

Spiritual Stewardship

an alternative
to the error of
ownership

Richard M. Eyre

Other books by Richard M. Eyre:

Spiritual Serendipity

Teaching Your Children Values

Don't Just Do Something, Sit There

*Lifebalance**

The Wrappings and the Gifts

What Manner of Man

The Second Rings

3 Steps to a Strong Family

Children Stories to Teach Joy

The Awakening (a novel)

*The Birth That We Call Death**

*Teaching Children Joy**

*Teaching Children Responsibility**

*Teaching Children Charity**

*Teaching Children Sensitivity**

The Secret of the Sabbath

Alexander's Amazing Adventures (children's tapes on values)

**Co-authored with Linda Eyre*

Definitions

Ownership: The mistaken notion that things belong to us.

Stewardship: The more accurate attitude that things pass through our hands, that we are caretakers or stewards over them for a time.

Spiritual

Stewardship: The pure, powerful perception that everything belongs to God, that true joy comes in magnifying and serving with what He gives us.

Dear Reader,

Those who know me or know my books are aware of my interest in (some would say obsession with) the word *joy*. For as long as I can remember, it has been my favorite word. I've tried to write about what it is, how to pursue it and how to teach it to children. (We even named one of *our* children *Joy*.)

I always knew that joy was not just luck, that it was something to be worked for. But eventually I decided that joy was not merely the product of some conscious formula or the end result of some multi-ingredient recipe. Rather, I came to feel that it was precipitated by an *attitude*. I found a name for the attitude I felt led to joy, and emerged with a second favorite word -- *serendipity* -- which means "a state of mind in which we are aware enough and in tune enough to discover something good while seeking something else." To one with an attitude of spiritual serendipity, life becomes an exciting adventure of finding joy through discovering God's goodness and God's will. I wrote *Spiritual Serendipity*, the companion volume to this book, as a personal prescription for joy (and of course we also have a child named *Saren*).

Somewhere along the way I began to feel that the spiritual guidance attitude of serendipity needed a closely linked quality of spiritual responsibility to become a complete attitude of joy. *Stewardship* became my third favorite word. (By this point we had run out of children to name, so we don't have one called Steward. Maybe a grandchild, someday.)

Spiritual stewardship, for me personally, and for my family, has become a way of looking at everything -- a way that has increased peace and enhanced joy. The word or the concept is like a *lens*. It turns things into a new focus and causes me to see them in a completely different context, to see them as they really are, and sometimes even to glimpse them as God would wish

them to be.

The Apostle John admonished us to “know the truth” and promised that “the truth shall make you free.” There is great freedom in the truth of stewardship. Once we mentally release ourselves from the burden, the inaccuracy, and the “prematurity” of *ownership*, we lighten and enlighten ourselves.

For me, life is a question, and stewardship is a new answer, or at least a new way to grasp and pull together and use the oldest eternal answers.

Richard Eyre
Piea, Maui, 1998

P.S. I’ve tried to “get at” stewardship from as many angles as possible . . . by using fiction, prose, poetry, quotations, and some other styles that I don’t have names for. I’m also rather liberal about punctuation. I like ellipses (. . .) and dashes (--). They seem to make some kinds of writing flow more like open conversation between friends.

Warning:

Be careful about getting into this book. Be warned. It is not written to amuse or entertain you. It seeks to do nothing less than to change the way you think about everything in your life. It encourages you to move away from materialism, and from many kinds of ambition, aggression, and accumulation. And it challenges you to seek fewer worldly treasures and more hidden treasures, less complexity and more simplicity, less quantity and more quality, less self-confidence and more faith.

Overture

The False Goals of Control, Ownership, and Independence

This is the second book in an attitudinal spiritual trilogy (the first book being *Serendipity of the Spirit* and the third *Synergy of the Soul*). The trilogy is a whole new type of book -- the beginning of an *alternative* to the genre of “self help” which has for 50 years so dominated current literature that it is one of the three *categories* on most best seller lists (1. Fiction, 2. Nonfiction, and 3. Self help).

While not without good intent and good ideas, the huge bulk of self-help literature with its “positive attitudes,” “time management,” “wealth strategies,” and “success formulas,” has had a *detrimental net effect on people’s sensitivity, spontaneity, and spirituality . . . and thus on their happiness*. Too many wealth strategies have affected people with dissatisfaction, jealousy, greed, materialism, and pride (often coming in that order to people who “succeed”). Too many temporal success formulas have pointed people away from the less obvious success of family and character. Too many time-management tools have made people more concerned with what they got done than with who they became or what they understood or how they learned to give. And too many positive mental attitude techniques have psyched their adherents to unrealistic levels of expectation from which the only direction was down.

Most self help-literature assumes (and claims to help us move toward) the objective of *control, ownership and independence*. While each of these three goals has its place, their excessive pursuit is dangerous . . . even debilitating . . . and can be spiritually destructive. The world (especially the world of self help) holds them out as objectives -- often as obsessions -- yet they can undermine our happiness . . . they can rob us of true spirituality.

A truly spiritual person seeks *guidance* rather than control. He relinquishes control to a higher power. He asks for awareness and appreciation, and for “promptings.” (I call this heightened awareness and receptivity to guidance *Spiritual Serendipity* or *Serendipity of the Spirit*.)

A truly spiritual person knows that ownership is an economic term with no spiritual relevance. God owns all and the most accurate (and most joyous) way to think of everything (from our materials to our talents to our children) is *Spiritual Stewardship* or *Stewardship of the Heart*.

A truly spiritual person is dependent on God and His spirit -- not independent unto himself. He acknowledges (and appreciates) his dependence not only on God but on love, on faith, and on all kinds of “others.” This interdependence can be thought of as *Spiritual Synergy* or *Synergy of the Soul*.

The basic problem with self help is that the term itself is ultimately an oxymoron. As popular as the metaphor is, no one has ever lifted himself by his own bootstraps. A physical reality called gravity prevents it. And as popular as the concept of self help has become, there are things we cannot help ourselves with. A spiritual reality called divine dependence prevents it.

Whether it will ever become a category on book lists, the real need of this entire world is precisely the same as the real need of every person within it -- the need not for self-help, for *spiritual help*.

Ownership vs. Stewardship

Ownership and private property is a great *economic* principle. It creates enterprise, competition, and prosperity.

“Ownership” is a disastrous, even damning *spiritual* principle. It creates envy, jealousies, and covetousness, as well as greed, pride, and intolerance.

Spiritual stewardship is the alternative. It is simply the realization and acknowledgment that in the deepest reality, we own nothing. We “possess” things for a relatively brief time. All things *belong* to God. We are *stewards* not only over things, but over our talents, our intellects, our opportunities, our families.

The acceptance, the attitude, and the approach of spiritual stewardship brings a kind of peace and harmony that is otherwise unobtainable. It relieves pressure and stress and puts things in prioritized perspective. It gives access to powerful spiritual help. And it makes a person successful in real rather than imagined terms.

Stewardship and ownership are not just two ways of dealing with material possessions. They are two alternate ways of thinking about everything in life, from our abilities to our circumstances to our children.

This book does not suggest that everyone live like Ghandi or Thoreau or sell all they have and give to the poor, or that we all adopt a completely Spartan life or live communally. It is not a book on *life style*. Rather, it is a book on a *mind set* (or heart set) that can free us of the cares of ownership and help us see our lives as God would have us see them.

Each person’s stewardship is unique. Each of us has separate and a distinct set of circumstances, talents, and opportunities. Therefore, there is no standard formula for becoming a successful steward. The goal of this book is not to provide ready-made answers but to

produce perspective and stimulate thought -- the very thought that can work within us, prompting prayer and inspiration, and accessing us to real answers from the real source.

Ownership in the worldly context of “I earned it, I deserve it, it’s mine” is the vehicle of pride and the enemy of stewardship. The term *ownership*, as used in this book, refers to the prideful form which forgets both the source and the nature of our gifts. The term stewardship is the accurate acknowledgment of where all came from and whose all is.

Who This Book is For

The question to ask is “What is the level of your pursuit.” We are all, in our own way, pursuing something, seeking something, looking for something. Personal pursuits can be generally categorized into four levels:

1. The pursuit of survival (shelter, sustenance)
2. The pursuit of comfort (material, security, wealth)
3. The pursuit of power (influence, control, recognition)
4. The pursuit of meaning (peace, quality, relationships)

This book is written for those interested in level four. At level two or three, one might be well advised to read a more typical self-help book on motivation or methods, on techniques or time management. While there are methods and techniques that might apply to the fourth level of pursuit, it is more about insights and principles.

Everyone, to some extent, pursues all four levels. We all must survive; we all earn and buy and seek to improve our circumstances. And we all seek influence in some context. But this is a book for those who are not obsessed or even enamored with the first three levels --

people who have what they need at one, two, and three or know they can get it but who long for something more -- people who know they can compete and achieve but who want to put it all in a more meaningful context -- people who are more interested in quality than in quantity, who want to value people and purpose and peace more than power or prosperity. For, in the words of Victor Frankl, *“There are more and more who have the means to live and less and less who have meaning to live for.”*

The modern fable that is Act One of this book is about a man who has been stuck (as so many of us are) at levels two and three.

Today: A Time for Stewardship

Truth never changes,
but *relevance* does.
God's ownership and our stewardship
have always been as true as they are now,
but perhaps never as before quite as relevant.
Because, today,
society's sentiments slide us and suck us so hard
in the opposite directions,
toward getting and having, and particularly toward
wanting more.
History's graphs of greed, materialism, and stress
are peaking
even as the second advent and the new millennium approaches.
The forces of dark apply deceit
in layers of pride, and preoccupation with possession.

We look to light, to place in God's path the palm branches
of being and giving.
We learn who we are and whose we are,
using His gifts and our agency
to discover His joy and ready His way.

Now, more than ever, in these last scenes
of the closing act,
He uses stewards, and we need stewardship.

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Act One

The One-Word Wish
(A modern fable)

The One-Word Wish

(a modern fable)

You may see yourself in one or more of the characters, or you may see bits of your life in theirs.

But even if your concerns and problems *don't* match exactly with those of this story's characters, the solution suggested for them *will* match with the solution for yours. (Because the solution -- herein called *stewardship* -- is universal.)

1. *Waking Up*

Problems.

I'd put my list up against anyone's!

My 15-year-old daughter is on serious drugs (I now know exactly what she uses and when) and is flunking school . . . and my 12- and 19-year-old boys are far more influenced by their friends than by their family, or the church, or by anything -- except maybe the media. (It's like I can see right into their thoughts.)

My marriage was rocky for years before the event that separated Darci and me last winter.

And while I really don't care very much anymore, my old business (I left it last winter, too) is floundering.

Problems, lots of problems!

But my biggest problem is that I'm dead!

It was death that separated me from Darci and from my business, and that is now giving me such clear insight into things I didn't have a clue about while I was alive.

That's what makes everything so exasperating! I *know* so much more about my problems now but I can *do* so much less about them. That's the thing about death. I know you won't really understand this because you're not dead. But I can tell you -- when you die you know too things immediately! 1. You know everything you should have been doing while you were alive and 2. You know it's too late now to do any of it.

It happened so fast, my death that is. In fact it happened instantly. One moment I was jogging along Pinecrest Drive and the next moment I was actually looking down on my own body. A massive heart attack had dropped me in my tracks.

The jogging was part of my concentrated effort to get back in shape -- part of the resolution I'd made. "Family, Self, and Relationships," that's what I called my New Year's Resolution. Pull back and *save* some time and energy from work and *spend* it on my marriage and my kids, on my own deteriorating body, and on the *people* in my life that I care for but have neglected. It seemed like such a strong and solid resolution. But I was having trouble with it. Work was so demanding. *Time* was the main problem. (I see now that time is always the problem, and always the blessing.)

You see, there just wasn't *time* to do much on family and relationships. And it was February 15, six-and-a-half weeks since I'd made that resolution, and I still hadn't started the exercise part. So I was jogging -- seeing how far out of shape I was. I ran two miles down to the old mill stream and then I had to try to run back, mostly uphill.

Like I said, the heart attack wasn't gradual. It was like being shot. I fell right in the middle of the road. The two boys on their bikes who saw me thought I was playing some kind of game. And I was watching them, and watching my body lying there. I can't tell you how strange that was. And from that very moment, everything looked so different to me. What was really happening down there seemed so simple, and in some ways so ridiculous. I could see what ought to be happening, but I couldn't do anything about it.

Anyway -- back to the point -- my problems.

I guess I sort of knew about Cindy's drugs while I was still there. No, I didn't, either. I *should* have. I mean, I knew her grades were deteriorating, and she was hard to talk to -- especially about friends or about any of her responsibilities. I don't know why I didn't see how much the light had gone out of her eyes, or notice how sad and mad and confused she was inside. It's so obvious now. I guess I just didn't really look.

And our two boys. "Well, they're just *normal*," I kept telling Darci. "I mean all kids want to be part of the crowd and to rebel a bit. Our boys are just starting a bit younger than most. They're *ahead* of their peers, you see." Darci didn't think that was very funny.

Darci didn't think anything was very funny, then or now. She's serious and worried because she's alone. She's a single parent now. But she was then too! That's what I can see now. I wasn't really there when I was alive. I *was* my work; she and the kids were a sidelight, a neglected sidelight.

In recent years, about the only conversation Darci and I had was argument -- especially about her going back to work. She was a professional musician and I'd talked her into quitting back when the children were small and I didn't want her to go back. They still needed her, especially since they hardly ever had me. I told her we didn't need a second income anymore.

She kept saying, "You miss the point. It's not what *we* need, it's what *I* need, and it's something that needs me." It's clear to me now what she meant. She was alone. She was alone every day in the house while the kids were at school. She was alone every night when I

slept with her but had my mind at the office. She was alone when she would try to tell me about her worries for the boys and I'd tell her how normal they were. Work was the only place where people listened to her, the only place where she wasn't alone!

Those boys are angry now, by the way. They think they're mad at God for letting their dad die. I know how they feel. I lost my dad too when I was a boy. But I think what my kids are really mad about is that I was gone before I was *gone*. They're starting to realize that now. I just didn't spend time with them. When they think about me they remember what they call "the one summer." (I'll tell you more about that in a minute.) Other than that, there's not much to remember.

Since they think they're angry at God, they don't want to have much to do with Him now. Darci tries to take them to church once in a while, but they usually find a way out of it. I wish I'd tried to give them some faith -- that's something else I never thought there was time for.

I wish I could do something! Somebody's *got* to come along and get them thinking -- a minister, a teacher -- a scoutmaster -- *somebody*! Their sister is the worst possible example now, and Darci's just trying to help herself out of the pit she feels like she's fallen into.

Well, I didn't mean to go on -- it's just that the problems are so clear now, and the solution is so obvious. The medicine needed was *my* time. And I didn't give it. And I don't *have* it any more. I used to think *time* was the enemy. It was the passing of time that made me hurry, made me stressed, made me not finish everything on my precious "to do" list. Time made me feel guilty because there wasn't enough of it left for family and friends (or for me and my own body and spirit).

How crazy! Now it's so obvious -- time was a gift. How I miss time now that I'm here where it doesn't exist. Time was what I had then, and yet I exchanged so much of it for absurd things like newer cars, or more expensive suits, or a bigger office and a more important title. Such incredibly unimportant things! Little, silly shooting-star things that last the briefest instant in eternity. Imagine! The very time that was given as such a loving gift to help me grow and reach and *become* . . . and I traded it for things -- for *toys*!

I'm trying to remember what I must have been thinking! It's difficult! My thoughts were so strange there -- like someone looking through a tunnel and not seeing up or down or to either side. I guess I felt like I was okay spiritually because I went to church now and then. I said a prayer each Sunday. I *believed*. And I was on the board of the volunteer center. That allowed me to think of myself as a believing, caring person -- even if I didn't act like one.

You know, the weird thing is, if I were still down there, the thing I'd probably be most worried about would be my business. No, I guess that's not true because the business would be okay if I were still down there. I mean, here's the irony: I was trading all that time for a bigger and bigger business, and all I did was make it so that it couldn't get along without me. And now Bill and the guys that are left are trying to save it -- and then they'll try to make it too big to get

along without them!

The community service and volunteer thing was a little different. You see, I thought that was where I felt good about myself. I was giving something back, and I felt *needed*. But my passing didn't destroy anything! My replacement on the board does things differently than I did, but things are going fine.

What's so exasperating . . . is that the ones down there who really needed me -- I mean the ones who needed *me*, in ways that no one else could substitute -- they're the ones I was short-changing. I had *plans* to do better -- even that last fatal resolution, no pun intended -- but no *time*, none of that precious time that I thought was my enemy.

Well, enough self-pity and guilt. But actually, it's not either of those I feel. In a way that I can't quite explain, I don't feel sad or guilty as much as I just feel *embarrassed*. I mean, things will turn out fine. Over *time* my family will have chances to be happy without me, and that little vacuum I left will close together, suck in, and be filled by others. I'm not really *so* worried or guilty about any of that because I can see it all in a longer perspective and I understand that God's plan and people's eternal happiness do not teeter on one man's mistakes. One of the most bizarre things about mortality is how important people think they are. From here, on the other hand, our *nothingness* is so obvious -- along with our potential "everythingness" as God's children.

