

Raising faith in

The Backyard

with a passion for generous stewardship ■ July 2010

What is stewardship? Simply stated, stewardship is using the gifts God has given us to do the things God asks (calls!) us to do.

Stewardship of time: The secret to time management is not learning how to save time or to get more of it; the secret is knowing how to use it.

Contentment is not the fulfillment of what you want, but the realization of how much you already have.

Christian giving is the normal, steady, increasing outflow of the Christian life.

"I have held many things in my hand, and have lost them all; but whatever I have placed in God's hands that I still possess." - Martin Luther

Have you ever heard anyone say: "My church is always asking for money. I wish I could belong to a church that never needed any money."

Surely they don't mean that. Any church that is alive needs money. Only dead churches do not call on their members for support. If anyone should accuse your church of always needing and calling for money, regard it as a compliment. Invite this person to rejoice with you that you both belong to something that is living and productive for Jesus Christ rather than a dead, stagnant organization from which glory of Christ has departed.

Years ago, Chinese farmers decided they would eat the good big potatoes and just use the small ones

for seed. A new understanding of the laws of life came to them when, through the years during which they kept up the practice, nature reduced all their potatoes to the size of marbles! Those farmers learned through bitter experience that they could not keep the best things of life for themselves and use the leftovers for seed. The laws of life decreed that the harvest would reflect the planting.

"Planting small potatoes" still is common practice. Too many folks take all the big things of life for themselves and plant only the leftovers. They expect that by some crazy twist of the laws of nature their selfishness will reward them with blessings.

William Carey, the cobbler-turned-missionary, gave \$499,000 to missions during his years as a servant of the Lord in India. How did he do it? Carey went to the mission field with a salary of \$250 a year. While in India he was hired by the government to teach in a university at \$7,500 a year. Carey continued to live on \$250, giving the rest to the work of the Lord.

As a youth John Wesley began working for \$150 a year. He gave \$10 to the Lord. His salary was doubled the second year, but Wesley continued to live on \$140, giving \$160 to Christian work. During his third year, Wesley received \$600. He kept \$140 while \$460 were given to the Lord.

"A religion that gives nothing, costs nothing, and suffers nothing, is worth nothing." - Martin Luther

Noisy Offering July 18

Northwest Assistance Ministries Back to School Drive

This month we are supporting NAM's Back to School Drive. Northwest Assistance Ministries (NAM) is seeking cash donations to provide needy children with basic school supplies and clothing to help prepare them for school in the fall. Last year, NAM helped over 2,200 students from the Spring, Klein, Aldine and Cy-Fair school districts. More than 80 percent of Aldine Independent School District students, over 65 percent of Spring ISD students, 35 percent of Cy-Fair and 31 percent of Klein ISD students are economically disadvantaged, according to Texas Education Agency reports. For young people to start this school year feeling good about themselves and ready to learn, they need the required school supplies and clothing.

A donation of \$55 provides supplies, clothing and shoes for one student. Supplies and clothing vouchers will be distributed to pre-screened families. Donations will help make a difference in the lives of area children in need, and there is no shortage of need. Last year Hosanna provided funds to assist 12 children. Let's help 15 (or more) children this year!



So save your spare change and extra dollars for Sunday, July 18 to support NAM's Back to School Drive.

Make some noise, and make a difference in the World!

EIGHT REASONS NOT TO MAKE YOUR HOUSE PAYMENT

- 1. The only time I ever hear from the bank is when they want money. They never pay attention to my other needs.**
 - 2. I'm upset at the bank president. He said some things I don't agree with.**
 - 3. That house payment is a tenth of my income. That's a whole lot more than I can really afford.**
 - 4. I'll give them what I can every month. But I don't want to make any long-range promises.**
 - 5. We went on vacation last month. The bank will have to wait while we catch up on other bills.**
 - 6. I'll support the bank with my prayers. That ought to do more good than my measly little payment.**
 - 7. The bank spends too much money on itself. When it starts giving more away, then I'll start making house payments again.**
 - 8. The bank has a lot of rich customers. It can get along fine without my little payment.**
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Did you know?

Two-thirds of Jesus' parables have to do with our possessions. In the four gospels, there are 500 verses on prayer, 500 on faith and 2,000 on things we accumulate. 1 out of 7 verses deals with giving or sharing with the world.



Let the Music Play

Let us float away on wings of sound,
Untie the knots that hold us down,
Let us fill our hearts and souls and minds
With the sweetest music we can find.
Make images within the tone
Be drawn up gently in a cone
Of colored light and crystal throats
Let the music swell and grandly roar,
Of our attention and affection,
Locking out past recollection.
Longer, stronger, louder rages,
Pay the Piper for his tunes.
Relax, relax. All too soon.
The throbbing sounds recede once more,
Explore the world of sound in action.
Feel the pulsing in the veins,
Enjoy the peace which still remains.

