

# Thoughts on Stewardship

by **Bishop Kenneth Untener**

This is Bishop Untener, and I'm going to spend few minutes talking about stewardship.

What I'm going to do is look at the meaning of three words and, I hope, it will help all of us see some things us in a new light.

"Stewardship"

The first word is "stewardship" . . . and the first thing to say is that "stewardship" is not a "Protestant" word, or even a "church" word. It's a word taken from the Gospels, and not just from the Gospels, but from the lips of Jesus. This is what Jesus says in Luke's Gospel:

"A rich man had a steward who was reported to him for squandering his property. He summoned him and said, 'What is this I hear about you? Prepare a full account of your stewardship, because you can no longer be my steward.'" (16:1-2)

The Gospels were written in Greek, and the English words "steward" and "stewardship" are used to translate a Greek word that means to administer what belongs to someone else.

Nowadays we might use a term like "money-manager." When a person gives their savings over to a money-manager, it's clear who owns what. The money doesn't belong to the money-manager, it is entrusted to them. They may get some of it - their fee - but the money belongs to the person who gave them the money. Imagine how off-base it would be if a money-manager took all the money and acted as though it belonged to them to spend as they alone wished to spend it.

That is the key: a steward is the "ward" of what belongs to someone else.

Stewardship is not about occasional acts of generosity, or now and then making contributions to good causes. It's not even about money - it goes deeper than that. The core of stewardship is seeing things differently . . . seeing everything with new eyes.

It's not complicated. We simply realize that everything we have - our existence, our life, our goods no matter how we got them - all come from God and belong to God, and we are stewards of all this. Once we see it that way, we live it that way - we try to administer well God's goods on behalf of God. That's what stewardship is.

When we die, God will ask us, "Well, how did you do in administering everything I gave you?" Imagine how off-base it would be if it turns out we spent our whole life thinking all these things belonged to us.

Generosity

Our next word is "generosity."

It's an interesting word, "generosity". It comes from the Latin word "birth," and at its root it means "someone of noble birth". It can, without us intending it, carry the implication of bestowing some of our own riches on other people.

Now that is not all bad, but what we need to do is move beyond generosity - as though we were giving away what rightfully belongs to us by birth or however we got it. What we all need to do is go beyond generosity and arrive at stewardship - the realization that it all belongs to God, no matter how we got it, and we are administering it on God's behalf.

"Greed"

Finally, I want to take a look at one more word: "greed". This is another word that is on the lips of Jesus. In Luke's Gospel Jesus says, "Take care to guard against all greed, for though one may be rich, one's life does not consist of possessions." (12:15)

Remember, all four Gospels were written in Greek. The Greek word for "greed" is "pleonexia" . . . from the Greek word "pleo" which means "more" and the word "nexia" which means "to want." Greed is literally "to want more."

Now, there is what I would call "raw greed" - always wanting to get more and more. I doubt that any of us fall into that category. But there is a more subtle kind of greed - not so much wanting to get more, but rather to keep more. We want to keep too much of what we have as though it all belonged to us.

A few days ago I stumbled on something interesting. That Greek word for "greed" - pleonexia - is used as a modern medical term. In medicine, "pleonexia" means a pathological condition of the blood. The blood receives oxygen from our lungs, and when the blood has pleonexia, it keeps most of the oxygen for itself rather than distributing it to the tissues of the body.

This is a perfect image of what can so easily happen to us. We can make the mistake of thinking that what we have - our time, talent, material goods - belong to us and are for us to do whatever we wish. We make the same mistake the blood makes when the blood forgets that it is a steward of the oxygen and ends up keeping too much for itself.

A Closing Thought

That's enough Greek for one day, and that's the end of our study of words. We close where we began . . . with the good word "stewardship," from the lips of Jesus.

Stewardship is a different way of looking at things and when we see the world this way, a certain peace of mind comes over us, a great sigh of relief, a deep down happiness that is worth more than money could buy. "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it." What a great way to live.