Part of what makes it embarrassing is to realize that there *are* people, still down there, who *understand* all this . . . people who have figured out what wasn't even occurring to me! I keep thinking of it quantitatively, and it just focuses my embarrassment. I probably traded a couple of *years* of time for that last new car and boat. And who knows how much time I gave up all together for the *life style*.

"*Life style*," can you imagine -- trading all that time for those little pseudo things we thought we owned -- at the expense of taking joy in the *real* things that God is going to *give* us anyway. It's like an heir who's going to inherit a huge estate getting all preoccupied with some little insignificant things and neglecting the whole estate in pursuing his little obsession.

Well, I'm rambling again. You've got to understand, though, that the perspective I have now is still so new to me. I'm still a little dazzled. What I really mean when I say "embarrassed" is that I now remember so perfectly the things I went down there for -- the purposes God had in making that place for us and carving time out of eternity. I remember the things I was fore-ordained to do before I went down, and I feel embarrassed that I didn't find so many of them, or even look for them, or *ask* God to send them. I didn't really look, or ask, or seek. I wasn't lazy; I worked hard; I had goals and plans, but I was leaning my ladder against the wrong walls!

I know now that what I called birth was really death, or at least going to sleep, or leaving God and my true home and real memory. But faith could have pierced the mist, and I *could*

have known and felt so much more, and *given* real gifts. What we call dying down there is being born -- or at least waking up. What an awakening, full of the most soaring joys and the most piercing regrets!

Anyway, on with my story, because I do have a story to tell. It's a short story really, or at least the part I'm so anxious to tell you is short. And it resembles some stories you've heard before -- children's stories about *being granted a wish*. But that's the *current* part of my story; that's what is happening to me right now. And before I can tell you about that part, before you'll understand about the wish I've been granted, I've got to tell you more of my story from mortality, from earth.

Not much more though. Because I realize now that a few well-chosen *incidents* from my life will pretty much give you the whole picture. They will illustrate the kind of person I was and the kind of life I lived on earth.

When I write "earth" it brings into me a feeling not unlike homesickness. The phrase *mother earth* seems appropriate. I miss the feel and smell and texture of earth, with a longing like a child feels for a comforting, familiar mother. Oh that I had *known* the beauty of earth while I lived on it! I feel the penalty of regret for what I refused to enjoy.

When I wrote "the kind of person I *was*," it occurred to me that it's also the kind of person I *am*. Everything has changed, and yet nothing has changed. I am still me in all the ways I wish I wasn't as well as in all the ways I'm glad I am.

And while I speak of words, let me also speak of language. I write in English so you can read, but this language's limitations are so profound. My thoughts come more and more in the pure, complete language, and it is hard, sometimes impossible, to translate them to English phrases. Part of mortality's veil is its language -- words that miss and even mask the full meaning and the deepest feeling.

2. *Having It All*

I see now that my baby-boomer generation grew up with the perfect ingredients, the natural recipe for selfishness. The “me generation.” We were given everything. We expected everything, except hardships. Our lives were easy and self-indulgent. We heard stories of puritans and of pioneers, stories of the depression, but we heard them as if they were fairy tales, with no possibility of truly identifying with them.

And the current thinking and trends in parenting contributed to what we became. “Permissive parenting.” Not much discipline, letting kids sort out everything for themselves -- even values. The notion of “building self-esteem” was a big part of it, helping children think they *can* do anything, everything. But the other half of the formula was too often forgotten, the part about what they *should* do, the part about responsibility, about self-denial, about service. Looking back at it now, I realize that we created a *disposable* society for ourselves. New things were good; old things were bad. Things were built not to last but to use a little and throw away. The present was what mattered to us. Instant gratification; buy on credit; get it now; more is better; big is better. No one really believed it, but we all lived it.

I’m trying to keep the events I want to tell you in some kind of order, but it’s hard from here to keep any kind of sequence, because everything seems “present” to me now. It’s not like a tape that you have to rewind to get to the past or fast-forward to get to the future. It’s like a compact disc -- it’s all instantly there. Just touch a number and that’s the part it plays.

But it is my past I wanted to tell you more about. Growing up relatively poor -- actually richer and more self-indulged than kings in another age, but relatively poor -- that’s what I remember. Our cars were older than my friends’, and my allowance smaller. My brother and I used to talk about it, somewhat bitterly, somewhat selfishly. Why did our dad have to die? Mom couldn’t earn the money he had, and it was we who suffered. My own kids feel that same illusion now.

Dad died when I was fifteen. It affected my brother and me in interesting ways. (Charles, my brother. I haven't mentioned him much but I think about him a lot now, and about how I can save him from the path he's on -- the path we were both on. We're so different in some ways, but so similar in our mistakes.) We both became more aggressive when our dad died. It became important to succeed. Not only to have things but to prove things, to "rise above our circumstances," to end up ahead of those we'd perceived to be ahead of us.

I see now how rampant this ridiculous kind of competition is. People view life as a race, as a desperate win-or-lose struggle. If only they could see that we've all won already, just by living, just by having the earth opportunity, just by having been saved by Christ. Simply accepting and enjoying the gifts He gives could make life so beautiful and make love so easy. But we compare and compete so that we're never happy with having anything -- only with having *more* of it than someone else.

Well, I'm having a hard time keeping my mind on the story I'm trying to tell you -- because what I really want to tell is what I know now about life and joy. And who I really want to tell is my family and those I love. Think I've found a way to tell them. It involves the wish I have been granted.

Anyway, I grew up, or at least got older in mortal years, and I learned how to compete. Gradually the envy and jealousy I felt were transformed by my achievements into pride and even condescension. I learned how to get good grades, how to impress people, got a college scholarship, began to believe in myself.

Where did the selfishness come from? Mortals are inclined to think of it as an inescapable human trait, largely unavoidable, particularly in adolescence. I see now that it's not always so. There were many, some of them my friends, who thought more about others' feelings, who *cared* more.

At any rate, I finished two years of college and then I went to New York for an internship on Wall Street. I thrived in New York -- on the cut-throat competition and the aggressive ambition. But I remember, once in a while, sensing that there was something different, something better.

I was there the night when the power blacked out in all of Manhattan. The lights went out during rush hour as I was driving along Park Avenue. The box canyon of lit skyscrapers on both sides and the old Pan Am Building directly ahead of us simply disappeared in one instant. The only light left was the previously unnoticed but now bright beams of car headlights. Since subways and trains couldn't run, the island was clogged with four million commuters who couldn't get home. Radio stations with emergency generators began almost immediately to broadcast predictions of increased crime and looting.

But it didn't happen. What did happen was that these tough New Yorkers, in sudden crisis, started helping each other. Drivers picked up walkers; stores reopened to get people off

the cold streets. Restaurants served everything they had, even to those who couldn't pay.

And they enjoyed it! *We* enjoyed it. The usual unfriendly self-isolation gave way to all kinds of gregarious friend-making. People thrown together by circumstance introduced themselves, shared family pictures from wallets, even sang together like old buddies at a school reunion.

Time had stopped in a way. There was no chance to rush or to hurry or to be on about the aggressive pace of life, so people slowed down and cared. I started picking up people -- driving them to where they needed to go.

I've always remembered that night -- and kind of longed for it to happen again -- to me and to those around me.

There was a guy in the same brokerage there in New York -- James Tyce from Berkeley. He seemed more driven than anyone else. He spoke of education as a *ticket* to get where you want to go, and he said the best first-class ticket was the Harvard Business School. I liked the sound of that -- liked his whole approach. I ended up following Jim to U. C. Berkeley and then to Harvard two years later for graduate school.

I don't think I realized it at the time, but I see now that I was a *climber*, not a thinker. I did well in school, but it was because I loved competing, not because I loved learning.

Anyway, I met Darci. Actually I met her *car* first. I saw the classic red 356b Porsche parked at Harvard Square and was admiring it when she walked up and introduced herself as the car's owner. She was as attractive as the car, and I decided instantly that I was in love with them both.

Darci was a little too interested in her appearance and in that of her car, but she was the best thing that ever happened to me. That's much clearer to me now than it ever was then. And it is one reason that I must use the wish I've been granted to help her -- help her to see what I missed seeing.

We went for it -- Darci and I -- the fast lane. Having it all, or at least wanting it all. I graduated and joined a hot New York based management consulting firm and was promoted to managing partner of the Denver office when they opened it three years later. Darci played in the Philharmonic Orchestra and did studio recording at night. I wanted kids; she said only if I'd stay home half-time to do my share of caring for them.

We lived above our means -- a house bigger than we needed, cars and clothes that were more impressive than practical, a ski condo near Aspen that we talked about more than we used.

We maxed out our credit cards and then got more cards. Doing better and better financially became a necessity. But we kept telling ourselves that we wanted money not for our egos but for our *freedom*. Wealth gave *options*, didn't it? And money would let us be what we truly wanted to be!

Why couldn't I see through that? With our mind set, it wasn't freedom, it was bondage. The more we had, the more effort it took to take care of it, to make payments for it, just to keep *track* of it. We were slaves to what we had. We consistently traded our time and our peace for *things*. We got in that pattern early, and it just got worse.

And I don't mean to blame everything on materialism and on the "success" we thought we were having. I realize now that it was attitude and perspective that were our problems. My brother Charles was undergoing the *same* destructive attitudes through somewhat opposite circumstances. He had dropped out of college and gone to work on construction, promising to return to school after a year. But the money was so good and the fun, single life so much easier that one year turned into two and two into five. He got married along the way, had twins a few months later, and suddenly college was impossible.

He tried doing some building and contracting on his own, lost what little money he'd saved, and went back to hourly construction work. He finally made a go of a small plumbing company; but life was a struggle, and his mind was (and is, more than I'd realized) filled with jealousy and envy. He covets the things he doesn't have and resents the opportunities he missed. But he wouldn't *tell* you any of this, or even admit to it himself. What he talks about is how those who have things he doesn't must have cheated for them, or stepped on others to get them. I've never thought about this until now, but he's more like me than I thought -- or like I was. I had *pride* that said I was better than others because I had things they didn't and had done things they hadn't. Charles has the pride that tells him he is better than others because he *hasn't* done things and doesn't have things that they have . . . hasn't "sold his soul" like they have. Pride, I now understand, is exceptionally versatile, able to use almost any circumstance to pit one against another, to create enmity that separates and fills one with the dark energy of self-justification and judgment of others.

But back to my story. By the time we'd been in Denver for a half dozen years, Darci's vanity had shifted into high gear. She was doing some modeling along with her music, and appearance became an obsession. She had a face lift, a tummy tuck, and some eyelid work before she was 30 years old! And she dieted until she looked like what Thomas Wolff called a "social X-ray" -- you could see light through her ribs.

Other people's opinions had such an effect on her, and on me. I see that now. We thought so much about what others were thinking that there wasn't much attention on what we thought about ourselves. From my new viewpoint up here it seems so ironic that people are so aware of what others *think*, and so unaware of and uninterested in what others are *feeling*. (Plenty of vanity, hardly any empathy.) But then again, not everyone down there fits that pattern. I did though, and so I guess that's why I see it so quickly in others.

Physically, Darci was extreme on one side, I on the other. She measured her weight in ounces and worked out twice a day. I avoided both scales and gymnasiums.

When Darci finally got pregnant with Cindy, she was 32 and she was deeply upset. It wasn't planned, and she was convinced that her career was to be devastated. I was thrilled, and only slightly less so when ultrasound suggested a girl. Darci, had it not been for her parents' religious beliefs, might have suggested an abortion. But her initial disappointment gave way to resignation and then, gradually, to excitement.

Still, the added weight and round belly were hard for her to accept, and by the sixth month, she refused to leave the house. But other than her appearance, she began to like the whole idea. She decided that if she were to have a child, the child would be the best and the brightest at everything. We bought a still bigger house, one with a nursery, and started to decorate it. Most amazing of all, Darci quit work!

Little Cindy, true to her mother's design, hit the ground running. She started preschool at two, Suzuki violin at three, Gymnastics at four. She became a wonderful extension of our egos, precocious, bright, and *very* mature and adult for her age. It seemed she was all we talked about for a while. I didn't see her much, because with my commute and trying to expand our office, I rarely got home before nine. But Darci assured me that Cindy was as busy as I was and wouldn't have had much time available anyway. Occasionally she balked at some new class or program we put her in, but a little simple bribery always took care of it. She was involved in so many things by the time she was five that starting "real school" seemed almost like a letdown.

About that time, three things happened, three things that could have turned me around, helped me reassess and get some balance. As it turned out, though, all three led the *other* direction. One thing was that Quintin, the first of our two boys, was born. Darci was getting more kick (and probably more *recognition*) out of mothering Cindy than she ever had out of her career, and she was ready to "double the pleasure." I desperately wanted a son and was convinced that I would be a much more active and involved father with a boy than I had been with a daughter. I behaved more spontaneously in the delivery room that day than I had in years. A boy! I let out a whoop and commented on the size of his *hands*. "He'll palm a basketball by the time he's 10!" I bought a basketball (the NBA leather version, of course) on the way home from the hospital and had it waiting for him in his crib. How early things start. That innocent but ill-conceived effort to make my son into something he was not would plague our relationship forever. And it started in the delivery room!

The second thing that happened was my invitation to serve on the board of the local volunteer center. The feeling I had when I was asked was not exactly one of joy. (I was too busy to take on anything else, especially this *job*. But it *was* a feeling of *relief*. For one thing, I'd been critical (just to myself and a couple of close friends, of course) of the volunteer center, run by a person who I thought was a terrible administrator and an even worse public speaker. I thought I could improve the place. For another thing, there was a lot of status connected with the center and its board. It was a society kind of thing. And everyone was into "giving

something back.”

So I felt sort of relieved that I'd been asked. It was something I didn't have to aspire to anymore.

Ouch! It hurts me to write this. It's an admission of such incredible stupidity. But I'm trying to tell it like it was, and the fact is, I was *proud* to have a son who I was sure I could turn into the basketball star I wished I had been, and I was *proud* of the board position and felt that I *deserved* it and it would enhance my image.

The third thing that happened was the new job offer. I had my branch office running so smoothly that I was actually getting home in time for dinner two or three times a week. It was part of my new “time for family, time for community” approach. But then Bill, one of the partners in the head office in New York, called. He was breaking off, taking some big clients with him, relocating in Phoenix. So much new action in the Sunbelt, he said. He wanted me to join him. Bigger money, much bigger money, and I could commute rather than moving. Some of the work would be in Denver, anyway, and he had a town house in Phoenix I could use midweek when I would have to be there. Chance of a lifetime. Five years at this income level and you're set. Retire, live wherever you want, do whatever you want. The retirement didn't appeal. The bucks did. That was the only way I knew to keep score. I took the job.

Darci objected, but only briefly. Her life now centered almost entirely with the kids, so what I did for work didn't much matter to her so long as it didn't disrupt her pattern.

We had plans to get away to do some planning, to communicate about what we'd started calling the “outer” and the “inner.” Outer meant my career, about which she knew less and less. Inner meant the kids, the home, about which I'd never known very much but in which, with Quintin's arrival, I had more interest. We planned to get away together and really talk it all through some day soon.

It was about at that point that things got very, very tough. It seemed to take an incredible amount of time to try to be a real father. The volunteer board was more demanding than I had imagined, and the new job -- well, it never let up. The pressure was there 24 hours a day.

At the condo in Phoenix, where I was spending two or three nights a week, I had a single female neighbor who kept inviting me over. I finally started accepting. In my mind I formed an almost unbelievable rationalization: I was faithful to Darci when I was in Denver.

Darci, I now know, must have made a similar rationalization. She was seeing someone while I was away. Looking back, I see that it was the loss of fidelity that really triggered our mid-life crisis. *Fidelity*, that old-fashioned word that I don't think I ever even used while I was alive. Fidelity, that thing that probably does more for your self-worth (and for your partner's) than any other thing -- it protects you, it harmonizes you, it is maturity and commitment and

security. It is the discipline of love. And I tossed it away so casually.

Well, back to my account. Mid-life crisis was upon us with a vengeance. And the crisis that I faced, and that Darci and my brother Charles and so many others that I love still face, is due to deep misconceptions about things like ownership and self-reliance. I've got to use the wish I've been granted to clear up the errors that are keeping them -- as they did me -- from finding joy!

3. Mid-Life Crisis

I think I know the exact moment that I entered mid-life crisis. It was on a Sunday night, five years ago (that's the funny part -- I thought it was mid-life and it was actually very-late-life, only five years from end-life). I was at the volunteer center after a board meeting trying to counsel a 17-year-old boy who had a drug problem and had left home and wandered into the center looking for food or a handout. As I sat trying to think what I could do to straighten him out, I had the strange sensation that I would probably trade my problems for his. His were so simple -- a bad habit, some bad friends. My problems were so complex. I felt so discouraged and tired. I had to be in Phoenix the next morning for a difficult round of meetings that might last all week. I'd get home for a few hours sleep but no time for Darci or the children. I'd see the woman in Phoenix about whom I was feeling more and more guilt.

This kid, by the way, was not one of those you had to pry things out of. He was talking a-mile-a-minute giving every excuse in the book, blaming everyone but himself.