Angela Sturm
Stürm und Dräng
(German, "storm and stress")

Glimpses of Grace 2010

Year-to-Date

Through June 30:

World Hunger	\$56.00
African Initiative	\$1,090.00
Buffalo Wings Fundraiser	\$1,071.23
Mulkey Endowment Fundraiser	\$4,209.00
Rachel's Day	\$170.00
Benevolence	\$11,917.17
Helping Hands	\$1,095.00
Mulkey Endowment Fund	\$4,559.00
Haiti Earthquake Relief	\$1,384.77
Souper Bowl of Caring	\$406.00
Chile Earthquake Relief	\$250.00

Mission of the Month Gifts:

January —ELCA Microloans	\$644.54
February —Haiti Earthquake Relief	\$684.77
March —Lutherhill	\$819.10
April —Ron and Heda Christ's Botswana Mission	\$740.00
May —Habitat for Humanity NW Houston	\$1,394.92
June —WomenCraft	\$657.83

Helping Hands

January: Two families received money for rent assistance; Four individuals received items from the food pantry.
February: Five individuals received items from the food pantry.
March: Seven individuals received food. Five received financial aid.
April: Five individuals received food. Four received financial aid.
May: Five individuals received food. Five received financial aid.
June: Eleven families received items from the food pantry.
Helping Hands Fund balance on hand: \$1,383.21

Through the Back Gate

The Kindness of Strangers

- Bishop Michael Rinehart

After a battery of meetings in Louisiana, I left Mandeville for the airport in New Orleans. To get there I have to cross the 20-mile bridge across Lake Pontchartrain, a \$3 toll, cash. I always forget this.

As I approach the toll booth I panick. I've cut it too close. I rifle my bags and pockets for change. Nada. I'm ready to throw myself on the mercy of the court.

"Three dollars," the toll booth lady says.

"Do you take credit cards?"

"No. Cash only."

"I don't have cash."

"There's an ATM one mile back." Her look says, "Don't mess with me."

Per her directions I turn around on the service road. The bank probably makes a mint off this ATM. Reaching for my wallet I realize I have only a credit card. I left my ATM card at my sister's place. A real dilemma. I can't cross the lake. I laugh out loud at the absurdity of the situation.

It's 7:30 AM. I don't want to show up on somebody's doorstep, begging for three dollars. My hosts in Mandeville, the Ehrhardts, live about 10 minutes back. I can go there but I'll lose 20 minutes. I'll miss my flight. The only solution ... beg for money from the nearest stranger. I'm not sure what to say. What will lower defenses? I'll have to take my best shot.

At the first gas station is a battered pickup. The driver, a man with gray moustache and dressed in camouflage, is chewing tobacco. Probably a hunter. I approach the vehicle. I look acceptable in khaki pants, blue dress shirt and navy blue blazer. At first he looks a bit startled, then he smiles. I relax and share my dilemma, offering to buy his gas for whatever cash he can scrounge up. I try not to look anxious or hurried, though I am both.

After a bit, he asks, "How much do you need?"

"Uh, three dollars."

"That all? Three bucks?"

"Yes sir."

"Are you sure you don't need more?"

"No sir. Three dollars gets me across the lake."

"Well, how 'bout I just give you three dollars?"

"That would be lovely," I squeak out with embarrassment. I hate being needy. I sense this is good for me. A learning moment. To be dependent.

He reaches for his wallet. He has only five one-dollar bills and gives me three of them. I don't know what to say.

"Thank you. What's your name?"

"Cliff."

"My name's Mike. It's nice to meet you. Thanks for your help."

"How do you like your Jeep?"

"Oh, it's a rental. To be honest it's kind of noisy."

We chat a bit more. I didn't want to be rude – take his money and run – but I need to get to the airport.

I disappeared into my noisy Jeep, certain that I'd never see Cliff again. I can't pay him back. I owe this kind stranger \$3. More really.

I didn't listen compassionately. I didn't tell him about Jesus or suggest Hosanna Lutheran Church up the road in Mandeville. I know nothing about him but his generosity. I gave nothing in return. It bothers me.

I've never been hungry a day in my life. When I came out of seminary owning nothing but clothes and a car, owing thousands in school loans, I still had everything, plus a good education. Living in this country we have much to be thankful for. To whom much is given, much is required. It's funny that no matter where you are in your life, at some point you will find yourself relying on the kindness of strangers.

Before the advent of modern hotels, travelers and refugees were absolutely dependent on the kindness of strangers. Hospitality, welcoming strangers and aliens was a sacred duty. The Scriptures are filled with commandments about this that we Westerners ignore. Antiquity left us stories of divine visitors that came and either were rejected or found welcome: Abraham and the three men at Mamre; Jesus offered hospitality at Emmaus; Mary, Martha and Lazarus welcoming Jesus into their home in Bethany; Mary opening her heart to a messenger named Gabriel at Nazareth...

"Never refuse hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unaware." Hebrews 13:2