

## An Old, Old Story

The other day a member of the congregation I belong to stopped me and said I have a book that I found in a pile of old library books that was written on stewardship years ago, do you want to read it? Certainly, I said, thinking I would probably never get the time but it was a nice gesture. It lay on my table for about a month and one day when I didn't have anything too pressing, I picked it up and browsed through it. Written and published in 1929, it was a Handbook for Stewardship to be used by congregations planning the coming year's activities.

As I read through this little handbook it became very clear the more I read that the description of the attitude of the congregation toward giving and the reputation stewardship had among most Christians at that time was a mirror image of what we see today. It explained that even though stewardship and a good steward should be continued to be taught as "one that uses all the gifts of God in a way which is pleasing to the Lord, it requires each gift to be used to advance the cause of God in the hearts of men." "The term stewardship" it continued, "in its most comprehensive sense, includes practically everything in the Christian life; the responsibility for the stewardship of time, talent, prayer and one's influence. Sometimes the church leaders have magnified the comprehensive use of the word stewardship in order to present with less offense a consideration of the stewardship of material possessions, but the average layman who hears that word stewardship thinks of money immediately."

Time hasn't changed that factor one little bit and if we went back two thousand years to the time when Christ was walking the earth and preaching --- it would be the same. There has always been an inordinate focus on the "goodies" of life and the money it takes to acquire them. As I read on it explained how "this focus on material things has created a great divide between where we are as Christians and where we should be, and was getting greater with time". I wonder what they would have thought if they had lived long enough to see today's culture and how deep that divide has taken us.

All in all, it was an interesting read and it was amazing how close to where we are today in stewardship activities and attitudes right down to a description of a collection of commitments named Consecration Day! The only thing different in what some are doing today and what they described 79 years ago is that the word Day is now Sunday! Can it be that what worked 79 years ago to motivate and inspire people to give that were driving Model T's and just getting their first telephones, also works today with people who are driving SUV's and carry their cell phones with them? Maybe we need to take another look.

The challenge hasn't changed in 2,000 years, but the people we are trying to motivate have! The Bible and our religious purposes and missions haven't changed, but the demands and psyche of the people we are trying motivate to accomplish those purposes and missions --- have! Do we need to retool our approaches and rethink our strategies to inspire true stewardship?

No, I don't think so. The Good News of Jesus Christ is still the best story ever told and it's meaning to every Christian can't be more clear! We just have to make sure we keep telling that story and make sure that they are getting the message! And that's just good stewardship!