Darci and I had fought the night before, louder and harsher than usual, words intended to cut and stab. We'd always fought, but there had once been a safety net of love and commitment that we both felt, and we'd always make up. Lately, we both felt too tired to make up. The arguments seemed to drain us dry, and the safety net seemed to have pulled away, so that one bad fall could be fatal. "Well," I remember thinking as I sat there, "work may be falling apart, my family may be getting more distant and alienated, but at least I'm helping some people like this kid.

"Hey," the 17 year old was yelling, "you're not really listening to me, are you?" I noticed then that he was crying. "You're one of these guys always looking for a quick fix. I can see it in your eyes. I'm a nuisance to you, and you want a quick fix and get me outa here!

You're going to tell me to 'just say no' or to take two aspirin and go to bed or to try to understand my parents' point of view. Hey man, I don't need those answers. Just give me a few bucks if you want to help." He was glaring at me, tears running down his flaming cheeks. I realized I hadn't heard very much of what he'd said. But what was making him so angry?

"You're a hot shot, know-it-all businessman, aren't you? You think everybody's problem is simple. Well, you don't know squat! My dad was right about big shots like you. You don't care about anyone but yourself." He jumped up, gave me the finger, and was gone before I could react. I sat there a little stunned, alone in the building.

Something he said pierced deeply, deflated me. Or maybe it was just the timing. Maybe it was just the last straw, the last evidence that I wasn't in *control* anymore, that I really wasn't *handling* everything!

I just sat there. I felt dizzy. I couldn't focus my thoughts. Control! Where was my control? I felt something vaguely familiar, an emotion I couldn't quite identify. My forehead was wet -- and my palms. It was *fear*. I was afraid. What of? I wished I hadn't asked myself, because answers flooded in.

I was afraid of getting old, afraid of my body going to pot, afraid that Darci didn't respect me, or even think about me much, afraid that she'd find out about my affair, afraid that I didn't know my own children, afraid I couldn't keep up the pace that work demanded of me, afraid that I never would be everything (or anything) that I thought I'd be, and *now* afraid that people in general saw through me, realized my shallowness, knew I didn't care very much about other people.

I don't know how long I sat there -- hours I guess -- trying to get my mind to function, trying to focus on what I had to do tomorrow in Phoenix, trying to think about how I'd resolve things with Darci, how I'd win back her confidence. But my mind was hitting a wall. No plan, no optimism, no confidence. I sat there for what must have been hours. I felt like I was drowning.

I finally stood up, picked up my briefcase, and walked out. I don't think I closed or locked the door. I drove home. Everyone was asleep. I knew I couldn't sleep. No idea what time it is. Look at watch -- 2:30 a.m. Pack for Phoenix. Sit. Stare at the wall. I can't function -- something's happened to me. Should I go to the hospital? Silly. Nothing wrong. Just tired. That 17 year old. Why did that affect me so much? Just a mixed-up kid. Just pressure. I'll feel okay when I get back to work. Can't think of what to do.

I heard a door open and looked up. In the shadows, my youngest, four year-old Kevin, hair tousled, disoriented. He saw me, ran over, arms outstretched, "Daddy, I was scared." Normally I would have said, "Hey, men don't get scared." My own heart made that a lie.

How tight I held him. His warmth, my arms around him comforted me. This was what mattered. For a moment I knew that. I carried him back to his bed. I don't think he saw my tears. I kissed him.

My mind semi-cleared, and I decided to drive to the airport and get the earliest Phoenix flight. Maybe I could get there in time to go to town house and sleep for a couple of hours.

I think I know now why I remembered that night so well -- so vividly. It's not just because it was the peak (or the depth) of my mid-life crisis -- it's because I was actually very close to realizing what was wrong. I was nearly low enough to reach real humility -- a broken heart and contrite spirit. I didn't realize at the time how close I was, but I almost figured out that night what was wrong. I almost saw myself for what I was. I was *close* to seeing that pride, selfishness, materialism, and self-reliance were my blinders.

If I could have gone just a little longer, just a little lower -- but instead, I chided myself for feeling so tired and weak. I gave myself a little pep talk, told myself that I was the best, that *I could do anything*, that this was just a weird little slump.

If only I'd said, "I can do anything *with God's help*." I didn't grasp the difference between hollow, self-oriented, self-confidence and *faith*.

I went in the airport restroom, combed my hair, looked in the mirror and felt a little of the confidence (pride actually) start to come back. It's always succeeded. I just needed a little break. I needed to reassert myself somehow, to re-prove myself.

Then something strange happened. As my eyes scanned the flight board, looking for the earliest Phoenix flight, my eye stuck on Delta 362 to Jackson Hole. For a moment I thought I had really snapped, because I knew instantly that I was going to get on that flight.

Suddenly the mid-life crisis I had decided I was in became a *justification*. People do wild things in mid-life, don't they? Well, this was mine. Dax Stone was in Jackson. Dax, my old roommate from Harvard Business School. Dax, the perfect model for mid-life crisis. He had divorced his wife; he had been forced out ("squeezed" was his way of saying it) of the presidency of a New York mortgage banking firm, but they'd given him a "golden parachute" -- a huge severance fee. He'd used it, most of it, to buy an incredible piece of property on the Snake River and to build a log house -- more like a log palace -- that looked out on the Grand Tetons. "Come and see me," he'd said when we happened to run into each other last month. "Let me show you what I've learned about life. Just drop in any time."

I bought a ticket and got on the plane. I couldn't call Darci. Why should I? This was a personal, private, mid-life crisis. She'd think I was in Phoenix, and we rarely called each other these days. I did call the office, got the answer machine, and left a vague message for Bill about something coming up and hoping he could cover for me, telling him not to try to reach me,

that I'd explain later.

Exhaustion caught up with me and maybe the irresponsibility of just walking away from everything relaxed me somehow. Anyway, I slept soundly on the plane and woke up as we descended into Jackson.

I'd been there before, but it had been years. Our descent approach was parallel to the Teton range. The awesome size of the mountains dwarfed the jetliner, and I felt mesmerized by their snow-capped magnificence. It amazed me that I was noticing them, that I was living in the present. No reason to look at my Day Timer. All plans were off. All bets were off. It was late autumn and the cottonwoods along the Snake River were burnished gold.

It was easy to find Dax Stone, or to find his place at least. I rolled down the rental car window and asked -- and everyone knew. He was hard to miss, the New York tycoon who had come in with his Ferraries and Jaguars and built the most lavish home in the valley. The President of the United States had stayed with him during his recent Wyoming vacation.

When I got there Dax wasn't home but the caretaker was, with his huge wolf-looking dog. Dax was fishing, he said, and would be back any time. I wandered around, breathing the crisp, pine-scented air, admiring the Tetons, envying the imposing log mansion Dax had built, wondering what I was doing there, what I'd say to Dax, how long I'd stay, what, if anything, I'd get resolved.

The week that followed could be a long story, but I'll make it a short one. Dax welcomed me as though we were still graduate school roommates. It was a sort of "welcome to the joys of mid-life crisis." We floated the rapids of the Snake River; we flew his ultra-lite aircraft, drove around in his sports cars, sat in his hot tub beneath the stars and the moonlit peaks, and talked about the hypocrisy and absurdity of the rat-race world.

The first four days I admired him, envied him, found myself plotting ways to follow suit. The last three days I pitied him, partly because he was letting down his own facade and being honest about the loneliness and emptiness he found without the love of his family and the challenges of his former life. By then I'd had some rest, was feeling better physically, and was missing some things myself -- things that I, unlike Dax, could still go back to.

I guess it was an intense, compressed, concentrated one-week mid-life crisis. The interesting thing was what it *didn't* include. Drugs and women, a major part of Dax's escape, were offered but were really not tempting. Another "fling" seemed unthinkable, and the fact convinced me that my love for Darci and my commitment to my family must be stronger than I had begun to think.

I flew back on Friday, waited for the "right time" to tell Darci, and apologized to Bill for unavoidable family problems "so distressing I couldn't even call you . . . don't ask about it yet, please . . . I'll tell you when I feel like I can talk about it."

It was a strange kind of progress. I had discovered some things I didn't want, but I was no closer to knowing just what was wrong, or what I needed. And, you see, the terminology was still "what I needed." I still didn't get it. It was "What's wrong with *me*?" "What can *I* do?" and "How can *I* get it together?"

The need for humility and help from an outer, higher source just didn't quite occur to me. I did pray, but it wasn't a humble prayer of faith. It was help *me* to find *my* strength and *my confidence* again. I just didn't get it. I thought I needed the old positive mental attitude back. It didn't occur to me that, instead of the old "I can do anything" mantra, I needed to acknowledge my need for help -- help from a higher source.

Oh, I feel such a fool thinking back on it. I was actually *ashamed* of the humility I almost felt that week. I pushed it away and tried to forget it. I consciously dug out and despised the very seeds of humility and realistic dependency that could have saved my life!

The week wasn't a total loss, however. It did motivate a decision to "drop out" the following summer. It wasn't with all of the right reasons or all of the right insights, but it did produce the happiest and most meaningful two-month period of my entire life!

4. *Almost Recovering*

A few days after I came home from Jackson Hole, I tried to tell Darci what had happened in Jackson, tried to tell her without sounding weak or confused. (I see now how much I worried about that, about showing any weakness or any emotion. I thought *questions* were weaknesses. I loathed any kind of uncertainty, any kind of hesitation. I see now that if I'd *told* Darci I was scared, or worried, or having trouble coping, everything would have been so much better. She needed to know that I needed her! She needed to have the *respect* that sharing my real feelings would have given her!)

I didn't mention the woman in Phoenix, nor did she say anything about her relationship -- though I know now that we each deeply needed to open up and attempt to resolve and regain each other's confidence and commitment. I guess we both believed the notion of "some things are better left unsaid" -- a sentiment that I now know prevents the "oneness" that should be the goal of marriage.

Anyway, the talk we had when I came home wasn't the kind of sharing or partnership discussion it should have been. But it was better than nothing. It was a "reevaluation conversation." She said she understood how pressures could build, said she'd come close to "taking off" herself a time or two. We agreed that we were both too pressed, too busy, that we needed to get away as a family and "rediscover each other." I had been putting in 60-hour weeks for three years with the new company and thought I was in a position to demand some time off.

We had a piece of wilderness, forest land in the Blue Mountains of Oregon, land that I'd only seen once, land that was traded to me to make up a deficiency in the down payment when we had sold our New York apartment and moved to Denver. Now that land, which I'd thought of as a nuisance, seemed like an *answer*. We'd go there as a family, next summer when school was out, and we'd live in splendid isolation -- no phones, no interruptions, no competition. We'd rediscover each other, rediscover the kids, have an experience, make a memory. It was easy to dream and make plans. After all, summer was still seven months away.

The amazing thing is that the idea lasted, and the idea worked! I think the reason we stayed committed to it is that, once the vision was in our minds, we grew more and more aware of how much we needed it. When pressures built, when things got crazy, we would just think about “next summer in Oregon.”

My brother Charles comes back into it here. He said something to me one day that may have caused me to make the final commitment to Oregon. I had called him to make what I thought was quite a nice gesture. I'd just bought a new car, and the one I'd been driving needed some engine work and wasn't worth much as a trade-in. Charles, unlike me, was mechanical and probably could have fixed the car, so I called him up and offered it to him.

What I didn't realize was how much his general sense of jealousy and critical resentment had come to focus on me. The offer ignited a hatred that stunned me. “Who do you think you are?” he yelled. “And who do you think I am? Do you think I want your charity? Do you think your degrees and your cushy job and your pin-stripe suits make you my benefactor? Listen, I don't care about that stuff like you do. You think it will ease your conscience to give me some thing? Why don't you give the car to some church, that ought to really make you feel righteous.”

Then, suddenly, his voice went soft, cold, took the offense. “Hey, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to overreact. It's just that you and I value different things. You see, I'm not into materialism. I'm not trying to impress anybody. The car I've got is just fine. Thanks anyway.”

It's so obvious to me now what was really happening. It's like I said earlier, his pride was as consuming as mine. It just worked from a different direction. He was proud to be poorer because it meant he was less worldly and ruthless. He was proud that his marriage was going better than mine, which meant he prioritized relationships and had higher values.

What I realize now is how pride in any form robs us of gratitude and joy. Charles does seem to have a good marriage -- an exceptional wife -- caring, supportive, bright and able. But he thinks of her too often as an “asset” rather than as a partner. He uses her to feed his pride and convince him that he really is better off than others who think they are better off than he.

Anyway, I called Charles back the next day to apologize for what I realized was a poorly-conceived gesture. We talked for a while and I mentioned our plans for Oregon. This set him off again, not quite as dramatically as the day before. Taking most of the summer off was an impossibility for him, but he managed to turn any envy he felt very quickly into a put-down. “You'll never do it,” he said. “I know you. You couldn't go three days without being a big dude in a big office making big decisions. You don't know how to relax and you sure don't know how to *build* anything. You'll never do it. If you ever try it, you'll never make it.”

That's when I decided for sure that I would.

The kids weren't so big on the Oregon idea, but we bribed them -- and we told them that we knew what was best for them.

Ouch! Again! -- another smarting realization. How often I told the kids what they thought, what they liked, what was best. My idea of parenting was *managing, directing*. In fact, thinking back on it now, I realize that my goal was to *control* them, not to teach them. That's why I disciplined them -- to control them, to make them less bother, to make sure they didn't embarrass us. I thought of them as *mine* -- mine to manage, mine to control. I see now what a terrible burden that was to put on myself and to put on them! When I told them what was best for them, what I was really thinking about was what was best for *me*.

In this case though, this Oregon business, it happened to be right for all of us. The trip was good for them, good for me, good for everyone.

What a trip it was! It's the *one* thing I can now remember from mortality that makes me smile. We bought a van and *drove* to Oregon. The trip was terrible. Close quarters in the van, contention, exhaustion. And when we first got there it was worse. Camping! Neither Darci nor I knew what we were doing. She had never "slept out" a single night in her life, and I had made the rank of first-class scout only because I had a scoutmaster who believed in "promoting" kids whether they'd earned it or not. And suddenly, there we were. No plumbing. No electricity! No telephone! It was awful. I spent the first week thinking that Charles had been right.

But we persevered. And, in the absence of anything else to do, we talked, we read, and we worked together. We cut down trees, hauled in rocks for a foundation, and we actually built a small, crude, log cabin. It took most of the summer. We went "into town" (Pendleton, 40 miles away) only once a week for supplies.

I actually began to figure things out there. The incredible beauty of the forest and the mountains gave me the closest feeling to *awe* that I ever felt as a mortal. My own smallness and insignificance seemed both real and acceptable in that magnificent place, and I realized my *dependency* on God, my weakness and frailty without Him, my love and appreciation for the beauty of creation. I called Bill each week at the office while we were in Pendleton and, though he was always annoyed at me and always trying to push me to return ahead of schedule, things *were* hanging together without me. I also called the volunteer center once and was told without reservation that everything was *fine*!

It occurred to me that I wasn't indispensable. In the more spiritual perspective of the wilderness, it occurred to me that, while the Lord might use me, He certainly didn't *need* me. It almost (but not quite) occurred to me, that one could be happier as a *servant* to the real Master than as someone "in charge" of "his own" things. I remember thinking that exact thought one night -- that "servant," a term I'd always despised, was a title of dignity and purpose when the

Master was the Lord.

Maybe if I'd stayed a little longer I'd have figured it out. Maybe with a little more time, Oregon would have become a permanent change for me rather than a tiny island of serenity and peace in a sea of self-centered, misled ambition.

Oregon even began to reshape my *body*. Lifting logs and wielding the heavy chain saw all day had its effect. I drank huge quantities of water and ate amazing amounts of food. Yet I lost weight and felt my waist shrink as my shoulders and forearms began to harden and grow. I began to respect my body for those few weeks, to feel some of the same awe and gratitude for it that I did for the mountains and the woods.

As the summer wore on, I think Darci loved the experience even more than I did. Even her vanity left her. No mirrors! No social competition. No television ads contrived to make us think we need what we really only want. The irony was, and I think Darci knew this herself, that she looked better in her work shirt and jeans, with pulled-back hair and healthy glow, than she looked emerging from the beauty parlor or from Bloomingdale's dressing rooms.

And the kids. Let me simply say (with pain at the realization) that there was more real communication during those summer weeks between father and child than in *all* the other years combined. After the first week or two they were never bored. They helped with the logs, they explored, they made up games, they *talked* . . . to each other and to Darci and me.

We had one visitor that summer, Charles. He came out of curiosity. He still couldn't believe I was really doing this. For the one time in my life, I felt no need to impress Charles, no need to prove anything. I just wanted to *explain* to him that I'd found something there, and that none of the things that either of us had pursued all of our lives were the answer. I tried, but his look just became more quizzical as he asked when we were coming back to the real world. "If you want to work with your hands," he said, "why don't you come and fit pipes with me for a while?"

Charles did seem less competitive and less resentful during the week he spent with us in Oregon. I realized why when he told me he'd just obtained his general contractor's license. "No more working for anyone else," he almost shouted. "I'm in charge now." I congratulated him and felt somehow that I should warn him, but I wasn't quite clear on just what the warning should be.

The summer ended and we returned; we drove back quickly to our home and returned almost as quickly to the old way of life. Competition and materialism closed back in around us, and the Oregon summer faded like a dream.

