

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. This is partially right and partially 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 had even one lecture on the theology of stewardship. It should be no surprise, then, 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 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 checkbook *after* we have done our giving. Stewardship is about what we are *keeping*.

So what exactly does 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. King David tells us in Psalm 24:1 (NASB), *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 (version?), *‘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 (NASB), *‘The silver is Mine and the gold is Mine,’ declares the Lord of hosts.* Clearly, 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... 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 (emphasis added).* 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” of the stool is the fact that God calls us to be stewards of His resources. As stewards, we are charged by Him to carry out *His* wishes for *His* property that He has entrusted to us to manage.

“*Steward*” accurately defined is, “to plan, to manage, to administer,” and stewardship is “the act of being a manager or a caretaker.” We see that this third leg of stewardship actually promotes us from playing little “gods” over a tiny empire of our own making, to the 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 my entire study on whole-life stewardship shook my hand, declaring, “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! I have been in the church all my life,” he continued, “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.

- 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 head 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?

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 the Stewardship Resource Group 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 extensive training curriculum for hundreds of professional financial and legal advisors in how to provide stewardship planning services for their clients.