

TRANSFORMATIONAL *Stewardship*



by Bill Meaïse

Introduction

Upon hearing the word “stewardship,” many parishioners reach for their wallets, checkbooks or debit cards (depending on their generation) to financially support church ministries. In the secular arena, people refer to responsible citizenship when giving time and resources to various non-profit causes. The reality is stewardship represents a transformational Biblical principle that provides individuals and organizations the impetus for growth well beyond their own potential.

Stewardship involves living for a higher, broader purpose to foster a greater, lasting outcome. A narrow view implies the

completion of an obligation to fulfill a specific expectation. The broader perspective creates results that exceed expectations. Ultimately, stewardship involves people giving their lives to God for outcomes greater than their capabilities, larger than their footprints and lasting longer than their lifetimes.

Stewardship in Context

The traditional American dream reflects stewardship by providing the next generation of our families with better opportunities for success. Parents enable these opportunities by providing a better education, breaking destructive behavioral cycles or leaving a stronger balance sheet.

My generation was the first on both sides of our family to attend college. Despite no precedents, my parents unequivocally planned for my brother and me to earn a college degree. Their personal sacrifices enabled our college graduation, meaningful business careers and better opportunities for our families. For the American dream to continue, people need to nurture steward within the families.

Private and public organizations generate value by using stewardship to facilitate strong financial performance, meaningful employee engagement and impactful community service. For example, global consultancy Accenture's core values include stewardship defined as: "Fulfilling our obligation of building a better, stronger and more durable company for future generations, protecting the Accenture brand, meeting our commitments to stakeholders, acting with an owner mentality, developing our people and helping improve communities and the global environment."

As an Accenture employee for almost 34 years, I experienced the influence of stewardship on the mindset of this organization. Accenture's leadership and employees have always discussed the importance of leaving the company in better shape than when they started. While the manifestations of stewardship may differ by individual, this core value has created a unique and bonding culture across Accenture's global operations and generations of employees.

The Bible articulates the true expectations for stewardship in our lives. Stewardship involves faithful tithing as specified in the Old Testament (Malachi 3:10) and purpose-driven, cheerful giving as described in the New Testament (II Corinthians 9:7).

Limiting stewardship to monetary matters, however, narrows its potential for changing lives. Giving all aspects of our life to Jesus Christ empowers the full potential of stewardship by acknowledging all we have comes from and belongs to God.

Since making this decision as a teenager, I have experienced the power of stewardship by seeking His purpose (Colossians 3:17), His plans (Jeremiah 29:11) and His desires (Galatians 2:20) for my life. Despite my personal shortcomings, the opportunities and accomplishments God has provided have exceeded all my own aspirations, and I remain confident the best is yet to come (Philippians 1:6).

Stewardship Mandates

Stewardship seeks opportunities not entitlements - a privilege not a right.

This mindset embraces fulfillment of potential versus satisfaction of the status quo. Craig Biggio exemplifies this stewardship quality. After making the 1991 All-Star team as a catcher, the Houston Astros asked Craig to change positions. Accepting this challenge, Craig became an All-Star as a second baseman

six out of seven years beginning in 1992. At the request of the Astros, Craig also played centerfield during 2003-04 to increase the team's chance for winning before finishing his career in 2007 having played his entire career in Houston. Craig demonstrated stewardship by placing team success above his own and leaving a legacy for future generations of Astros as a Hall of Fame inductee.

Stewardship views risk as an investment not an expense - value versus cost.

This focus emphasizes a long-term perspective rather than short-term fears. For instance, the investment horizon for oil and gas companies can approach 10+ years. While short-term market factors may adversely impact annual capital expenditures, their commitment to the long-term remains steadfast.

The Bible also illustrates this point with a man who entrusted his servants with specific monetary amounts before departing on a trip giving one ten talents, another five talents and a third one talent.

When he returned, this man met with his servants to review the status of their investments. The servants with ten and five talents both had doubled their original amounts, but the servant with one

talent had done nothing for fear of losing it. This servant still lost his talent as the man gave it to the one who originally had ten (Matthew 25:14-30). For Christians, the long-term returns of stewardship last for eternity.

Stewardship requires an ownership mentality that creates a strong sense of responsibility and accountability.

Human nature often causes people to care less for items they rent versus own. Reliable stewards treat the possessions of others with the same diligence as their own. As an example, consultants who excel at Accenture develop a strong client perspective by learning all aspects of the company and its industry - as if an owner. By identifying key value levers and challenges, these consultants can shape opportunities to optimize their client's business performance. While balancing the interests of both parties, this approach assumes delivering value for the client will also benefit Accenture by creating a trusted, long-term relationship and a stronger economic proposition. In the same way, placing the interests of God ahead of our own results in a stronger commitment and a greater impact than if we pursue only our own desires.

Stewardship realizes influence proves more effective than authority.

Influence involves demonstrated capability and established credibility resulting in trusting relationships. These relationships provide the basis for influence. Expanding spheres of influence proves more important as careers progress because organizations often expect people to deliver results beyond their level of authority.

During my tenure with Accenture, I served in numerous internal roles - some empowered with “line” authority while others relied on personal influence. In addition, clients rarely empowered me with the authority to meet their full expectations. Effective influence demonstrates a “solve for Accenture (or client) first” mindset above personal interests. Consistently showing this mentality builds trusts enabling influence to grow over time. In fact, most leaders prefer to affect change through influence rather than authority to foster faster and broader acceptance within the organization. Christian stewardship often leverages the influence of the Holy Spirit to present opportunities and resolve circumstances through various “coincidences” in our lives.