Well, you've been patient -- listening to the thoughts and reflections that I have in this new vantage point of death. I keep going back to that thought about being *embarrassed* that I missed so much and found so little in my brief mortality. I have to tell you, there really are *plenty* of clues down there to allow people to figure out the things that I didn't realize until I got up here.

For one thing, there is so much good advice on what *not* to do -- don't covet, don't seek treasure that moth and rust (and time) can destroy, don't value *things*, don't look for status or develop pride. Don't' this and don't that. Lots of don'ts . . . and all good ones.

I knew while I was down there about *what not to do*, about what I shouldn't be. I accepted those commandments and at least gave lip service to not coveting, not envying, not being completely materialistic. And I felt a certain amount of guilt about feeling all those things I knew I shouldn't. What I didn't know was *what to do* -- what good goals and attitudes I needed to replace the bad ones.

That's why, when I was granted *the wish*, I knew I would not use it to help them *not* to do what I did. Rather, I would use it to help them to *do* what I didn't . . . to help them know and focus on what *to* do and not to become even more constrained and more guilty by what not to do.

5. *The Reprieve of One Wish Granted*

Now, the happy part of this story. The existing part that happens after the “closing curtain,” the part that is happening right now. I think I’ve told you enough to set the stage for this.

Let me just quickly finish closing the mortal curtain and then get to *the wish*. As I said, the Oregon summer quickly slid into a kind of dream-like memory. Sometimes (even within a few months) it was hard to believe it really happened. I was back with Bill and the business, trying to make up for lost time. The kids were back with their peer groups and back with their problems. Darci and I were competing again -- in our respective individual worlds and with each other.

Life was back to normal.

Three more years of this normalcy (Thoreau called it “quiet desperation”) went by before I made the fatal New Year’s resolution. Then I went jogging one cold February day and died in the middle of the street.

You probably know me well enough now, from this account, to feel sorry for me, just as I felt sorry for myself. But I’m past that now, and I’ve been granted a wish. And it is my own experience (and the clear vision I now have of it) that has shown me how to use the wish.

I don’t want to give you the impression that the granting of wishes is a frequent occurrence among the recently dead. *Wishes* are frequent -- oh, they’re the main thing most of us do at first -- wishing we’d done this or that, wishing we’d seen what really mattered, simply wishing we’d had more time there to figure things out. Wishes are frequent, but the *granting* of

them, especially in the rather direct and beautiful way that mine was granted, is very rare indeed.

I think the premature and unpredictable nature of my death may have been a factor. I pleaded with the *Liaison* (I'm sorry but I can say nothing about who this is) to let me do something from *here* for those I had done so little for while I was *there*. I said these were things I would have discovered if I'd had a little longer, things I was on the verge of, insights that would have changed me and that I could have taught them.

Still I was surprised when he said yes. And I was surprised by the single, simple power he gave me as a *method* to bring about what I desired.

“One word,” he said. “You may plant a single English word in the minds of two people, and the word will dwell there, softly and subtly, not directing or interfering, but *staying*, until they each deal with it, define it for themselves, and decide whether or not to live by it.” Then he extended some advice, “The best word to use,” he said, “would be a new and somewhat unfamiliar word, for any familiar word could be lost and camouflaged by past and present perception.”

At first I was confused and disappointed. What I had wanted was to open some sort of vision or perspective to those I loved, to help them see what really mattered, to change their attitudes so that they would seek guidance rather than gratification and find the help and light that I had missed. I wanted them to value and care for each other more -- to find joy in all they had been given. That would take some sort of life-changing experience, or a supernatural event or manifestation that would wipe away pride and bring gratitude and inspire service. If it was to be done with words, it would have to be paragraphs, pages, books. If all the verses of scripture hadn't made me see, hadn't made them see, then what could a single word accomplish?

But the *Liaison* had promised that the word would *stay*. I sensed that this meant the word would be present and somehow active, that it would “rattle around” in the minds of the two people I chose until it was dealt with, until it was understood and either rejected or adapted. I needed a one-word summary of what I realized here and should have realized there. A concept, an insight that *would* have changed how I thought and how I lived . . . and that *could* do the same for them, now.

I knew who the “them” would be. Darci, of course, and Charles. Darci because I loved her more than I had ever realized and because she now bore the challenge of raising the children and of claiming eternity for our family and our marriage. Charles because, though I'd always thought of him as so different from me, I saw now that he was making the same mistakes I made, and that his basic problem was exactly the same as mine.

A single word.

Scriptures came to mind, “The only name by which man can be saved.” Was *Christ* the word? Or was *love*, or some form of love -- perhaps *charity*, without which all else is “tinkling

brass and sounding symbol.” But it had to be a new word, “unordinary” enough that Darci and Charles would explore and pursue. They thought they knew “love.” They thought they believed in Christ.

What did they each need most? What one word would turn them, change them, open the spiritual *realities* of mortality to Darci and Charles?

No, those weren’t the right questions. There was too much I didn’t know, even now, about both of them. The question I needed to ask was about *myself*. What would have changed *me*? What word would have opened *my* spiritual eyes?

I reviewed my regrets. There were so many, or were there? Did they all fall into certain categories? Many regrets but only a few *kinds* of regrets. I regretted pride. I regretted selfishness. I regretted *missing* so much of joy, of gratitude. I regretted trading away things of incalculable value like *time* and *relationships* and *beauty* for meaningless things like *possessions*, *appearances*, and *status*.

I regretted *ownership*!

I froze the frame of my thought on that word.

“Ownership.” That was the culprit. And from here, it was the greatest absurdity. I thought I owned things, deserved them, earned them, won them. I thought my children were mine. I thought cars and houses and little bits of the earth were mine -- or other people’s. I thought talents and opportunities and ideas were mine. And *because* of “ownership” I was proud, I was jealous, I was manipulative, I was ambitious, I was materialistic, I was shortsighted.

“Ownership.” That was how Charles viewed his new plumbing company and his new contractor’s license. It was how Darci viewed everything from her surgically lifted face to her new, heavy responsibilities. It was a mirror game, an evil and dangerous illusion that bred competitive enmity between people and cultivated an inward, stirring stress and a dark, blind self-focus that smothered and choked off the light.

What is the alternative then? Its opposite? Because the word that counters ownership is the word I will plant in Darci and in Charles. No, not its *opposite*. Because ownership is not a 180-degree lie -- it is an oblique, subtle lie. We do *have* so much in mortality. We have all that God gives. It is “ours” and yet we do not own it. It is *with* us and yet not *from* us. It all belongs to Him and yet is ours as a gift, for now, as an entrustment, as a loving *loan*.

As a *stewardship*!

I knew the word when it came.

“Stewardship.” It may mean little at first, when I first plant it in their minds. They may

think of the scriptural parable of the stewards, or of some medieval entrustment of land.

But the word will grow. It will *stay*. And they will begin to *apply* it to their thoughts, to their perspectives, to their decisions. It will change how they look at their children, at their options and opportunities, at their gifts and talents. It will release them from the stress of spiritual self-reliance. It will reveal to them the joy of humility and gratitude and reliance on a higher power.

Stewardship will become a lens that widens and sharpens their views. It will deepen awareness and appreciation, prompt compassion and empathy, dull envy and competition. It will bring peace and guidance and lighten burdens. It will grow both gratitude and generosity.

And I, like a spectator watching the ultimate, moving drama, will applaud, and laugh, and cry, and hope, and wait.

The End (The beginning)

Real Eyes

The fable
uses the word *realize* dozens of times.
(Had you realized that?)
The writer, heart attack awakened,
and born into eternity
sees things suddenly, as they really are
And thus keeps “realizing.”
What he means and what he suggests is that he sees with
“real eyes.”

Marvelous as our physical eyes are,
pupil and cornea relaying magnificent mind-messages
of mountain majesty, field and flower, sky and sea,
they are not the real eyes of spirit
which see
the plan, the perspective, and the pure purposes
of God.

Our real eyes are veiled in this earthly sphere,
but the veil is translucent.
Shapes, images, and most importantly
light
come through to a true watcher,
enough to tell us who He is,
and who are His.

End of Act One

The Hope:

That you have become *interested* in
the concept, that you now wonder
if the principle of stewardship
could make a difference
in how you think,
how you act,
how you live,
how you
die.

The hope is that you are now curious about Spiritual Serendipity.

First Intermission

Things As They Really Are

Pause now for a minute.

Reflect on the fable.

Reflect on yourself.

The intent is not for you to turn back or give up
on pursuit level two (*comfort* . . . achievement, affluence -- see p. 10)
or pursuit level three (*power* . . . influence, control).

The Goal is to *modify* them, to mellow them,
to supersede their quantity with the quality of pursuit level four
(*meaning* . . . insights, relationships, peace),
to perceive in life what the fable's speaker perceived in death
to see with Real Eyes.

To understand that fourth level of pursuit,
we need to understand that there are also four levels of *seeing*.

I like jet take-offs on cloudy, stormy, foggy days
(landings in those conditions worry me
but take-offs are exhilarating).

You burst from dim into bright, from short-sighted to long,
from level one seeing (where everything is blurred and obscure
except your own face on a close-up round window)
to level two sight where great distance is visible
and you become a very small part of a very large clarity.

Still, there is a higher perspective.

I think of a friend of mine who had the remarkable
(and, for him, spiritually awe-inspiring) opportunity
of looping the earth in the space shuttle.

From there he saw all of the earth,
An almost supernatural perspective, a third level of sight,
A view of our world as it really is,
an insight of how close we all are on
fragile spaceship earth,
how superficial and unimportant the difference of race or country.

The only higher level of seeing -- the fourth level
would be the divine perspective -- still higher -- encompassing all
beyond all flight but faith.

The flight of faith to
this fourth level of sight

is the only way to the fourth pursuit.

If we are stuck on the ground, in the cloudy confines of level one seeing,
we see through shallow, selfish paradigms of ownership.

But if we can change who we are
by becoming enlightened stewards,
we can begin to see through the higher paradigm
of the true owner
and perceive things as they really are.

Once we have the fourth level of sight,
we can go back down to the ground
and see the close up things in their true beauty -- as His.

Rising higher, above our self-reliance
expands our *out-sight* . . . we can see further and further out,
but we bring the paradigm back as *insight*
about how small we are in God's plan
and yet how large we are as His children.

Thus, with out-sight insight
we begin
to see ourselves and our world
as they really are.

An Attitude and a Feeling

Stewardship is difficult to isolate, to describe,
because it evolves, expands, elevates.
It begins as an attitude, a mental approach,
an aware assessment of things as they are . . .
But as it mixes and mingles with the spirit of the Giver,
it becomes a feeling,
deeper and sweeter than the mind can hold,
touching us, moving us,
reaching in to heart, to soul.
It intertwines with guidance, with gratitude,
and creates the peaceful speed of going slow,
expanding time,
warming the colors and textures of the every-day,
revealing unexpected, exquisite joy,
sifting and softening the strong sunlight of self
so that it absorbs and accepts and assists others
rather than reflecting off of them.

Stewardship is not so much
a part of life,
but a definition of it and a way of it.
God's definition, God's way.
This book tries to be a high lighter
and a guide into the process.

Roots and Branches

The thesis of this book is simple and startling. It is that in the perspective of eternal reality, human beings own nothing except the agency God has given them. Furthermore, the illusion of ownership, and particularly the preoccupation with it, causes:

pride
envy
greed
frustration
win-lose competition
selfishness
stress
hoarding
vanity
manipulation
squandering
covetousness
conceit
over-confidence
condescension
fear
bitterness in tragedy
a judgmental nature

Think about the cause and effect. Remove the notion of owning and each of these unhappy traits loses its very foundation. Or think of each of these negative characteristics as *branches* and realize that the illusion of ownership is their *root*.

The simple and powerful truth is that God owns all. But to us, His children, He has given the use of, the responsibility for, the *stewardship* over things, talents, time, opportunities, physical bodies, and even over others of His children.

We need to understand stewardship. First because it is reality, and any other paradigm or world-view is a deception; and second because thinking and living like stewards can rid us of the damning characteristics above and replace them with their opposites:

humility
empathy
generosity
fulfillment
win-win cooperation
selflessness
peace
sharing
modesty
respect
frugality
satisfaction
meekness
worshipful faith and awe
equality
courage
sweet acceptance of sorrow
tolerance

Each of these righteous qualities are *effects* which can stem from the *cause* of an attitude of the heart called stewardship.

Pair these positive traits up one on one with their opposite negatives. (The two lists match up one for one.) Realize that strong, happy characteristics grow out of the stewardship root. Realize that ownership is wrong both because it is inaccurate and because it produces bitter fruit. Turn ownership out. Or turn it in for a new lease on life called stewardship.

The Many Things (Everything) We Don't Own

This is not merely
a book on anti-materialism
(although it includes that)
material things (misnamed "possessions") are just one category
of what we don't own,
but do have stewardship over.

There are many other categories:
(and their "ownership" is often harder to give up than possessions)
abilities
friends
options
earth's beauty
opportunities
talents
"our" children
time
spouses
physical bodies
trials
tests
loves.

If we think we own
any of these
or have earned them or deserve them
we're wrong,
and we're *harmed* by the error.

God *has* given them to us!
But they are gifts of
stewardship
which can produce the opposite effects
of wrong, prideful ownership
and
which is a step toward
the right kind of ultimate eternal ownership.

God

wants us to have all that He has
and be
all that He is
thus He gives all --
but wisely, gradually,
through a sequence involving stewardship.
Ownership
(in its right and righteous form)
follows
hereafter,
in another place,
if,
here,
for now,
as stewards,
we learn to love them, build them,
guide them, grow them,
so that
we come to know their joy
and the joy of their Giver.

The Next Two Acts

Act one was a fable.

Acts two and three are reality.

It was claimed at the outset

that the attitude of stewardship is more a product of insight and principle
than a method or technique.

But we should seek both the attitude and the *practice*.

The first comes from insights (Act II)

and the second from methods (Act III).

Act Two

Insights

(A modern [and ancient] paradigm)

Paradigms

A paradigm is a world-view, a perspective or a framework within or through which we view our world. One's paradigm is his reality -- the way he thinks things are. As Anais Nin said, "We don't see things as they are, we see things as we are."

Every once in a while we gain a new insight or discover a new reality which changes or shifts our paradigm, and suddenly everything looks different to us. Consider the captain of a ship who sees on his radar another vessel which is directly in his path. He gets on his radio and requests that it change course. It answers back, "*You* change course." Angered, the captain sends a more authoritative message, demanding that the other vessel move. "You move," comes back the answer. Enraged, the captain asks for the identity of the insolent answerer. The reply totally changes the captain's paradigm.

"I am the lighthouse!"

Paradigm shifts of an even more serious nature happen when people hear and accept spiritual truths. Eternal realities about who we are and where we came from change how we see ourselves and how we view our lives. In turn, the way we *view* life changes how we live life -- alters what we think is important, and motivates us to reach higher and strive to be better.

Change a person's glasses and you may change his sight, thus improving the clarity with which he sees his surroundings, but add to a person's knowledge and you may change his *insight*, thus improving his clarity and understanding of himself and of his life.

Insight is a fascinating word because it implies an *inner* sight -- our "real eyes" -- something we view with our spiritual eyes -- something deeper and more permanent than the surface -- something that may change how we *live* as well as how we see.

There at least fourteen insights, all of them gifts of the spirit, which can assist in shifting our prevailing paradigm from one of ownership to one of stewardship.

And *that* paradigm shift, as already promised, can make all the difference.

Insights

Insight, *sight* in to something

discovering what makes it up, where it comes from,

why it is the way it is.

A *flash* of insight we often say,

an illumination, an enlightenment.

We recognize them when they come because

they have a familiarity

almost as though we're remembering rather than discovering.

Stewardship itself is an insight --

an inner illumination of life as it really is.

But there are insights within stewardship,

lights kindled in its concept that let us see into other places

even into our souls

even into our origins.

Insights work best when they are progressive,

one leading to and preparing for the next

otherwise, leaping too far, we slip and miss.

Here we start with small ones -- close to where we already stand

Using them as stepping stones to reach the larger platforms
deeper in the spiritual current.

The first five insights relate to physical and mortal stewardship

The follies of materialism and pride

The serenity and superiority of stewardship.

Deeper spiritual currents start with insight six

Stewardship becomes real when there is a master, an owner
to whom and for whom we are stewards.

If we don't own things, who does?

We could be stewards for the universe, for future generations,
for human kind.

But stewardship beams deeper and more real

when we perceive

that we are stewards for God.

The most exciting form of stewardship foreshadows ownership

in the truest sense, we rent to own

we are given the use and possession of something

that we may learn to care for it, to develop it,

to improve it for the glory of its owner.

But that owner/mentor/father/God

has always intended that it someday becomes ours
like the West's homesteaded land which, after a set term of improvement
became deeded, became owned.

So we step off of the bank of ownership
on small, close stones of anti-materialism and pride elimination
and we progress
to stewardship-improved balance and leadership.

Then, in the deeper, spiritual part of the stream
we step to stones of knowledge about the owner --
and about His plan for us.

With the clarity of that paradigm we complete the crossing with stones of application
more provident living,
being in the world without being of it
and we step up and across to the higher green bank of stewardship.

The Way and The Why

Understanding
the *way* things really are
is called *insight*.

