

Mental Foxholes

1 Chronicles 29:6-16

Patricia Reuse has written (*Our World of Things*, p. 39):
I had occasion to visit a church of another denomination while traveling one weekend. On that particular Sunday the pastor preached a wonderful and stimulating sermon on stewardship with the primary emphasis on giving. As soon as it was over, one of the church members apologized to me. What a shame I had come to visit only to hear a sermon about giving! As if to say, "Our pastor does better than that most of the time; sorry, he slipped up today."

Tom Hudson, who grew up right here in Utica, once wrote a study guide on stewardship entitled *Bible Teachings on Giving: Adults*, in which he said, *One Sunday I had finished preaching and was extending the invitation in a small mission church. My three-year-old was sitting on the front pew. Suddenly he began to choke on something. I jerked him up by his heels and shook him. Out came a penny. Later a man in the congregation commented to me: "You preachers will do anything to get money out of a guy."* (p. 41)

Dr. Hudson said that they laughed together over that, but later he began to wonder: *Why do many Christians feel defensive when the subject of giving comes up in church?* He says that *"you can almost see folk heading for mental foxholes."*

You may be tempted today to have the same kind of attitude about this message today. You may have already jumped into your mental foxhole. I pray instead that you will see this message on stewardship as just that—a message that I believe comes from God Himself to this church for this particular time.

It's been said that there are three kinds of givers: Tippers, Trashers and Tithers. The Tippers are those who give only if they like the service. You know how things are in the restaurant: if the coffee and tea refills are regular, if the waiter or waitress smiles and makes you feel important, you'll leave a large tip. It just depends on how you feel at the moment.

Then there are the Trashers. These are the folks who give God the leftovers. They have something they want to get rid of at home, so they think, *Who would even want this old beat up thing?* Perhaps the church can use it. These are the people who bring to the church only what they feel is unessential. Only the time—or the dime—they can spare. Sacrifice is never an issue with the Trasher.

The Tithers are those who take stewardship seriously. Their gifts are made out of grateful hearts, hearts filled with the greatness and goodness of God. They support their church from a sense of responsibility, partnership and concern. They quite often find themselves giving more than ten percent, not because they have to, but because they want to. They are cheerful, constant, and consistent givers.

Well, which are you— a Tipper, a Trasher, or a Tither? Do we need to make changes in the way we give, and the reason we give— what we might call our giving lifestyle? Probably one of the best examples for our own giving lifestyle can be found in one brief period in David's life in 1 Chronicles 29. David had had it on his heart that he should build a temple for God, but God had told him that his son Solomon would be the one to actually do that.

So David had a direct word from God that he would not live to see the temple built, yet he led the people to begin gathering the materials. David had his eyes on something not every person could see. He had set his sights on something more permanent and lasting than mere possession of property, as important as that may be to some. David had his eyes on God, and that is how he gave.

So climb out of that mental foxhole, and let's look at this story to find some clues as to what our giving should be like.

1 We should give with our eyes on those who follow us, vv. 6-9

If you all look closely at verses 1-5, you will see very quickly that David gave appropriately and wholeheartedly. He gave to the cause in which he most believed. Now, beginning with verse six, we begin to see that David gave to the Lord with his eyes not only on God Himself, but also on those people who were watching him. *“The leaders of the families, the officers of the tribes of Israel, the commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds, and the officials in charge of the king’s work gave willingly.”* Verses seven and eight describe what it was they gave, and then in verse nine, we see what effect all this giving had on the people: *“The people rejoiced at the willing response of their leaders, for they had given freely and wholeheartedly to the Lord.”* The leaders gave sacrificially because David had given sacrificially. The people gave sacrificially because they had seen what their leaders had given.

I believe it all goes back to what David had done. He had observed the first principle of obedient stewardship: he gave with his eyes on God. As a result, the leaders and people who followed him gave appropriately, generously and joyfully.

I don't believe that the temple would have been built if David had not given with an eye on the kind of example he was setting for everyone else.

It may hurt, but Mom's and Dad's, take a look at the kind of stewardship example you are setting for your children. You teach them by example that it is okay to spend several dollars at the movie theater or the ball game, but the work of God must be left up to someone else. Your children hear what you say when you explain your disobedience to Scripture by saying, "I just can't afford to tithe right now," then spend your money on some non-essential item. And they are confused. We are raising an entire generation who has no concept of what it means to invest one's life and resources into the work of God.

It may be your children, or if you are a teacher or a deacon, it may be people outside your immediate family who are watching what you do, and they are following your example. Even though your record of contributions may not be printed in a bulletin for all to see, the level of your stewardship becomes apparent in many other ways. To climb out of your mental foxhole, and move into obedient stewardship, you must give with your eyes on those who follow you.

