It would be wise to look past the promotional "window dressing" of a ministry and drill down deeper to discover, "How much of what I will give to this organization will actually do what I am making this gift to do?" The answer may surprise you.
4. *Does the ministry have a core competency in the area I want my gift to impact?* Is what the Lord is leading me to give part of the core competency of the ministry I am considering? Most ministries have one core competency and then a number of other peripheral competencies—other things they can do, but not their primary focus. The best way to ensure that your gift will do what you want it to do is to find a ministry whose core competency is what you want to support—your *main thing* is their *main thing*.

When is a gift really a gift? When it does what you gave it to do. Giving is easy. Giving wisely, now that's another story!

Giving or Leaving?

A gentleman recently asked me a thought-provoking question. He asked, "Do you think testamentary giving is really giving?" Though the answer seems obvious, it really is not. With lifetime giving, you are voluntarily separating yourself from your possessions. With testamentary giving, you are involuntarily being separated from your possessions when you can no longer keep them. With one you are *giving*. With the other you are *leaving*. Viewed this way, there emerges a huge difference between the two.

It has been my experience over the years that most people who have made plans to leave something behind for the Kingdom after they eternally relocate could certainly make most, if not all, those gifts while they are still alive. This being the case, an important question must be asked. Why don't people do all the giving they can while they are still here? I believe there are three reasons why people might opt for testamentary *leaving* instead of lifetime *giving*.

REASON #1: UNINFORMED

I am amazed how often believers work with unbelieving advisors (attorneys, money managers, insurance agents, accountants, etc.). For advisors with a secular world view, the idea of giving is seldom a central part of their planning considerations. (In many cases, they may actually be opposed to the idea of giving because their incomes would go down if you did.) If you bring up giving, it is very easy to drop a testamentary gift into your plan since it requires no real strategic planning or sacrifice to give it. We might say, "I'd also like to leave a little something for God in our plan." Simple. Easy. No need to carefully plan how to maximize my lifetime giving. No need to stretch my faith in any way, because after all, I am not really giving anything away—which leads to the second reason why people might choose testamentary *leaving* instead of lifetime *giving*.

REASON #2: UNCERTAIN

Uncertainty breeds fear, and fear is one of the great paralyzers to lifetime giving. There is often a spoken or unspoken fear that if I really get generous in my lifetime giving, I might inadvertently give too much away and then run short of funds to live on later in life. I have never known of anyone who gave themselves into poverty. In fact, I don't even believe that is possible. But fear, driven by our fallen, lack-of-faith nature, kicks in, reducing, or altogether stopping, our ability to joyfully and generously give while we are still "on this side of the grass." Testamentary *leaving*, as opposed to lifetime *giving*, can be a practical manifestation of fear—a lack of trust in God to provide for us in the future.

REASON #3: UNENGAGED

If believers don't have a "fire in their belly" about something eternal; if they are not passionate about seeing God work in people's lives; if they are not personally, spiritually, and emotionally engaged in doing something with their lives and resources that will matter forever; then there will be little perceived difference between lifetime *giving* and testamentary *leaving*. With either giving or leaving, one may think, "Whenever I do give, I am sure I will do some good, somewhere, for someone in some way, at some time." In these cases, both *giving* and *leaving* can be devoid of any urgency or passion. When it comes to your giving, would you be able to say with Jeremiah in Lamentations 1:13, *From on high He sent fire into my bones?* If you are unengaged in Kingdom work, *giving* or *leaving* can feel about the same.

Tom Monaghan, the founder of Domino's Pizza, is a compelling, contemporary example of a man who is trying to give it all away before he relocates. His personal testimony of *a millionaire's vow of poverty* is a compelling story regardless of our own personal financial situation.

So, should we choose to *upgrade* our testamentary *leaving* to lifetime *giving*? How do we decide how much lifetime giving we should be doing? Here is a three step process to ratchet up your lifetime giving and experience more fun, more joy, and more Kingdom impact during your lifetime than you ever dreamed possible.

STEP #1: IMAGINE

…what you could do for the Kingdom while you are still here on earth.

Helen Keller recognized, "I can't do everything, but I can do something." And so can you. If you don't know where God is at work in the world today, start looking. You will not have trouble finding Him working all over the world in amazing and supernatural ways. Choose the work and places that most excite and motivate you. Discover what unfunded opportunities there are that you could help continue or expand. Imagine who or what could be changed for eternity if you were to give now. Ask, "Is God calling me to help fund this Kingdom opportunity?" Just imagine. You could be part of something big, something eternal, right now!

STEP #2: PLAN

…for maximum Kingdom impact with all you have.

Most people have little idea how much lifetime giving capacity they really have. Sit down with your advisors and charge them with the task of presenting you a plan on how to maximize your Kingdom giving and impact before you relocate to your permanent home with the Lord. Start with determining what you have in the way of surplus income and assets. These are immediately available for lifetime giving. Then ask the Lord if He might even like you to reduce your lifestyle consumption so as to increase your lifetime giving.

This can be a scary question to ask because I think we all might be afraid our Lord might say, "Yes, I want you to reduce your lifestyle for My Kingdom's sake." By developing this kind of a strategic giving plan, you will be absolutely amazed at how much you will be able to deploy of your income and resources, if lifetime Kingdom impact become the top priority in your planning.

STEP #3: TRUST

…God to take care of you while you focus on taking care of others.

This is where the "rubber meets the road." Are you willing to trust God to take care of you so you can stop worrying about whether you have enough to take care of yourself? When we can answer "Yes" to this question, we will now be free to focus on making sure others have enough. Faith (trust) and fear are mutually exclusive. One clear indicator that we are lacking in faith is when we become fearful about not having adequate provisions in the future.

Do you believe that God is powerful enough, wise enough, and loving enough to take care of you without your help? If God feeds the birds of the air and clothes the lilies of the field will He not all the more take care of you? (Read Matthew 6:25-34.) When you can finally and fully trust God for your care and provision, you will never again need to worry about giving too much away during your lifetime.

Do you remember the story of the widow of Zarephath and Elijah? With her last bit of provisions she fed Elijah. As a result, God kept her bowl of flour and her jar of oil perpetually full. (Read I Kings 17:8-16.) *Our God's hand is not too short to save, nor His ear too dull to hear* (Isaiah 59:1). If we are willing to trust God for our eternity, surely we can trust Him for the short time we have left here on this earth. Think about it.

If we focus our energies on maximizing our lifetime, Kingdom giving, we will find, to our delight, the *rest* of our lives will actually prove to be the *best* years of our lives!