Figuring
why they are that *way*

is called *reason*.

And the factors that help us determine

why we should follow that *way*

are called *reasons*

And the good things that happen when we do

are called *rewards*.

The insights,

the way and the why,

the reason and the reasons and the rewards

form a paradigm

on which we can base our life

on which we can base our faith.

The fourteen paradigm parts that follow

are called insights,

but they are also the fourteen ways

the fourteen whys

the fourteen reasons

the fourteen rewards.

Look for ways, whys, reasons, and rewards

in each insight.

As you find them

you'll move inside the paradigm and become part of it

as it becomes part of you.

One footnote on *reason*:

As useful as it is, and as relevant to the insights that follow,

it tends to become heavy

and, when used alone, can sink.

Add the flight of faith,

believe that there are other paths than logic

to truth;

believe it can be *felt*

and believe what you feel.

G. K. Chesterton perhaps said it *best*:

“Poetry is sane because it floats easily in an infinite sea; reason seeks to cross the infinite sea, and so make it finite. The result is mental exhaustion. To . . . understand everything is a strain . . . the poet only asks to get his head into the heavens. It is the logician who seeks to get the heavens into his head. And it is his head that splits.” (Orthodoxy, p. 27)

How do you know if an insight is true

or just a pleasant wish, a happy image,

a clever arrangement of words?

You know by how it feels.

Does it appeal to both your logic and your faith?

Does it (and its projected implementation)
generate happiness?

Does it seem to gather light around it
as you hold it in your mind?

You see, (and this, itself, is an insight)
we are spiritually equipped to recognize and discern truth.

The difference between truth and error
is as real as the difference between light and darkness.

Trust your feelings.

You will know.

There is no effort made, herein,
to prove or justify any insight
or to persuade you that they are true.

Insights,
by definition,
carry their own light.

Insight 1

The Selfish Smallness of Pride
The Joyful Abundance of Humility

(An attitude of stewardship lifts us up from the sticky confines of one into the peace and simplicity of the other.)

I had been working hard on the manuscript for this book, thinking and writing about stewardship 16 hours a day. I was trying, at one point, to describe the attitude of prideful ownership as the basic opposite of the attitude of stewardship. My mind seemed at gridlock. I couldn't come up with simple or powerful enough words put across what I wanted to say. Sunday came and I set the manuscript aside and went to church.

As if by providence, the sermon focused precisely on the subject and on the answers I was trying to clarify.

"Pride," the speaker said, "is the great stumbling block of people in today's society. The scriptures warn repeatedly of pride. Then with a wonderful directness and economy of words, he said that pride:

- is ugly and “win-lose competitive” so that “if you succeed, I fail.”
- keeps us from learning new things or new ways, since doing so sometimes requires us to admit that we were less than fully right in the first place.
- is the seed that brings the fruit of dishonest secrecy, unholy liaisons, and efforts to deceive and take advantage of others.
- can exist in the rich and successful as they look down on those with less, but can also grow in those who have less as they resent and criticize and become jealous of those who have more.
- centers in competitiveness and *enmity* which pulls us apart and divides us from others, pitting us against each other.

The preacher than warned that “God will have a humble people; we can choose to be humble or we can be compelled to be humble.” He suggested ways that we could move away from enmity and pride and toward humility: 1. give selfless service, 2. forgive others, 3. confess and forsake sins, 4. become as a child, 5. love God, and 6. submit our wills to Him.

The talk came as a strong confirmation to me of the things I was trying to write. As I sat in the congregation, I took my pen and wrote the following notes on an envelope from my pocket.

“Pride, in all of its forms stems from the false concept of ownership. Thinking we own things breeds enmity because if someone else owns it, we can’t; and if we win, someone else loses. With stewardship, we appreciate others’ gifts as much as our own; we are increasingly humble as more is entrusted to us, more inclined to use what we have in the service of God and of others; and the only pride we feel is pride in God, which manifests itself in the form of praise

and worship. If the “what” is to eliminate pride and to develop humility, then the “how” is an attitude of stewardship.

I realized, that day in church and in the days that followed that as we develop an attitude of stewardship, we gain a sense of humility, of awe, of respect and of wonder that is the key to deep joy.

As G. K. Chesterton said:

“Humility was largely meant as a restraint upon the arrogance and infinity of man . . . if a man would make his world large, he must be always making himself small . . . pinnacles are the creations of humility . . . it is impossible without humility to enjoy anything -- even pride.” (Orthodoxy, pp. 52-53)

Pride not only occupies and detracts us, it sucks away our appreciation and our sense of wonder, it robs us of our natural empathy and simply holds us back from the natural joy that would otherwise flow into our lives. To Thomas More, pride was a “monster” and a “serpent from hell.”

“. . . It is better to have enough of what we really need than an abundance of superfluities, much better to escape from our many present troubles than to be burdened with great masses of wealth.

“. . . every man’s perception of where his true interest lies . . . would long ago have brought the whole world to adopt Utopian laws, if it were not for one single monster, the prime plague and begetter of all others -- I mean Pride.

“Pride measures her advantages not by what she has but by what other people lack. Pride would not condescend even to be made a goddess, if there were no wretches for her to sneer at and domineer over. Her good fortune is dazzling only by contrast with the miseries of others. Her riches are valuable only as they torment and tantalize the poverty of others. Pride is a serpent from hell which twines itself around the hearts of men; and it acts like the suckfish in

holding them back from choosing a better way of life.” Thomas More

Contrast the callousness of pride with the simple beauty of enjoying all God has given and ignoring ownership. This is what Thomas Traherne tried to do in these stanzas from the poem *Wonder* where we see the world through the innocent, awed eyes of a child who does not know about ownership:

How like an angel came I down
How bright are all things here!
When first among his works I did appear
Oh how their glory did we crown!
The world resembled His eternity,
In which my soul did walk;
And everything that I did see,
Did with me talk.

Cursed and devised proprieties,
With envy, avarice
And fraud, those fiends that spoil even Paradise,
Fled from the splendor of mine eyes,
And so did hedges, ditches, limits, bounds,
I dreamed not aught of those,
But wandered over all men's grounds,
And found repose.

Proprieties themselves were mine,
And hedges ornaments;
Walls, boxes, coffers, and their rich contents
Did not divide my joys, but shine.
Clothes, ribbons, jewels, laces, I esteemed
My joys by others worn;
For me they all to wear them seemed When I was born.

“The sea” it is said “belongs to him who appreciates from the shore. Indeed, the best things in life are free. They involve gratitude rather than pride. They invite sharing rather than

selfishness, they are perceived as stewardships, not ownerships.

Imagine

a man who owns one hundred acres,
proud, protective;
then an inheritance, a gift, a bequest comes to him --
an additional hundred acres.

Wow! Suddenly
he is twice as rich, twice as proud, twice as protective.
“Aren’t I doing well?” he says
as he extends his fence,
and his line of credit,
and his ego.

Now imagine a man who is the steward over one hundred acres,
grateful and guided (by his master’s will).

Then an increase of stewardship,
an additional hundred acres.
“Thank you for your trust,” he says,
“but I am happy and busy with what I care for now,
I don’t need the extra --
Still, I will care for it all,
give myself to it, seek your will for it,
honor you with it.”

Pride is somehow diminished
in places where less exists to take pride in.
I think of illustrations from experience:
walking alone
among peasants in China, natives in Africa,
lower castes in Sri Lanka.

“Alone” because we are separated by gulfs
of poverty.

The same feeling in all three places, like *deja’ vu*.
Wonderment!

How is it possible that I see more smiles here . . .
less stress and hollow hurrying?

The only three places I’ve ever been
where people have nothing
and while I walk with them I have nothing.

Is it just my imagination
that I notice more?

That I feel more?

At the same church mentioned earlier, (where I heard the sermon on pride) the lay “bishop” of the congregation was a relatively uneducated but a very wise and practical man. Professionally, he was a plumber. There was often dirt under his fingernails, and to those who were proud or judgmental, he did not make a great first impression.

Attending the same church, there happened to be a highly trained and very expensive clinical psychiatric analyst. Certain church members were going to this psychiatrist, seeking help with personal problems, particularly with depression. Some of them were also going to the lay bishop for counsel.

Many noticed that the plumber-bishop seemed to be rendering more help and having more effect than the expensive analyst. One person who noticed this was the analyst, and it bothered him greatly.

With some frustration, he went to the bishop one day and asked, “How do you do it, what technique do you use?” The humble bishop gave a simple answer. “I just keep asking and listening until I find out what commandment they are breaking -- and then I tell them to stop.”

Joy is the result of right choices, of right living, of righteousness. And joy (not happiness or pleasure) is also the *measurement* of how well and how faithfully we are living. The Egyptian God Osiris is said to ask only two questions to those who die and pass before him: “Did you find joy?” and “Did you give joy?” An ancient rabbinical saying indicates that God

asks those who die to give an accounting of “the things He made for them that they refused to enjoy.”

What keeps us from enjoying God’s gifts is the mistaken impression that we have *earned* them or that we *own* them. This notion encourages hoarding, over-protection and worry, and wipes away the gratitude and appreciative use of things that bring us joy.

Whether the Osiris story and the rabbinical sayings are literally or precisely correct, it does seem logical that what will be asked for on the other side is not a resume’ or an accounting of worldly wealth or accomplishment, but a reporting on the joy we obtained and passed on from our stewardships.

The darker forces of this world have contrived and concocted a great collection of false *connections* . . . connections between worldly things and joy, connections of the material with the beautiful, of outer circumstances with inner happiness. Many have been conned and confused into connecting pretentious materialism with success, and into thinking that we can win respect and peace through bigger homes, newer boats, more expensive cars.

Some people seem to have the *capacity* for deep, welling joy -- the ability to be profoundly and emotionally *moved* by beauty, or by love, or by excellence, or by courage. These capacities are often muted and muffled by materialism. Wordsworth said it well:

“The world is too much with us; late and soon, getting and spending, we lay waste to our powers. . . . the sea that bares her bosom to the moon; the winds that will be howling at all hours, and are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers; for this, for everything, we are out of tune; it moves us not . . .”

“Seek not to be cumbered,” says the *Bible*. When we are cumbered and heavy with the

pride and weight of “too much,” it is hard to be *moved* or to find room or time for simple joy. It is easy to be *moved* if we are *light*. The accomplishments and excellence of others can move us if we are not jealous, and the simple beauties can move us if we see them as the great gifts they are.

The relationship between joy and stewardship is a direct and powerful one as is the relationship between pride and misery. Joy is the objective and stewardship is the vehicle. Joy is the goal and stewardship is the plan. Joy is the *what* and stewardship is the *how*.

Owning, Renting or Stewardship

(An attitude of true stewardship is more motivating, more responsible, and more joyful than an attitude of ownership.)

Anyone who has ever had rental property knows the disinclination of most renters to take good care of anything. Absentee landlordship is the worst of all. You optimistically assume all is well with your property and your renters until you visit and find that nothing is well.

My best (worst) example of this is a little rental home we had early in our marriage. We were living elsewhere and one month the rent check (which usually came late) didn't come at all.

I called an acquaintance who lived nearby and asked her to check it out. This acquaintance is an interesting woman, extremely blunt and candid. When she called back, she gave her report in two three-word sentences. "They are gone." "They trashed it."

Indeed they were, and indeed they had. Everything had to be replaced -- the carpet, the doors, the appliances, the fixtures, even several of the *walls*.

Two other rental experiences by way of contrast. First, a home we owned in the Washington, D.C. suburbs. We lived nearby so we watched it and became concerned that the renters weren't taking very good care of it. Then they offered to buy and we accepted their offer. We still drove by occasionally and noticed the incredible difference. Their sloppiness had become fastidiousness. Every blade of grass was trimmed, every broken shingle replaced.

The only better-cared-for home I've seen was one we leased to some people with an option to buy. They wanted the house badly and intended to exercise their option as soon as they could afford it, so they took immaculate care of everything even though it was not yet theirs.

We generally care for things better when we own them than when they belong to someone else. But there is a third level -- a higher level with a motivation for care that is much higher than ownership. Imagine that you had been given the use of something incredibly precious by someone for whom you had ultimate respect and admiration. You were told to care for it well, but to enjoy it and use it -- even develop it and improve it. You were also told of the possibility that it could someday become yours.

Whereas *ownership* could become routine -- you could tire of what you had, perhaps set it aside, lose interest in it, or take it for granted, a *stewardship*, bestowed by a great owner, would challenge you and stimulate you and prompt you not only to do your own best but to seek advice and guidance from the owner. Ownership might evolve into laziness. Stewardship under a watchful and much loved master never could.

Stewardship must never become a let-up or a cop-out, or a give-up -- if so, it becomes rentership, which is lower than ownership. We must remember who the owner is and how high His standards and expectations are.

Ownership can ultimately point toward a lazy form of rest. If we own enough, we can settle back and quit working. Stewardship leads in the opposite direction. As entrustment increases, the progress and challenge of stewardship grows and expands.

And not only does our challenge expand, our need for guidance grows, deepening our humility, and we come to love and depend on the spirit, and to cherish Christ's offer to "cast our burdens on Him."

Mahatma Gandhi, in perhaps one of the most dramatic statements of anti-materialism ever made, gave up the cumbrance and ownership of every earthly thing save three: his loin cloth, his spectacles, and his scriptures. Anything beyond these, he had decided, would occupy his attention and consume the thought and energy that he wished to devote to other's needs and to higher causes. (It is important to remember, however, that Gandhi's goal for his people was freedom from poverty.)

The bottom line is that stewardship is not only a more accurate and more peaceful paradigm than ownership. It is a more *motivating* one. While the selfishness of ownership may provide one level of incentive, there is a stronger, higher motivation in the responsibility and

glory of caring for things that belong to a greater owner.

The Bonds and Shackles of Materialism

The Feelings of Stewardship

(An attitude of stewardship releases us and expands our latitude of experience, of feeling, and of thought.)

There is no shortage of compelling and articulate warnings against materialism and about how too many things destroy our freedom. Some of my favorites:

Emerson said:

“Things are in the saddle and rule mankind.”

His friend Thoreau felt the same thing -- only more so. He compared owning a farm to going to jail. *“Both control and confine us”* he said. *“We are encumbered by the things we own.”* Thoreau also said, *“Our houses are such unwieldy property that we are often*

imprisoned rather than housed by them.” He also said, “Men have become tools of their tools.”

Bertrand Russell put it this way:

“It is the preoccupation with possession, more than any other thing, that keeps men and women from living freely and nobly.”

And e. e. cummings drove home the point in his own unique way:

“More, more, more, more, my hell, what are we all, morticians?”

E. M. Forster, in an essay called “My Wood” tried to explain the effect that ownership had upon him:

“I bought a wood . . . it is the first property I have owned . . . what is the effect of property upon the character?”

“In the first place, it makes me feel heavy. Property does have this effect. Property produces men of weight, and it was a man of weight who failed to get into the Kingdom of Heaven. They (the Gospels) point out what is perfectly obvious, yet seldom realized: that if you have a lot of things you cannot move about a lot, that furniture requires dusting, dusting requires servants, servants require insurance.

“Property makes its owner feel that he ought to do something to it. Yet he isn’t sure what. A restlessness comes over him . . . Sometimes I think I will cut down such trees as remain in the wood; at other times I want to fill up the gaps between them with new trees. Both impulses are pretentious and empty. They are not honest movements towards money-making or beauty. They spring from a foolish desire to express myself and from an inability to enjoy what I have got. Creation, property, enjoyment form a sinister trinity in the human mind. Creation and enjoyment are both very good, yet they are often unattainable without a material basis, and at such moments property pushes itself in as a substitute.

“It (materialism) is also forced on us by an internal defect in the soul, by the feeling that in property may lie the germs of self-development and of exquisite or heroic deeds. Our life on earth is, and ought to be, materials and carnal. But we have not yet learned to manage our materialism and carnality properly; they are still entangled with the desire for ownership, where (in the words of Dante) ‘Possession is one with loss’.”

Possession is one with loss. Are we willing to go that far? We all need and want

certain things. The problem is separating the two. Can we distinguish what we need from what we want? A candid friend of mine, an advertising executive, says, “*Advertising is the fine and subtle act of making people think they need what they actually only want.*”

How do we separate wants from needs? How do we know when we have enough?

Two upwardly mobile young professionals were discussing what they considered to be a very deep and intellectual topic. “We seek wealth because of the freedom it brings,” said one. “It allows us to go and be and do what we want.” “But the question is,” said the other, “at what level does wealth start *removing* freedom because the things we own take so much of our time and attention to look after them?” A good question, and one that may lead to voluntary simplicity and to release from the manacles of materialism. Yet still an inaccurate question because we own nothing and therefore are always non-wealthy while God is all-wealthy. The better question is, “What stewardship has God given, what stewardship does He want to give? What can others use, or care for better than we, and how can we find God’s guidance in what we do with what is His?”

Airplane chat:

Next to me sat a financial planner,
poring over balance sheets
as I worked on this manuscript.

“What do you do?”

(we exchanged the classic American conversation opener).

“I’ll tell you something I’ve observed in my work,”

he said,

“That might tie into your book.”

He said people typically came to him initially and said,

“Help me earn and plan and save so I’ll have *enough*.”

He helped them set a goal

(a number they thought would be enough).