Stewardship focuses on motivation more than circumstances.

Successful people seek to fulfill high expectations – pursue a mission versus complete a task. These expectations enable a positive attitude despite periodic challenges. Playing nineteen years for the Chicago Cubs, Ernie Banks experienced only six winning seasons and holds the record for the most games played without a postseason appearance. Despite this lack of team success, Ernie earned two National League Most Valuable Player awards, played in fourteen All-Star games and became a Hall of Fame inductee. Ernie also displayed an ever optimistic attitude exemplified by his infamous line of “let’s play two” and received the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2013. Similarly, Christian missionaries demonstrate stewardship by submitting their lives to sacrificial service often under

difficult and challenging circumstances receiving the joy of the Lord rather than the accolades of this world.

Measures of Stewardship

You get what you measure. This adage stresses the importance of defining and assessing effective metrics to facilitate desired results. The following measures provide evidence of stewardship:

Confidence - involves how (tone) and what (content) we say.

Credibility - demonstrates alignment between what we do versus what we say.

Respect - reflects the attitude that the ends do not justify the means.

Trust - reflects our motives reiterating why we do something is more important than what we do.

Patience - shows maturity to wait for right outcomes in a world demanding instant gratification.

Commitment - maintains focus on purpose despite obstacles and challenges.

The life of Joseph illustrates these measures of stewardship. His sense of God’s calling through dreams served as Joseph’s source of confidence as a young boy. These dreams alienated him from his brothers who sold Joseph to an Egyptian caravan. Arriving in Egypt, Joseph displayed credibility by refusing the seduction of Potiphar’s wife. Despite his loyalty, Potiphar

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imprisoned Joseph after his wife's false accusations of sexual misconduct.

While in prison, Joseph demonstrated patience by serving the chief jailer and accurately interpreting dreams for Pharaoh's imprisoned baker and cupbearer. Several years later Pharaoh could not find someone to interpret his dreams until the cupbearer remembered Joseph. Through his professed reliance on God for his divine discernment of dreams, Joseph earned the respect and trust of Pharaoh who granted him authority over all of Egypt.

When the sons of Jacob came to Egypt seeking grain during the seven years of famine, Joseph recognized the fulfillment of his commitment. While the actions of his brothers resulted from evil, God transformed their actions for good by placing Joseph in a position to save his family.

Implementing the Stewardship Mandates

Defining a strategy or designing a concept can present some challenges; however, the implementation phase often proves more difficult as theory and assumptions collide with reality. In the same way, discussing stewardship is easier than demonstrating stewardship.

Nehemiah illustrated several principles for effectively implementing stewardship while leading the Jewish people to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem:

Establish stewardship as a core value.

This step aligns aspirations and expectations with mindsets and behaviors. The sense of a higher purpose creates a mission with a larger and longer lasting impact. Stewardship facilitates a calling that requires dependency on God for success.

While holding an important position and living hundreds of miles away in Persia, Nehemiah sensed God's calling to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Despite the magnitude and risk, Nehemiah answered this calling by seeking and relying on God to secure the sponsorship of the Persian king for safe travel and resources.

Empower stewardship through servant leadership.

Solving for a broader purpose ahead of personal gain unleashes the power of stewardship. Servant leaders facilitate the growth of others by removing obstacles to their success. This process reinforces the value of stewardship among others and shares the fruits of success accordingly.

Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem with no fanfare and maintained a low profile while assessing the situation. His approach enhanced the preparation for rebuilding the walls while also confirming the nature of his motives. Recognizing his higher sense of calling, the people accepted the challenge presented by Nehemiah.

Encourage stewardship among others.

Sharing common aspirations creates synergy resulting in joint outcomes that exceed the sum of individual ones. When aspirations involve a unified faith in God, stewardship becomes an evangelistic agent permeating lives to overcome challenges and delivering supernatural results.

Amidst ridicule and threats, the Jews began to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Nehemiah continuously encouraged everyone while adapting tactics to offset the opposition. Completing the rebuilding process in fifty-two days exceeded the expectations and capabilities of the people who heeded God's leadership and leveraged Nehemiah's stewardship.

Conclusion

Stewardship involves living for a higher, broader purpose to foster a greater, lasting outcome. As the ultimate example of stewardship, a king vacated his throne to reside among his subjects for the purpose of giving them a better life. Through this

experience, the king disguised his identity and relinquished his privileges. The people did not recognize him and rejected his approach for a better life. Their rejection became hostile, resulting in humiliation, suffering and eventually a cruel,

horrific death.

The people, however, did not realize his death was part of the plan. In fact, his sacrifice and subsequent resurrection empowered forgiveness for their rejection and created hope of an everlasting legacy. The name of this king is Jesus Christ. Accepting His stewardship transforms our lives for the day when every knee will bow before him and every tongue will confess his identity (Philippians 2: 3-11). The reality of His stewardship makes the potential for our stewardship a reality.

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About the Author



Bill Mearse was Chief Operating Officer for Accenture's Resources business and Senior Managing Director of its Houston office until his retirement in November 2013. During his 33 years with Accenture, Bill served in several roles and worked with numerous clients on a global basis to deliver valued business outcomes. Since

his retirement, Bill participates in private investments for entrepreneurial companies seeking high growth opportunities and serves as a volunteer in various capacities at Baylor University, Houston Baptist University, and Baylor College of Medicine. Bill holds a BBA (with honors) and MBA degrees from Baylor University.