



The Good Steward

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Everything, but the Angel

It is said that long ago a great sculptor unveiled his latest work to a large crowd. With a flourish he swept off the cover, revealing an angel, which would be one of many in the church where it was to be placed. But what an angel! There was no wind in the sculptor's shop, yet this angel's wings seemed to be spreading to take flight. Marble can neither speak nor move, yet this angel's mouth appeared to bless, its hands to fold in prayer.

The audience burst into applause. One person dared to ask, "How do you do it?" The sculptor said, "I simply carved away everything except the angel."

"Everything except the angel"...it seems like a joke, but it's not... great sculptors have this gift, to see the figure that already exists within the material, and then use tools to remove what is extra, freeing the masterpiece.

As the Creator, God is the great Artist. Also, God sees all the art that has ever been, and ever will be. By commanding us to be stewards, God tells us to become artists too, of our own souls.

Instead of a hammer and chisel, our tool is giving. Every time we give money to the church, it's like carving away a bit of "marble" to reveal more of our Christian nature. Every hour helping in a food pantry, teaching Sunday school, singing in a choir, and so on, does the same.

Our hands may lack the sculptor's skill, but through Christian stewardship, we can make our lives more beautiful than any statue. Used with permission by Parish Publishing, LLC, New Canaan, CT 06840

The Secret of Handling Money

A wise man named Sydney Harris made this insightful comment about money: "Money," he said, "just like fire, is a splendid servant but a ruthless master. If you cannot control it, it can ruin you." Knowing how to deal with money obviously does not come with birth. It must be learned. It takes prayer, effort, a strong will that repels foolish temptations, and it takes thoughtfulness. Unfortunately, countless people do not heed the necessary lessons.

There was a man who labored diligently to make a million dollars. When he achieved his goal, his relatives proudly announced that the man was a certified millionaire. The man threw back his shoulders with pride, almost arrogance. Money was his servant, he believed. But, sad to say, the man did not invest wisely. A recession diminished his fortune. One of his sons got into trouble requiring a large sum to be bailed out. The man had retired early and now he needed to go to work again. Money was not a servant, it was a master demanding his time, energy and worry. It was a demanding, ruthless master.

Many Christians have learned the secret of handling money by allowing God to direct them in the matter. Such people have discovered that when God and God's mission are put first...before any else...one is compelled to plan wisely, budget carefully, buy frugally, save regularly and invest only in that which they pray God would approve.

Those who, with God's guidance, plan their financial affairs carefully, then carry out that plan, will find that money becomes their splendid servant and not a ruthless master. They will discover freedom from financial pressures and joy in being good stewards of the benefits which they, by God's grace, often find coming their way. C. Ferrell Used with permission by Parish Publishing, LLC, New Canaan, CT 06840

Stewardship Office
Diocese of Crookston
PO Box 610
Crookston, MN 56716



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Theology in the trenches - Shopping at the five and dime by Kathleen Kjolhaug

Those were the days, alright; 10 cents could buy a bright orange bouncing ball that filled my fist. What more could you ask for when you are 8, or 9 or 10 years old? However, I could never understand why some of the things inside were marked 29 cents or more if indeed it truly was a five and dime store!

The aisles roamed brought hours of pleasure and though it wasn't Macy's Department Store, it was equally adventuresome. There were the candy cubbies that held the 1-cent treats. There were the make-up bins that offered the round cardboard holders of facial powder. There were white glass jars of scented creams. And there was an affordable section of heart-shaped bottles of Blue Waltz perfume with tiny black lids. One still graces my medicine cabinet, just for fun. Nearly every Friday night, I would make my way downtown to browse the five and dime while the red popcorn wagon stood serenely in its place awaiting my order of a 10-cent bag of popped corn. However, with all the treasures lying in wait within the store, it was the rumor of the owner being an incredible gift-giver that sticks most in my mind.

Rumor had it the owner's nephew would be invited in on his birthday to pick out anything in the whole store for free. Now mind you, this nephew was only a year younger than me and my brother was his best friend. So you see, it simply had to be true. Often I would pass through those aisles and pretend I was that nephew.

I grew up but apparently parts of me hadn't because one day my hubby came home with a gift certificate earned from a sales promotion. I was thrilled! It was for a large department store and we would have to drive to the big city several hours away in order to spend it. Our kids were ages 8, or 9 or 10 and big enough to be a dreamer at the five and dime. That's when I came up with the idea.

"Hey, just for fun, let's give them each \$50 and let them spend it on anything they want. And for some odd reason he agreed. Perhaps it was the lilt in my voice he so desired to please or perhaps he caught the drift of childhood dreams never met but whatever the reason, he agreed and I was excited!

We planned our family outing and the afternoon adventure with the children. Driving the long distance was the first clue something might be a bit overwhelming for the young ones and once arriving, the second clue might have been it just didn't hold their interest. Trying to accomplish the task of actually spending money they hadn't earned and gathering more junk to pick up once they arrived home, just wasn't all that appealing. It a day and age of stuff, stuff, stuff they just didn't have the gleam in their eyes a child once had 40 years ago dreaming of spending a wad at the five and dime.

I can't begin to tell you what treasures they picked out that day. The only recollection I have is of one crying in the grocery cart wanting to go home, another having a meltdown with the decision-making process and me trying to chide them into thinking this was actually fun. It wasn't.

Dear Lord, You are the one who said, "Where your treasure is there will your heart be also." Gathering stuff is just too easy to do nowadays. Seems like that which we have is not what we need. Help us to gather hearts full of things that aren't measured in monetary worth. Please put those desires within so our hearts are where you desire them to be. Amen. Used with permission.