He said most people, when they reach “enough” say,

“Help me get a bit more, as a cushion.”

He said most people, when they get the cushion say,

“I’ve decided enough isn’t enough.”

We like to say “enough is enough,”

but enough isn’t *ever* enough

because we get the *more* habit,

and we’ve learned so much about how to get more

and so little about how to use and enjoy

and give what we have.

Many of us think we have limited our wants, held check on our excesses. But then we

catch ourselves saying something ultimately ridiculous like, “All I want is the property next to mine.”

We want to be less materialistic, and we want our society to be less materialistic. The majority who feel this way is huge as illustrated in a National public opinion poll done for the Chavez Company:

Would you like to see a return
to a simpler, family-oriented society
with less emphasis on materialism?
Yes: 82% No: 18%

The attitude of stewardship is the only answer. Through it we can realize that we don't own our possessions any more than we own the beach or the sea.

Summer holidays
Beach houses and boats.
Owners spending their vacations fixing, polishing,
worrying.
Worrying
about their things,
protecting them with alarm systems,
so preoccupied with ownership, they miss
the infinitely greater joys of wind, sand,
sky and lake,
all of which belong to them just exactly as much
as the boats and beach houses do.

When stewardship takes hold of us, we begin looking harder for ways to give than for ways to get. Many years ago, while at graduate school in Boston, I played on a community basketball team which won a regional tournament and qualified to go to the national finals. We all wanted to go; but since most of us were struggling students, we couldn't afford the plane fare.

We asked around, looking for someone who might want to help, and it was suggested that we go see one Bill Hartley who, we were told, might be interested in helping with the expense.

Two members of our team knew Bill Hartley and at the suggestion because he was a quiet, unassuming man who gave no indications of being wealthy.

But we went to see him. Bill Hartley, as it turned out, was a man of means, but also a man who lived simply and humbly, and a man who understood stewardship. He listened to our situation and then said something like this: “Yes, I’ll help. I don’t think of what I have as belonging to me anyway. I’m a steward, and when some worthy use for money or something else I’m taking care of comes along, I always feel relieved to return some portion of my stewardship and to have that much less to worry about.”

Stewardship, Balance, and Serendipity

(An attitude of stewardship connects our priorities, makes it more natural to balance work and personal needs, improves our relationships and our receptivity to divine guidance.)

When Linda and I wrote our book, *Lifebalance*, we hoped it would be a manual and a guide for people who wanted techniques and methods for balancing work, family, and personal needs.

To some extent, it has been so. But we've realized something. It's not mental methods or temporal techniques that get people balanced. The *desire* to be balanced, to prioritize the things of eternal importance, doesn't come from the mind. It comes from the *spirit* and from the *heart*.

If our hearts are turned to our children, to service, to true acceptance and honoring of stewardships from God, *then* we will remove the materialism and much of the selfishness in life, replacing them with a spiritual balance.

So, as it turns out, I wrote the books in the wrong order. *Spiritual Stewardship* is the attitude that brings the guidance of the Spirit into our hearts and that give us the desire to balance our lives according to the Lord's pattern. *Lifebalance* should have been (and perhaps still can be) a follow up.

To one who grasps and accepts the concept of stewardship, balancing takes on a refreshing simplicity: What are my stewardships? What is their relative importance? How can I balance them? Now, instead of the perplexing business of trying to do everything and be everything, we select and lift up the things we have been given -- the things that are really ours to care for -- and there are only three: Our families, our work, and our selves. (Each of us must define our own "self" -- what interests, what service, what commitments it includes.)

Balancing three things -- and thinking of them as stewardships brings simplicity and harmony. We begin to discard and eliminate things that aren't stewardships -- that don't matter. We begin to realize that the time and relationships we give up for more *things* are bad tradeoffs. We begin to understand what Henry David Thoreau meant when he said:

"The true cost of a thing is the amount of what I call life that is required to be exchanged for it."

A stewardship attitude helps in prioritizing things that matter most. We begin to understand statements like:

“No success can compensate for failure in the home.”

or

“The most important work you will ever do will be within the walls of your own home.”

Complete responsibility for others of God’s children (we call them our children but in fact they are our brothers and sisters -- we “babysit” for their true parent) is an awesome stewardship. But just the *perspective* of children as stewardships (rather than as something we own and control) makes us better parents. If we think of our children as the genetic creations of our own bodies, flung into first-time life as we give them birth, it may follow to think of them as unprogrammed computers that we can program or as lumps of clay which we can mold into whatever we wish them to be.

But if we think of our children as God’s children, our own brothers and sisters, as old spiritually as ourselves, then the better metaphor is *seedlings*, each with built-in and unique possibilities. We are not sculptors working with stone, but gardeners or stewards, nourishing and cultivating so each kind of tree will grow up to its own unique best.

“Some time ago, as I was officiating in the nightly ritual of getting our little children into bed, I may have seemed a bit dictatorial with the directions to ‘pick up your clothes, brush your teeth’ and other such utterances. Then our five year old wistfully looked and said, ‘Daddy, do you own me?’ While she has doubtless long since forgotten her question, I have remembered it as a challenge to distinguish carefully between ownership and stewardship.

“Often as parents and leaders we may be tempted to direct as owners rather than as stewards. In the last analysis, we own very little, but are stewards over much.”

Russell M. Nelson

There are at least three “levels” of parenting:

“Level one” parents raise their children by reaction -- by trying to solve problems when they arise and meet crisis when it comes. “Level two” parents try for an offense and a plan to

go with the defense and the reaction. They ask, “What do we want for our children? What can we give our children?” “Level three” parents ask a higher and more accurate question that brings light and guidance. “What does God want for these, His children, and how can we assist in helping Him give those gifts to the small brothers and sister who live in our home?”

Serendipity is defined as “a state of mind whereby a person is sensitive and aware enough to find something good while seeking something else.” It suggests that we can be structured *and* spontaneous, disciplined *and* flexible -- if we can develop a serendipity attitude. Spiritual serendipity includes the seeking of divine guidance and “promptings” in seeing the path we should take.

For many years I have lectured to corporate and business groups on stewardship and serendipity. One night, I found myself in a very different rural setting, giving my serendipity seminar to a group that consisted mostly of farmers. I sensed as I spoke that this group either didn’t “get it” or else they needed it less than the groups I was used to.

A farmer came up afterward and convinced me that it was the latter. “I enjoyed your speech,” he said, “and I hadn’t ever heard the word ‘serendipity’ before. But you know, farmers are sort-of naturally that way -- we have to be.” He explained that, as a farmer, he had plans of what he would like to do in a certain day, but the weather and natural conditions forced flexibility and observing them often caused him to shift his attention to a more pressing need or a more “do-able” project. “You can’t just *act* on a farm,” he said. “You’ve got to learn to *react* as well.”

He had a comment on stewardship as well. “Farmers also pretty much know they are stewards,” he said. “Anyone who really thinks about it knows that the land is God’s, as is the water and the wind. It’s our land just to use and to care for.”

I drove home that night with a better understanding of the *connections* between my two favorite words. *Stewardship* and *serendipity*, two eleven-letter S words that symbolize the two *attitudes* I want most to live by. The words are *linked* in many ways. Serendipity requires spiritual awareness and guidance from the Spirit (that we might see what God wants us to do and notice the unexpected *ways* He may have prepared for us -- even as we are pursuing some other worthwhile goal). This same guidance also lies at the heart of stewardship where we acknowledge that we must be guided by the *owner* if we are to be good stewards over *His* things.

Spiritual serendipity is the conviction that we should seek guidance rather than control. Spiritual stewardship is the belief that we are caretakers rather than owners. The two play cause- and-effect with each other. The acknowledgment of our status as stewards causes us to seek the very guidance that brings about spiritual serendipity or the awareness of what God wants us to do. And the consistent pursuit of guidance and of awareness of the serendipitous directions God may have in mind for us is the best way to become worthy and effective stewards.

As our stewardships increase and expand, so does our *need* for spiritual serendipity. If our assignments, or entrustment, or opportunities are very basic (like simple times tables in a math class), then perhaps we can do them or care for them in a rather routine, self-reliant way. But if we want to get beyond “basic arithmetic” into higher and freer forms, we need spiritual serendipity or an open, sensitive attitude in which the Spirit can show us purer, stronger, more

creative ways to multiply and magnify what we have been entrusted with.

Try to imagine how God might view one of us as we set our goals and make our plans. Perhaps He would smile as He observed. Part of His smile might be His approval of our efforts to decide what we want to do and what we want to contribute. And part of His smile might be His amusement in how little we know of what is in store for us and therefore how incomplete our plans usually are.

If we seek to know and understand the stewardships we have been given, and if we seek to have the constant, serendipity-like guidance of the Holy Spirit in magnifying and balancing those stewardships -- then perhaps His smile will also reflect His pleasure in our faithfulness.

Stewardship and Leadership

(An attitude of stewardship fundamentally changes and elevates our ability to lead other people. The concern and service-mentality of stewardship inspires trust rather than resentment and competition. And our leadership decisions become inspired rather than insulated)

I have a friend who loves to talk about *ideas*. He is one of the few people I have ever known who has no interest in talking about people (he would call that gossip) and no interest in talking about the weather or about everyday events (he would call that small talk). It's not that he is uninterested in people, and he actually loves the weather -- it's just that ideas are what he likes to talk about.

Anyway, I love to take long drives with this friend of mine because the time is filled with the exploration of ideas. One day, on the way back from a trip, he said, "Why do you think Jesus said that the meek will inherit the earth?" For the next several hours, driving through the beauty of Eastern Oregon, we worked on the question. Certainly *leadership* would be required

to run the earth. Is meekness a quality of leadership? That is certainly not the usual context. We identify leadership with assertiveness and aggressiveness. Aren't these opposites of meekness? Wouldn't the earth be inherited by those who had demonstrated leadership that included wisdom, intelligence, compassion, vision, courage, discipline, and love?

Yes, we decided, leadership included all of these, but *great* and *trusted* leadership included one thing *more* -- one capstone quality that made all the other qualities work better and that allowed others to *trust* the leader enough to *give* him leadership over them, to entrust their destiny to him. This final, great quality, we decided, was *meekness* -- defined as a humble dependency on God and a genuine respect for other people that would prevent any unrighteous dominion or prideful dominance.

This kind of meekness is an attitude of stewardship. A leader who sees himself as a *steward* over those he leads will lead with gentleness, persuasion, and long-suffering. He will acknowledge that God is the true leader and, as a steward, will try to do what God would do and care in the way God cares. Such a leader is the type that others will want to be led by, that others will entrust leadership to, and thus that will inherit the earth.

In the leadership sense, stewardship is like "shepherdship." The shepherd, Jesus's most common leader-metaphor, *led* his sheep rather than herding them, and cared for them as individuals rather than as a flock.

The attitude of stewardship is not the only quality of leadership, but it is the capstone quality -- it is the factor that can help us lead with the guidance of the true leader and that causes

those we lead to trust our motives and to want to give us their support.

A stewardship leader serves those he leads rather than seeing them as his servants. They are his charge and his concern, not his status or his subjects. Their followership will be based on mutual respect, not on fear.

When we elevate the concept to *spiritual* stewardship, seeing God as the owner, it becomes natural to care for *His* things, His people, as He would care for them -- to lead as He leads. Thus we follow the ultimate leadership model and in doing so we rely on His power and insight rather than our own.

This shift -- relying on His power rather than ours -- brings into focus the remarkable distinction between self-confidence and faith, between self-help and divine help, between our extreme limitation and the omnipotence of God. The difference, as we consciously shift from one to the other, is a more thoughtful, more insightful, more peaceful as well as a vastly more powerful form of leadership.

A Semantics Break and a Survey of Insights to This Point

I sat at dinner with a friend, talking about stewardship and about an early draft of this book. He had read it and wanted to share some reaction and response.

“We have a lot of wrong ideas about stewardship,” he said. In its economic sense, we associate it with communism or with trying to force an ownerless kind of equality on people. Actually, there have been some economic experiments with “stewardship” that worked quite well -- but the idea was not to have all things in common or to have exactly equal or similar stewardships. People were given what they could *handle*, and the goal was the common *good*.”

My friend had some expertise in semantics and etymology. We talked about how words sometimes evolve *outside* their original meaning. The English “Commonwealth,” for example, is often taken to mean the common wealth -- or things owned in common. The original word, however, was “common weal” which meant *for the common good* -- things which could be used by all and not be diminished.

Stewardship is not intended by God to make everyone poorer, but to make everyone richer, to wisely transfer all that He has to His children, His heirs.

The root *stig*, which means “upward reaching,” to strive, to try, evolved into *stew*.

The root *ware* means to watch out for, as in beware.” This evolved to the root *ward*. A ward of the court in England is an *heir* who is watched over until he is old enough to take over on his own.

Steward: One who watches over that to which he is heir, while reaching upward, acknowledging its source, remembering its Giver, striving to handle it as He would, use it as He would, give it as He would.

An acceptor of true stewardship tries to build, to strengthen, to multiply. He does not take pride nor does he abdicate or give up nor does he wish for less. A steward over property does not count it as power or superiority, but neither does he give it up by a vow of poverty. A steward over sexual desire and powers of procreation does not squander or use them lightly, but neither does he try to rid himself of them by a vow of celibacy.

I confessed, clear back in the preface, that *joy*, *serendipity*, and *stewardship* are my favorite words. Let me attempt, at this point, to chart some connections between these four word-concepts and some bridges that connect them to the two qualities perhaps needed most by people today.

The chart is not a “quick study.” But with some pondering, and with the notes of explanation that follow, it can review the process by which great attitudes become great capacities.

*Awe,
Worship,
Calm.*

*Nudges
Impressions,
Insights.*

*Gifts
Guidance,
Responsibilities.*

*Gratitude
Acknowledgment,
Peace.*

*Sagacity
Generosity,
Sensitivity,
Spontaneity*

Spiritual Serendipity

Spiritual Synergy

Spiritual Stewardship

*Charity,
Provident
Living.*

*Opportunity,
Vision,
Adventure,
Creativity.*

*Meekness
(confident
humility).*

Leadership

*Independence
and Interdependence*

Lifebalance

*Correct Priorities
(time and energy
balance.)*

*Perception and
Flexible Discipline*

Notes on the chart:

Both *Spiritual Serendipity* and *Spiritual Stewardship* begin with and develop from a relationship with God. The Spirit's serendipitous awareness "draws down" nudges, impressions, and divine insights and returns awe and calm, profound worship. Acceptance of oneself as a steward generates gratitude and peaceful acknowledgment of God's hand in all things and derives guidance, gifts, and stewardship responsibilities.

Both the "receiving" and the "returning" produce joy.

The heightened awareness of a serendipity attitude opens one to opportunities and creative possibilities that others miss and allows him to see both the adventure in life and the broader view that gives him vision.

Through stewardship we see both how close we are to God as His children and yet how far our imperfection is from His perfection. Thus, confidence and humility have the same source (an understanding of our relationship with God) and generate the kind of meekness that allows others to entrust themselves to us.

The vision of serendipity and the meekness of stewardship are two of the rare yet indispensable qualities that are involved in true leadership.

Also, from the open-minded awareness of serendipity comes sagacity and sensitivity which allows one to be flexible and to balance the structured, task-and-list oriented left brain with the spontaneous and creative impulses of the right brain.

At the same time, the correct and clear priorities and values of stewardship prompt a balance of our time and energy among the eternally important aspect of life.

Through Serendipity we:

SEE LIFE AS

Adventure

We welcome questions, surprises, interruptions, needs, opportunities, and ideas as adventures. We learn to find them where no-one else does. We look for them with physical and spiritual senses, believing that each surprise comes from God who knows us better than we do. We let each instance of spontaneity and flexibility bring joy.

Giving and Receiving

We receive all, knowing that every good thing is a stewardship from God. We give when we see needs and give care to our entrustments. We find joy in each moment of receiving and of giving. We become good at letting in, and at forgiving and repenting (two things that are virtually unlearnable except on this earth).

SEE SELF AS

Receiver

of beauty, experience. Guidance, surprise, insight, hidden treasure.

Ultimate-potential nothingness

grateful for guidance, natural inclination to be generous.

SEE GOD AS

Loving Father

giver of nudges, impressions, inspiration, and guidance.

Great Master

whom we serve, and in serving, love, and in loving, know.

The Real Part Is The Spirit

(Spiritual Stewardship allows the liberating perspective of knowing what is temporary and what is eternal. The body is the glove -- the stewardship -- the spirit is the hand. With that understanding, we begin to know who we are and how and why this world exists.)

I have a friend who reads everything he can find on out-of-body experiences, near-death experiences, anything where one part of us moves beyond anything that indicates that there is more to us than flesh and bone and brain. He also pays attention to intuition and *deja' vu* and notions of any kind that we have other sources of knowledge and understanding than our five senses.

In one discussion I had with him, he told me that his fondest hope was to have a personal out-of-body experience . . . to leave his body and then return to it. It would be more exciting than anything he said -- more exciting than being able to fly, more exciting than space travel.

We'd had similar discussions before, and this time I decided to take it in a different

direction. “I think I know a way you can have that experience if you really want it badly enough.” “I do,” he said, wondering if I had more psychic or mystic interests than I’d revealed.

“All you have to do . . .” I said “is die.”