2 We should give with our eyes on a Biblical understanding of stewardship, vv. 11-16

David's immediate response to what was happening was to go to God.

You'll find as you grow in Christ that your first response in many situations, whether in sorrow or in joy, is to take it to God. David's prayer begins in verse ten, and in his prayer there are embedded four precepts of obedient, biblical stewardship. It is imperative that we understand and observe these precepts if our giving lifestyles are to be transformed.

(1) As Sovereign Lord, God owns everything that is, v. 11b. "For everything in heaven and earth is yours." God's sovereignty is revealed in many places in Scripture. For example, Isaiah described the sovereignty of God by saying that "the Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth...he who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and all that comes out of it" (Isaiah 40:28; 42:5). Paul, in 1 Timothy 1:17, wrote that God is the "eternal, immortal, invisible king."

The Scriptures are just as plain in telling us that this Sovereign Lord is also Sovereign Owner. From the Psalms: *"All the world is mine, and all that is in it;" "The heavens are yours..." "The sea is his, for he made it..."* (Psalm 50:12; 89:11;

95:5). Haggai 2:8 reads *“The silver is mine and the gold is mine, says the Lord Almighty.”* In the New Testament, we read *“You are not your own; you were bought with a price”* (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

This first precept is foundational to all else. God is primary and original owner. He is absolute and principal owner, without any conditions or limitations. As Sovereign Lord, He owns everything that is.

(2) All resources come from God, v. 12a. *“Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things.”* Simply put, there is nothing you and I have in our little realm of possessions that has not come from God. The same precept is seen in verse 14: *“But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this?”* We have only what God has given us.

(3) Thanksgiving and praise are due God for His goodness, v. 13. *“Now, our God, we give you thanks, and praise your glorious name.”* Contemplating the marvelous goodness of God toward us results in hearts filled with thanksgiving and praise. Oftentimes this fresh awareness of the grace and mercy of God will result in giving back to God out of those resources He has given us.

(4) We can only give out of what God gives to us, vv. 14b, 16. *“Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand.”* *“As for all this abundance that we have provided for building you a temple for your Holy Name, it comes from your hand, and all of it belongs to you.”* We can only give out of what God gives to us. I am not expected to give a million dollars a year to the work of the Lord, because He has not given me a million dollars. However, I am expected to be faithful in giving at least ten percent of what He does give me.

We must understand these four precepts of giving if we are going to be obedient in our biblical stewardship.

3 We should give with our eyes on eternity, vv. 10, 15.

David's was an obedient stewardship, so his own generous giving, and that of the people, caused him to look toward the God of all eternity in verse ten.

As David began his prayer, he acknowledged the Foreverness of God. *“Praise be to you, O Lord, God of our father Israel, from everlasting to everlasting.”* True, the immediate project was to raise funds and materials so that David's son, Solomon, could build the temple. But David had his eyes on how the influence of that temple would affect the people of God down through the ages.

This was not some local, neighborhood god to whom they were giving. They were giving to the God of eternity.

In light of God's everlasting presence, David took the long-range view of time and possessions. He realized that out of all his riches, not one thing could he take with him when he died. He said in verse 15, *"We are aliens and strangers in your sight, as were all our forefathers. Our days on earth are like a shadow, without hope."* What was David saying?

He was simply saying that all of us, regardless of rank or station in life, are merely passing through on our way to eternity. We can settle down and accumulate all kinds of riches and possessions, we can clutch them to our hearts with deep determination but they will all be snatched away from our fingers the moment we breathe our last, if not before then. David had all kinds of riches, certainly more than anyone else in Israel, yet he gave it away before he died, because he had his eyes on eternity.

One reason that so many of us are in such dire need of a transformation of our giving lifestyles is that our stewardship is so narrow. Our vision is limited. We think only of how our gifts will pay for this month's utility bill, without much thought as to how this month's utilities are being used to effect a difference in the lives of people for all of eternity. We fail too often to relate our present-day stewardship with the vast stretches of eternity that lay before us.

A wealthy man once said to a young preacher, "Son, you won't ever have anything." When the young pastor asked him why, the wealthy man explained, "You give everything away! You never saw a wealthy person who gave away what he had!" The young preacher remarked later, "I looked at him, and I looked at me, and decided not to change places with him."

Today, perhaps you've looked at David, and you've looked at yourself. With a sudden shock you've realized that something is tragically missing from your giving lifestyle. The Bible tells us that obedient, Biblical stewardship gives with its eyes on God, and on those who follow us. And we've seen that our giving lifestyles can be transformed as we give with our eyes on a proper understanding of biblical stewardship, and with our eyes on eternity.

The transformation begins not when you first begin to give money, but when you first begin to give your heart and life to the Savior. Do it now! don't jump into a mental foxhole!