

Stewardship of Treasure Witness, 2-3 Feb 08

Good morning/evening. I'm Ann Funk and I first came to Good Shepherd in 1995 when in the Air Force stationed at FSU. I left in 1998, then returned in July 2005 after I retired. My husband, Wes, belongs to another church, and our 20-year-old son, Greg, attends college in Georgia.

A steward is one who manages the finances, property, household, or affairs for another. God gave us "dominion over all the earth," and as Christians, we "are regarded as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God," Gn 1:28, 1 Cor 4:1. We are charged with wisely managing the providence of the all-knowing, all-present, all-powerful God of eternity! Wow.

In the fall, we focused on the stewardship of Time and Talent, beginning with the Ministry Fair and concluding with Commitment Sunday. Today, we focus on the stewardship of Treasure. All three are vital; one does not substitute for another.

Growing up, my parents' generosity was part of daily life. For example, they gave food, clothing, books, and toys to a local orphanage. In summer, they would bus the kids to the swimming pool for an afternoon, then to an ice cream parlor. When my father's pay increased at work, he proportionally increased his church donations as well as the kids' weekly allowances. He thanked God and his family, and shared accordingly.

So it's no surprise there were parallels in my life. My husband and I sponsored an orphanage for handicapped kids. We raised money, hosted parties, and took them to pro wrestling (their idea). We tried to instill the spirit of giving in our son. From his allowance, 10% first went to God's cup, then 10% to savings. When Greg was three, he went trick-or-treating. He told his grandma, "I went next-to-door, next-to-door, and they gave me candy! No, I'm not kidding." He was amazed at the concept, but we were amazed he wanted to go home early so he could hand out candy, and this is what he loved most. At about five, he was inseparable from the treasure of his life at the time, a mutant ninja turtle. But he offered it to his dad who was packing to go to Desert Storm.

Wes and I donated to cardiac and cancer research following the deaths of family members to those illnesses, to international relief after natural disasters, and to Habitat for

Humanity when a house sold. We like tangible, self-sustaining gifts, so we've chosen such things as digging a fish pond and fresh water well to nourish the hungry and thirsty, and paying for kids to go to school and learn a trade.

Scripture tells us: "Every perfect gift is from above; and as we have received, we must serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace. We must honor the Lord with the first fruits of our wealth," Jas 1:17, 1 Pt 4:10, Prv 3:9. My husband has always accepted tithing as a given. We also judge the vibrancy of a church by whether it tithes from its own collections. As we've moved 22 times and traveled in 18 foreign countries, this has been a good indicator.

Praise God we have never had to choose between the basic necessities of life or giving to the church. Nevertheless, we've had some obstacles. Sometimes we've disagreed about the best place to contribute, the right timing, and whether our money will be well spent. Then we have struggled to return to the point of "giving cheerfully," 2 Cor 9:7, and trusted the Lord to sort it all out. And I have seen firsthand that He does!

As I give to others, I become more aware of and grateful for the many blessings God has granted me. As promised in Lk 18: 29-30, "There is no one who has given...for the sake of the kingdom of God who will not receive an overabundant return in this present age and eternal life in the age to come." I am truly blessed, enjoying an education, career, home, food, clothing, security, health, humor, family, friends, love, faith -- too much to name. I have come to understand more deeply how my spiritual, work, and home lives are not separate, but one integrated expression of living in God's will.

I don't pretend to have it all worked out, and wouldn't want to be tested like the "widow who gave Elijah the last flour and oil she had, even though she and her son would die without the Lord's replenishment," 1 Kg 17:12. I fear I'd fail that test. But I do desire to use what has been entrusted to my stewardship for the glory of God. And I pray that we all may, "consider (our) own calling," as Paul says in today's reading, live in accord with the beatitudes, and strive to "build up treasure in heaven...so our hearts may be there also," Mt 6:20-21. Amen.