Our discussion did go a different way from there. We decided that out-of-body experience was the *norm* for eternity, that it was in-body experience that is rare -- occurring briefly -- here on this earth.

We also realized, as we talked, that the main lesson or message carried back by those who have been temporarily out of their bodies is to *appreciate* this brief time in our bodies, to care for and be grateful for all our stewardships -- especially those involving children, families, *relationships*.

It seems natural and right to think of the earth and its beauties, our unique talents and our remarkable physical bodies as *gifts*. We did nothing to earn them or to deserve them -- so they are gifts. But acknowledging that begs a question. Who is the giver, and who (if our bodies are part of the gift) is the recipient?

The answers, to those two questions (and to life), are *God* and *our own eternal spirits*.

The answers must not be hard to accept, because most of the world *does*. (Surveys reveal that more than 95 percent believe in God and in a spirit within themselves that continues after death; and 90 percent pray regularly to God.)

In some ways, the question is more challenging than the answer. The question, you recall, had to do with giving and receiving -- with *stewardship*. And while most profess a belief

in God and in the eternal spirit within man, far fewer deal with the perception of God as an owner and themselves as caretaker-stewards. This *relationship* between God and man (the subject of insights 7 and 8) can be the key to the goals we set, the priorities we live by, and the peace and joy that we attract to our lives.

In this light we can now refer to our pursuit, to the subject of this book, as *spiritual* stewardship. Our spirit, the lasting part of us, is entrusted with stewardships over things made by and belonging to God. How we use and care for these things (from the earth to our talents to our bodies to our opportunities to our children) determines how long we will have them and whether they will ever actually belong to us.

Because the most real and lasting part of us is spirit, the most meaningful and lasting things we can seek are things of the spirit. Thus God says to us:

“Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” (Matthew 6:21)

“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt.”
(Matthew 6:19)

“Be poor of this world but rich in faith.” (James 2:5)

“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” (I John 2:15)

“For what is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?”
(Matthew 16:26)

“A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.” (James 1:8)

Stewardship, even without the spiritual dimension, is a useful concept. For example, a

person may perceive himself as a steward of the earth for future generations, or as someone who has been fortunate and thus should “give something back” to society. Even without spiritual connections, stewardship is a better and truer way to view the world than ownership.

But with the spiritual insight that God is the owner and we are *His* stewards comes the excitement of a true and powerful unfolding of perspective, purpose, and potential.

God is the Owner

(Spiritual Stewardship provides us with the security of knowing that there is an absolute owner and thus that there are absolute truths, absolute rights and wrongs, unchanging realities, and eternal principles on which we can always rely.)

I was driving home from a vacation, alone with my oldest daughter; the rest of the family had gone on ahead. It was precious one-on-one time, and I was enjoying her company, her strong, individual opinions, her experiences from her just-completed freshman year at Wellesley College near Boston.

This book, halfway written, was a major topic -- partly because Saren had become my best editor and best critic. But I jumped to the heart of the topic too quickly and she balked.

I said the central thesis of my book was that God owned all and we owned nothing. All we have, from possessions to talents, are His and since they have been *given*, so could they also be taken away.

She wasn't ready to go that far. She said, "The earth is His, but *we* are not is. The one thing that belongs to us is ourselves! There is something of us that has always been and thus

that is ours. Talents are part of what we *are*. We're better off thinking of talents and gifts as *ours*, but being willing to give them to God and use them for His purposes."

We learned a lot that day, from each other and from the Spirit, and the feeling (and the context of stewardship) was more brother-sister than father-daughter. We decided that all of God's stewardships were real gifts that could become ours forever but that, in the dynamics of His plan, all stewardships either grow as they are invested and developed or diminish as they are idle or buried.

As we drove and talked, we listed a half dozen related insights:

1. In one way, God owns *us* as well as all *things*. In fact, for Christians, His ownership is *doubled* where we are concerned. We belong to God because we are His children. We belong to Christ because he ransomed us, purchased us with His atonement.
2. One way of realizing that we own nothing is to acknowledge that there is nothing over which we have ultimate control or which we can never lose or have taken from us. Talents and gifts, like opportunities or options, like possessions and like children, are given to us to use and develop, but can be forfeited (and perhaps, in God's perfect economy, given to others) through ill use. There are examples all around of lost gifts and talents that once were someone's stewardship.
3. It could be well argued, at least among Christians, that we own our bodies. We will lose them at death, but we will all reclaim them in the resurrection. Christ's atonement assures that. Still, since we will lose our bodies for a time, and since their *nature* and glory

when we take them up again depends on our righteousness, it behooves us to think of them in their present form as a stewardship.

4. The more complete exception is our agency or freedom to choose. This we *own*. This we can never lose or have taken from us. This one thing is given not as a stewardship but as an outright, absolute gift. Since it is the one thing we own, it is the one thing we can give God, by trying to submit our will to His.

5. Religion, without this sense of insight into stewardship loses its power and efficacy. This is why, in many “religious” people through the ages and today, there is greed, selfishness, and materialism.

6. There are four levels on which people can live, depending on their paradigms. The highest level, level 4, is stewardship.

Level 1. “The world owes me a living.”

Level 2. “I own, you own. I deserve what I’ve got, and you deserve what you’ve got.”

Level 3. “Where much is given, much is required. I’ve been given much, so I must give something back.

Level 4. All is God’s. Through my stewardships I can assist Him in His purposes.

Noble and admirable as the third level is, it does not “plug in” to God’s power as does level 4. On level 3 we might seek guidance by asking, “What would God have me do with what I own?” On level 4 we would ask, “What would God have me do with what is His?”

“We must, in the first place, remember that (the property that we have) is not ours. Why? Because the earth is the Lord’s and the fulness thereof. We have no cattle, no gold or silver, no watches or jewelry, no property of any description, no houses, lands, or anything else which is our own. Then in the giving of that which we have been in the habit of calling our own, we are only returning to the Lord His own property.” (Orson Pratt)

Once again the bottom line of the insight is stewardship. All is His and we are His. Brigham Young, the great colonizer of the American West and thus a man with enormous stewardships understood this. He said, *“We are not our own . . . we are bought with a price. We are the Lord’s, our time, our talents, our gold and silver . . . and all there is on this earth . . .”* *“Whatever you have, it is the Lord’s. You own nothing.”*

The Bible reconfirms: *“Ye are not your own.”* (I Cor. 6:20) *“The earth is the Lord’s, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.”* (Psalms 24:1)

Since all belongs to God, since He and His reality are absolute, His will, His values and His truth are also absolute. Conditional morality and value than change with person, place, and time are not of Him.

There is enormous security in knowing that the standard does not move, that what was right yesterday is right today, that while we, our stewardships, and everything about us might change from day to day, God does not change, nor do His commandments, nor does His love.

The Owner is Also Our Father

(Spiritual Stewardship takes on an intricate and personal connotation when we believe in an inheritance -- in gifts from a real and loving Heavenly Father.)

Few things have ever caught my attention as dramatically as what my precocious little four-year-old daughter said to me one Sunday afternoon. I was sitting in my recliner, reading the newspaper, when she climbed up on the footrest, pulled my paper down and announced, “You’re not really my daddy.”

“What?” I said. I didn’t know whether to be amused or annoyed. “Who told you that? What are you talking about?”

“Well . . .” she said, enjoying being the focus of my full attention. “Today in Sunday School my teacher said that God is our real Father, and so we’re really all brothers and sisters.”

I smiled, patted her little blond head and told her that she was exactly right. I started to hoist up the newspaper again but she wasn’t finished with me.

“You’re my brother and I’m your sister . . . and guess what I’ve decided daddy?”

“What?”

“I’ve decided that I’m your big sister!”

The newspaper could wait. “Did your teacher tell you that?” I said.

“Kind of. She said she thought maybe Heavenly Father saved his brightest, smartest children to come down here later, when everything is so hard and complicated.”

I’m still not sure exactly what that Sunday School teacher told her, but I know of no more profound or pivotal truth than the simple and literal statement, “*God is our Father.*” It has almost as powerful an effect on our paradigm as “*There is a God.*” Belief in a God opens to us vistas of eternity and real purpose in life. Belief that God is our Father opens to us a whole other dimension of love, guidance, and eternal potential.

“Father” -- the title and salutation the *Bible* gives us for God, is not a metaphor. It is a literal truth. We are spirit children of God. We are in His image because we are His offspring. This insight can have a profound effect on how we think about everything, particularly about ourselves.

I sat in a training meeting once where the motivational speaker must have felt we were a little caught up in our own importance. He corrected this impression by telling us the number of stars and suns astronomers had so far discovered in the universe. He wrote the number on the blackboard, and it was huge, with 15 or 16 zeros. To help us understand its size, he asked how thick we thought a book would be if it had that many pages. Someone guessed 100 feet thick.

Another thought it might be ten miles. The speaker informed us that the book would be thick enough to extend around the world 600 times. He then pointed out that we were tiny specks on one planet that went around one of those innumerable suns. When he had us feeling incredibly small, to the point of nothingness, he gave us the other side of the principle.

“When I look out on the night sky,” he said, “I see the handwork of God. But when I look out on your faces, I see the offspring of God!”

He then told us that all we could see, wherever we chose to look, was made for us -- that we were stewards over all that God had made.

I loved that experience because it created in my mind an illuminating oxymoron. “Confident humility” or “humble confidence.” These two words which in secular context seem opposite are spiritually of the same root. We are truly humble in realization of the vast difference between our limits and God’s omnipotence, between our nothingness and His everythingness. Yet we are truly confident in the realization that we are God’s children and can draw on and eventually inherit and develop some of His wisdom, His peace, His power.

Just how literally are we God’s children? Are we His children because He made us, like the table is the child of the carpenter who made it? Did our existence and our childhood to God begin with our birth on this earth or did we live before? Were we His children before? Were we spirits, His spirit children, before He gave us the stewardship of physical and spiritual earth?

Wordsworth, in a poem about immortality, gave an answer that is as clear and compelling as it is beautiful:

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting
The soul that rises with us,
our life star
hath had elsewhere its setting
and cometh from afar
not in utter nakedness
and not in entire forgetfulness
but trailing clouds of glory do we come
from God
who is our home.

Our life star, our spirits, did begin elsewhere. We left an earlier life to come here. We came from afar, from a premortal life where we lived as spirits with God, the Father of our spirits. Earth, mortality, time, physical bodies, powers of procreation, agency and freedom of choice -- all are stewardships given to us by a loving Father to facilitate or at least to allow growth, progress, and joy.

The freedom and independence necessary for this growth is given by a forgetting of our earlier life. But the forgetting, as Wordsworth says, is not entire -- we trail clouds of glory. We have conscience, we recognize light and truth, we experience *deja' vu* and sense, in deep and important moments, that there is more to us than genetics, and more history to us than these few years on earth.

Virtually all religion, ancient and modern, encompasses a belief in the eternity of the soul -- in life after death. Less discussed, less canonized, but equally important is the other half of eternity -- our life before birth. A one-way eternity is both illogical and unfulfilling.

Belief in God as our Father and in our pre-earth life with Him removes some of the blockades of reason that undermine many people's faith, "Why would a loving God allow suffering, or inequality?" can be answered (or at least deferred to a faith that there *is* an answer) by the concept of a Father who allows us to learn from experience and by the realization that we

only see a narrow slice -- that when we see all of the “before” and all of the “after,” the “now” will make more sense. Believing that there is no God or that God is arbitrary and unfair is like a spectator coming into the stadium in the middle of a race and drawing conclusions about why some runners are ahead of others, or an Aborigine returning from “walkabout” to his tribe, drawing conclusions about the white man cutting his wife with a knife (not knowing that medical missionaries came in his absence and not knowing about appendectomies).

Our unique and individual stewardships did not come about by chance, nor did we chance upon them. They were given to us by a loving and eternal and infinitely wise Father. And they continue to be given, each day. How we think about them, how we use and develop them, and how humble and grateful we are for them will become the measure of our happiness here and in the hereafter.

The Plan and Purpose of Mortality

(Spiritual Stewardship encompasses not only what we have been given, but why. It is knowing the reason for gifts that allows us to use them well.)

Knowing God as a Father and believing that we came from Him to this earth changes everything. Our respect for all men, all women, and all children (including our own) is enhanced because we see them all as brothers and sisters. Our tolerance expands, because we are aware that no matter how big our differences may be with others, they can never match our similarities. Our confidence expands as we accept our Godlike heredity, even as our humility deepens in acknowledgment of His perfection and our imperfection. We begin to see the earth and all of mortality not only as a gift, but as an inheritance.

How natural that a father would plan for his children, that a father, to the best of his ability, would provide a way, a means, a path for the happiness and well-being of his children. A father of perfect abilities would provide a perfect plan -- as our Father has done -- containing freedom of choice by which we can test ourselves, *families* through which we can assume the role of parents (previously a role and title only of God), *physical* bodies to experience physical beauty and develop discipline, and a world full of challenges, opportunities, surprises, gifts and joys.

The best one-word title or description of this plan -- in which a wise father entrusts his finest things to his children, allowing them to develop and prove themselves -- is *stewardship*.

The notion of children, growing to a certain point *with* their parents and then going out on their own to continue their education and become their truest selves is easy to grasp -- particularly easy for any parent who has send a child off to college. We know that freedom, distance, and a place of new experiences are necessities for their continue growth and progress. In a vastly higher plan, so it was with ourselves, and with our Father God.

Because it involved real freedom and real choice, God's plan of a physical mortality involved risk. Without the possibility of individual failure, there could not be genuine possibilities for success. The risks were magnified by God's perfection and by the certainty that we would make mistakes which would separate us from Him and preclude our return. There was, therefore, a need for *atonement*, for one who could pay our ransom and activate a process of repentance and improvement that would allow us to come back. Our eldest spirit brother,

immeasurably beyond our own level of progress and knowledge accepted the incalculably difficult role of Savior and created for us a dependency that can win our hearts. His atonement is the most priceless part of our stewardship -- a gift we can accept but could never earn.

Perhaps the most exciting part of our Father's plan of stewardship is the promise that all that we are now entrusted with can one day become ours for eternity. Our bodies can be resurrected and perfected allowing us continuous experience in the physical as well as spiritual realm. The bonds and commitment and togetherness of our marriages and our families can continue beyond death. Our talents and aptitudes can continue to grow. And this earth, renewed, can be our heaven.

Why should it not be so? The highest purpose for stewardship is a preparation for ourselves. God, the ultimate Father, wants us to have all that he has. Stewardship is a phase in His process and plan of giving.

The Adversary's Alternative (Plan B)

(Spiritual Stewardship is undermined not only by our own tendencies toward selfishness but by a supernatural and very real force of darkness.)

We know the story, or part of it, through scripture and legend. It is the story of ourselves, in our first estate, and the story of the great conflict where agency, atonement, and the glory of God was pitted against coercion, manipulation, and Lucifer's glory.

Lucifer, the fallen angel, spoke against freedom, decrying its risk and offering a false guarantee under his control, winning the misguided allegiance of one-third of our spirit brothers and sisters. He did not lose the "vote" gracefully or with any reconciliation but with vows of eternal opposition, thus becoming the adversary that the Father's plan required.

With his departure, the scriptural story ends, but the story only begins of his demonic and

unceasing struggle to win us to him and take us from God.

Whether we see this anti-light, anti-right, anti-Christ as an individual being or simply as some kind of dark force may be less important than our realization *that it exists*.

How does Satan (or the dark force that all of us feel at times) go about his sworn objectives to take us from God and to control the world God has made? Yes, he tempts us and tries to turn us from the light and cause us to go counter to God's command. But how does he go about this? What is his strategy or game plan?

We know something of Satan's nature. It is unwise to dwell on him or become too aware of him (C. S. Lewis said, "There are two grave mistakes we can make with regard to the devil -- one is to think too much about him, the other is not to think enough about him"), but it is always helpful (and healthy) to know an opponent's strategy well enough to fight it or overcome it.

Lewis, in the best selling of all his books -- *The Screwtape Letters* -- elaborates the subtle, cunning intelligence by which the dark force uses our own natures and propensities to deceive us, confound our priorities, and encourage error and spiritual failure in our lives.

When Satan's "plan A" (coercion and force) failed, he adopted "plan B." Plan A was to keep us from having agency or freedom of choice. Plan B is to use our agency against us. In a way, the plans are not too different. Satan's goal has always been to control and enslave us. First he tried to do so by taking our agency. Now he tries to do so by *using* our agency, in its most selfish form, to orient us to *getting* and *keeping* and *hoarding* and *having* -- all of which

enslave us.

Satan's plans are always *counter* to God's. He tried to counter God's plan of freedom with force. Now he tries to counter God's plan of selfless *stewardship* with selfish *ownership*. Where a stewardship mentality humbles and liberates, an ownership mentality can build pride and enslave.

How well is Satan's plan B working? Look around! People competing for "ownership," spending more than they earn -- and spending it before they earn it; judging themselves and others on how much they have; becoming jealous and envious of each other based on relative possessions. Bumper strips (with a dark reality beneath their humor) say, "He who dies with the most toys wins" or "I owe, I owe, so off to work I go." Pretentiousness reigns and in it we spend more than we can afford for houses bigger than we need, or for cars and clothes designed to impress.

