

After the Faith Decision...

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Let me begin with a bold statement. I believe that *after the faith decision, all else is stewardship*. I cannot take credit for that statement and I don't know who rightly should be credited, but it certainly is a powerful statement. And if it is true, then stewardship is about more than money, much more.

The dictionary definition is *the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one's care*. That is a pretty broad statement and certainly can apply to more than just the handling of money, which is what many of us have come to believe stewardship is about. The dictionary also lists "servant" as a synonym for steward.

So I find it interesting that one of the least loved words in Christian circles is this word, "stewardship"; interesting, because many of us long to one day hear those words, "well done, good and faithful servant". So if steward and servant mean the same thing, should we not joyfully embrace God's call to Christian stewardship? Sadly, amongst many Christians today, stewardship has come to mean the annual "money" drive for the church or that "outdated" tithing thing. And upon hearing the word, many actually feel offended "oh no, here they go again, wanting more of my hard-earned money."

Over the next few issues of *Christian Advisor*, I invite you to share a journey with me -- a journey to rediscover the meaning of Christian stewardship. And just to be clear, part of our understanding of stewardship does indeed involve the issue of money and possessions. God spoke more about money and possessions in the Bible than he did about heaven and hell combined -- over 2350 times. Did you know that 16 of the 38 parables recorded in the Bible deal with money and possessions? Jesus obviously felt that we needed help and guidance in this area. Could it be because money and possessions are so often used by Satan to distract us from the things that have eternal value?

But our journey will explore so much more than money and possessions, because stewardship is about so much more than that. In seeking to serve God's kingdom, we become His servants -- His stewards; stewards of His truth; stewards of His Word; stewards of our lives; stewards of our service;

stewards of our relationships; stewards of our bodies; and stewards of His creation. From the moment we answered His call to a life of service in His Kingdom, we began a journey of stewardship. We have become managers in the Kingdom.

If we look at Jesus' ministry here on earth we see that He spent most of his time in the marketplace, as do we. Of His 132 appearances in the NT over 120 of them are in the marketplace and almost all of His parables were built around marketplace examples. So let's begin our stewardship journey with an examination of our role as managers and leaders in the workplace.

Stewardship in my business

Over the years I believe that I have grown in my understanding of what God expects of me as a business leader and some of that clearly has to do with decisions in financial matters. But God has also shown me much more in the area of personal integrity and managing and leading people.

Sometimes we as hard driving type "A" leaders feel the need to be right over the need to do the right thing. We mistakenly think we will be respected if we are right all the time -- or at least perceive that we are right. I cannot claim to have been perfect in this area, but I sure did try as God convicted me and I believe I grew in my understanding and application. Allow me to share a couple of stories to illustrate.

I made it a point of company pride that our suppliers could say that no one paid their bills quicker than we did.

Before I hired a Chartered Accountant as my controller, one day each week our payroll clerk would pay all the invoices for the week. Shortly after hiring this new accountant I received a call from a good supplier asking if we were having cash flow problems. The answer was no and when I asked him what the basis for his question was, he informed me that recently we hadn't been paying our bills in a timely manner. My new controller explained that he was simply following standard accounting principles. I quickly explained our beliefs and practices and from that point forward he complied with our standard principles. If someone supplied us with goods and services in a timely manner, we felt they deserved to be paid in a timely manner (Matthew 7:12).

The area of people management and servant leadership was something I had to grow into and regularly seek God's help and direction. One of the lessons God taught me was that employees' personal problems did not stop at the front door of our office. Over the years, I had been ready to terminate employees based on things like consistent lateness, lack of work ethic (sometimes perceived, sometimes real) and many other very appropriate and justifiable reasons. Some of these people were Christians who I felt should be producing better and modeling good employee behaviour. I thank God that I had leaders who were close enough to the people and cared enough to be able to uncover some very ugly realities -- some of these employees were dealing with very serious life issues such as spousal illnesses, spousal abuse, and children on drugs and in trouble with the authorities. Instead of terminating, we were able to take action that resulted in some very changed lives and circumstances; marriages healed, families given a second chance at wholeness and many other situations. I believe God is honoured when we act out of love and care instead of expediency and economic interests. And the interesting thing is that the short term cost and pain to come alongside these people and really lend a helping hand was more than compensated for by the goodwill this created and the employees who became very engaged in our success -- those who benefited from our actions and those watching from a distance.

Another thing I learned was that by investing in our people, we invested in the business. For years I tried to get an employee suggestion program going with very limited success. Then we implemented the "Killing the Sacred Cow" program. Without going into detail about the program, let me just say that this employee suggestion program was wildly successful, in part because it was innovative and fun, but primarily because the program itself was created and executed by the employees including the measuring and judging of the submissions. And we never ran out of suggestions; as a matter of fact, the list kept growing and the caliber of recommendations was extraordinary. This is what it means to empower your employees. Give them the authority and resources to impact their everyday work lives and they will do more than you could ever imagine and we will all win.

Somewhere along this journey we produced some mugs as gifts -- for our employees. Many companies have coffee mug giveaways for their clients, but we had these specifically designed for our employees. Along with our logo, printed on the mugs was the following:

Each person is a created being of infinite value and worth our time and commitment to help them develop to their full potential.

I began to understand the awesome responsibility and incredible opportunity that leaders have to influence and impact people's lives by our actions and our care. I believe God was teaching me about relationship stewardship.

*Following a successful career in the Financial Services industry, Lorne Jackson left full time corporate work in September 2001 and devotes his time to charitable causes, leadership development and public speaking. He is one of the founding members of the Canadian National Christian Foundation (CNCF) and since its inception has served as President. In that role, Lorne interacts with Christian donors, financial advisors, and leaders in church and ministry organizations in an effort to encourage, empower and equip God's stewards towards a better understanding and living out of Christ-centered stewardship. He also serves on several other non-profit and charitable boards. This article is based on excerpts from his book, *After the Faith Decision*, available at www.cncf.ca*