Satan's plan B of ownership involves counterfeit connections between *things* and *joy*. The connections don't work. The only things that excessive, imagined ownership provide are pride, worry, selfish "protectiveness," and dangerous feelings of independence from God.

Case studies of the effects of plan B abound in scripture and in history. Riches and perceived ownership repeatedly lead to pride which lead to apostasy and wickedness. Wickedness brings poverty which sometimes leads to humility and then repentance. Prosperity often follows but then, unfortunately, the cycle starts anew.

Now, as in earlier times, the defense against plan B and the antidote to Satan's poison of

pride is the acknowledgment of God's ownership of all, and the joyful acceptance of our favored role as children, stewards, and heirs!

Communication between Father and Children (between Heaven and earth)

(In the context of Spiritual Stewardship, prayer becomes both essential and natural. The Steward must be in communication with the owner.)

The pattern of a father sending children away to school is certainly one that I understand from an earthly perspective. As I write, my sixth child is filling out college applications and preparing to follow what has become the family tradition of going far away for the first year of university. Each time I've "deposited" a freshman at a dormitory I've had the same feelings and given the same advice: "Write, call, e-mail, fax, stay in touch, let me know what you need, ask for advice."

Our Father says the same to us. The most frequently repeated *admonition* in all of scripture is "ask," or "pray," . . . be in touch with God. The stewardship we have cannot be

successfully managed, or developed, or even appreciated without His help.

With my children, once they are away, I know that if I initiate too much contact, if I too often impose my advice on them unsolicited, I essentially take away the independence that is a key purpose of their separation. On the grander, eternal scale, God asks us to ask because to intervene without our invitation would be to violate the very agency. He has sent us here to achieve. This relationship is represented in the classic painting that shows Christ on a doorstep, willing and prepared to come in but unable to without our initiative because there is no latch or handle on His side of the door.

To push the analogy one more step, let me say that I do *equip* my children in every possible way to stay in close touch with me. I pay their phone bill, I get them an e-mail address and make sure they have mine. Similarly, but far more powerfully, God provides us with prayer.

True prayer is not a ritual, not a form of talking to one's self, not a tradition, not a wish or a fantasy. Prayer is, in reality and in the deepest sense of truth, actual communication with God. It is the channel through which we express gratitude for our stewardships and through which we seek guidance and blessings regarding our stewardships. Prayer is communication between the steward and the owner. And prayer is the source of insight and power beyond our own capacity, beyond our own comprehension, beyond our own imagination.

Ninety percent of Americans pray. Eighty percent say they do so with regularity. And "More things are wrought in this world by prayer than we can imagine." It is a simple and

accurate sense of humility that often leads us to prayer. We become aware that our stewardships require more understanding, more intelligence, and more power than we possess. The raising of a child, the making of a highly consequential decision, the facing of a personal tragedy . . . challenges that are simply beyond our own ability. “I am often driven to my knees,” said Abraham Lincoln, “by the overwhelming conviction that I have nowhere else to go!”

Prayer becomes more real and more powerful as it becomes more personal. Written or memorized prayers may act as mantras or self-programming vehicles that turn our mind toward God and toward things of the spirit, but real communication always involves our own feelings and our own words. And real communication involves *listening* as well as speaking. “Ask,” says the most frequent scriptural admonition. “Then listen” is the implication. Stay on your knees or in the attitude and mode of prayer long enough to be *receptive* to the feelings, the little nudges or impressions that constitute *answers*.

Provident Living

(Spiritual Stewardship is an attitude of quality rather than quantity, of win-win gratitude rather than win-lose competition, and of joy rather than stress.)

“We need a new car, Dad.”

“Why?”

“Because this one has dents and paint chips and the air conditioning doesn’t work.”

I found it interesting that my ten year old didn’t entertain the possibility of *fixing* or *repairing* the old car.

Partly as a lesson to him, I fixed it, had it repainted an exciting new color, tuned, repaired, and showed him that it cost less than a tenth of the cost of a new car.

That time (it’s certainly not always this way with kids) the payoff was almost immediate.

The next day my son said, “Dad, you know that \$300.00 I had saved up for a new bike?”

“Yes.”

“Well, I’m spending \$100.00 of it to fix up my old one. It will be better than new because I’m getting forged pedals, and I’m putting the other \$200.00 in my savings account.”

We live in a throw away society. Our children, if we’re not careful, begin to think that all things, *including themselves*, are disposable.

I like the word *provident* and the phrase “provident living” because they imply frugality but not miserliness, neatness but not perfectionism, preservation but not hoarding, self-reliance but not selfishness.

Most of all, provident living implies *guidance*. The root word is providence, meaning “of God.” It implies a worshipful, grateful, God-acknowledging approach to life. Provident living involves caring for stewardships God has given us and seeking guidance in their care, their use, and their giving.

Provident living is a combination of self-reliance and God reliance. We accept responsibility and stewardship, but we seek God’s help. We *appreciate* and *enjoy* and *take care* of what we have, knowing that it all belongs to God.

For years, we’ve spent a part of our summers at a mountain lake in a very rural part of Idaho. Something about the simplicity and beauty of the place makes certain aspects of stewardship particularly clear.

A few of the “owners” in the little lakeside community could only be called pretentious. They have built places far bigger and more elaborate than they need (or can afford) and surrounded them with more “toys” than they could ever use. They seem consumed by their appearance and the impressions they are making. A second group -- a much larger number -- have smaller places, but are equally obsessed with *protecting* them, with being sure no one

blocks their view of the water, with worrying about sun or wind damage, with building stronger fences with higher gates, and particularly with being sure their neighbors' place isn't better than theirs. A third group -- a smaller number -- just a few families actually, seem to approach their places at the lake as a blessing and a gift. They take care of their places, but mostly they *enjoy* them. And they *share* them. Whenever they're not there, they've loaned them to friends. Their places are always in use, always being enjoyed instead of boarded up with security systems turned on like most of their neighbors.

As I observe the "owners" (groups one and two) they're often in a hurry and often looking down (at something they are fixing or protecting). The stewards (group three) are usually more relaxed and often looking up or out (at the lake, at the sunset, at the night sky).

Owner or steward, worry or gratitude, stress or joy.

Being In The World But Not of the World

(Spiritual Stewardship, as a mind set, allows us to be selective about the parts of this world that we let in and the parts that we shut out.)

I remember once, as a university student, hearing the notion that we should try to live in the world without being “of the world.” It appealed to me particularly at that time because I had just gained a full belief in God and had thus entered what I considered to be a higher realm of thinking, of feeling, of living.

At the same time, I had begun to see the danger and the error in the view many “religious” people seemed to take of the world as an obstacle course, as evil-to-be-avoided, danger-to-be-aware-of. This defensive orientation, it seemed to me, made many try to escape the world . . . from monks who isolate themselves and try to cut off the physical world through vows of celibacy (misnamed vows of chastity) and vows of poverty . . . to every-day people who

think the world is out to get them and who try in various ways to hide from it. This type of person takes the same couplet (“Be in the world but not of the world.”) and interprets it as support for their view that the world is a bad and dangerous place to be feared and avoided.

The most exciting and useful interpretation of the phrase is as two separate and positive admonitions. “Be in the world” -- be involved, partake, and enjoy. “Be not of the world” -- avoid the materialism and worldliness that can destroy the joy.

Thus interpreted, there is such *power* and *balance* in this little saying. Like a teeter-totter with righteous weight on each end, it can keep our lives in harmony and balance. On the one hand we’re advised to be in the world -- to love and appreciate God’s incredible gifts, to care for all that we’ve been given stewardship over. On the other hand, we’re asked to rise above the misuse of mortal gifts that exist in a place made dangerous by the mixture of our agency and Satan’s temptings. The couplet suggests an offense and a defense, a concentration on both doing good and avoiding evil, a challenge to seek the light side and shun the dark side. But above all, it is an invitation to put a positive interpretation on mortality, to live and to love as faithful, joyful stewards. The contrast lends itself to a poem:

“Worldly”

“Sensuous”

“Temporal,” “Physical,” “Materialistic,” “Earthy.”

Words used to describe what we hope we’re not?

Only when mis-used.

This physical, material earth, is a gift

of senses and sensation,
a laboratory of learning,
of expansion and expression,
of freedom and faith.

It's sad (and wrong) to exploit, abuse, or worship
the physical.

But it is equally wrong (and sad)
to hate the world, or hide from it;
to fear passion or shut out what we came here to know.

Our "physicalness," like
a horse's power (capable of hurting us or running away with us)
can be feared and killed
or bridled and enjoyed.

A vow of poverty like
a vow of celibacy
is an attempt to kill passion, to escape the world,
to abdicate stewardship.

"Be in the world but not of it"
should be read not as

“You have to be so try not to be”

but as two separate, joyful admonitions.

To make it so, we must remember that the world
is not our master or our identity . . . but our gift,
that we are spiritual beings entering, experiencing, enjoying
a physical extension of ourselves.

We must bridle, we must use with discipline -- like disciples,
and most of all, we must remember
who it all belongs to.

Remembering this, and understanding and loving
our role as stewards,
makes it impossible to be “of the world”
and equally impossible not to find the joy of being “in it.”

Finding Ourselves ***(The Uniqueness of our Stewardships)***

(Spiritual Stewardship is different for each individual and discovering and differentiating our own is the key to usefulness as well as to happiness)

When I first moved to New York City as a nineteen year old, I remember walking down Fifth Avenue one day, watching the thousands of people I was passing, and being overwhelmed by the uniqueness of each individual. Everyone has two eyes, two ears, one mouth and one nose . . . yet there are an infinite number of variations and combinations . . . no two faces are alike.

Our natures, our personalities, our combinations of capacities are as unique as our faces . . . as are our *stewardship*. No one is given exactly the same gifts (or challenges or circumstances or opportunities) as someone else.

Thoreau said, “There comes a time in the course of every true education, when one assumes at the conclusion that envy is ignorance, that imitation is suicide.” Indeed, in our

efforts to be someone we are not we can kill our truest selves. Our search for identity should be a search for individuality. We should see life as a struggle not to be *too* influenced, not to conform too much, never to change the parts of ourselves that make us unique.

We often tell parents that one of the best things they can do for their children is to help them to view themselves as truly unique individuals . . . to get good at appreciating the things they do well *and* the things that others do well . . . to be able to say to themselves, “I’m not as good as _____ at _____, but it’s okay because I’m better at _____.” Life is more about cooperation and complementing than it is about competition and comparing.

Our individual uniqueness is not so much a matter of chance and coincidence as it is a matter of stewardship. God, our loving Father, has given us each certain capacities, certain gifts. Some are obvious, some are subtle. All are real and all are important.

Because we each have unique gifts, we also each have unique opportunities regarding who we will become and what we will do. It could be well argued that the most unique thing you can do is the most valuable thing you can do . . . the most useful thing is the thing no one else can do. Thus, seeking to find and recognize your uniqueness is tantamount to seeking your most useful and valuable contributions in and to the world.

The given of our uniqueness wants us to find and make good use of each individual gift. Asking for self-knowledge is thus a high and effective use of prayer.

Ownership vs. Stewardship

(charting contracting effects)

True principles have a way of expanding and becoming more luminous in our minds the longer we hold them there. Line grows on line and precept on precept. Soon the principle begins to affect how we see and feel, how we act and react.

Thinking about the principle of stewardship over the years has established a sort of conceptual matrix in my mind -- so that nearly everything in life can be perceived in two opposite ways -- as ownership or as stewardship. The difference is astounding, like seeing a negative and a positive of the same photograph.

The bottom line is that the ownership paradigm reminds us constantly of self; the stewardship paradigm reminds us constantly of God.

Consider the matrix that follows. Its left axis are some categories of things that many believe (and act as though) they own . . . but that are rightly (and righteously) perceived as stewardships.

	Ownership	Stewardship
material possessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · pride · greed · hoard and protect · wastefulness (squander) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · humility · peace · share, use and enjoy · frugality
lack of material possessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · envy · jealousy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · empathy · magnanimity
goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · getting, winning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · giving, expanding
talents, abilities, gifts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · selfishness · conceit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · selflessness · meekness
options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · over-worry · over-analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · guidance · “cast burdens”
time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · hoard it · protect it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · use it · give it
bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · vanity · mine, to abuse · appetites and passions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · modesty · God’s, to care for · temple of spirit
friends associates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · manipulation · win-lose competition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · respect · win-win support
beauty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · ignore it · exploit it · try to buy it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · appreciate it · care for it · preserve it
children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · make them what we want · extensions of our egos 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · our brothers and sisters · extensions of God’s glory
spouse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · push, demand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · build, sponsor

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · expect support · liaison of convenience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · out give · oneness
trials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · bitterness · despair 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · acceptance · hope
strangers, new acquaintances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · judgment, prejudice · enmity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · tolerance, acceptance · cooperation
opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · I made them, I deserve them · self-confidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · God gave them, I'm grateful · faith

End of Act Two

The Hope:

That you now share a
belief in the accuracy and the
validity of stewardship and grasp
its central position and key role
in Heavenly Father's plan for the
joy and progress of His children.

*The hope is that you now understand Spiritual Serendipity
enough to want to develop it.*

Second Intermission

The Oxymorons of Stewardship

Oxymorons!

Word pairs or phrases that work even though (literally)
one word contradicts the other:

“pretty ugly”

“freezer burn”

“jumbo shrimp”

Sometimes they creep into our sports terminology:

“back-up forward”

“two-center offense.”

Sometimes they poke fun:

“airline food”

“postal service”

“military intelligence.”

The interesting thing about real oxymorons
is that while the individual words conflict,
the two-word phrase is useful and workable.

Spiritual Stewardship -- as an attitude,
creates three workable, useful oxymorons:

1. “Confident humility”
(we are humble because of the greatness of God,
confident because we are His children)
2. “Frugal generosity”
(stewardship means *caring* for what we have, *saving* it, and *growing* it,
but it also means *giving* it and not valuing it unto ourselves)
3. “Independent reliance”
(we learn to think and to self-determine,
even as we depend and rely on His guidance).

Work and Plan or Watch and Pray

Whence cometh success, power, the fulfillment or destiny, and the happiness of finding and reaching full potential? These questions are the underlying topic of all self-help books, tapes, speeches, seminars . . . a huge industry of advice, methods, counseling, formulas, exercises, time management, prioritizing, psychology, psychiatry, self-analysis, self-improvement, self-actualization, self-motivation, self-programing.

These same questions are also the underlying topic of religion and spirituality. They are the questions explored by *The Bible*. They are the questions answered by Christ's gospel, and they are individual questions that are answered by individual prayer.

The first type of answers, the "self-help" ones, can be summarized in two words" "*work and plan*" -- more effective ways to work, better methods of prioritizing and planning, stronger, more specific and measurable goals, better personal management of self, time, resources, personnel.

The second type of answers, the "spiritual help" ones, can also be summarized in two one-syllable words: "*watch and pray*" -- watch for both needs and for God's will, pray both for needs and for God's will, watch for both expected and unexpected answers.

The first type of help requires (and tries to build) self-confidence. The second type of help requires (and tries to build) faith. The first leads to poetry like the lines in *Invictus*, "I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul." The second leads to scripture like, "Lean not on your own understanding," or "Cast your burden on me," or "All things are possible to him that believeth."

Both two-word formulas work in back-and-forth, upward-spiral order. In self-help,

better planning makes for more efficient work and harder work opens opportunities for higher goals and bolder plans which yield opportunities for still more effective work. In spiritual help, those who are in tune and watchful know what to pray for and the prayer opens broader spiritual awareness which watches for insights, impressions, and answers that stimulate further prayer.

Of course, self-help and spiritual help need not be mutually exclusive (though the most zealous practitioners of each sometimes seem to try to make it that way -- i.e., the atheist motivational speaker who condemns spiritual belief as naive and weak and tells us our only God is ourself or the saved-by-grace preacher who condemns aggressive self-improvement as foolish and says what Christ did makes all the difference and what we do makes no difference). Most people find themselves in neither of these extremes. Most believe in self-help and spiritual help. Most have (and desire more of) both self-confidence and faith. And most believe in the positive effects of (and would like to become better at the personal implementation of) both *work* and *plan* and *watch* and *pray*. It is one who strives hard at the work and plan who generally knows when it is time for the watch and pray.

Those who rely heavily on prayer often find answers in promptings to work harder or in insights allowing them to plan better. The complementing synergistic relationship between the two approaches is almost caught in the cliché, “Work as though everything depended on you, pray as though everything depended on God.”

So is that it? A tidy little summary that self-help and spiritual help approaches both have validity, both have positive effect, both are favored and believed in by most, and both can work together?

Not quite. There is another aspect of the argument, another dimension of the dilemma --

a little more personal, maybe a little more disturbing; capable, perhaps, of prompting some changes in paradigms and in process (how we think and how we act).

I happen to have two books inside my roll-top desk. One is a huge looseleaf where I've tried to keep track of the goals and plans I've set over the past 30 years. It has sections -- lifetime goals, five-year goals, yearly goals and plans. It has summaries of the monthly and weekly plans from the various planners I've used through my entire adulthood. It is a record of a whole life of *work* and *plan*. The other book is a small suede-covered diary in which I've tried (at the advice of a spiritual counselor 30 years ago) to keep track of the pivotal or important things I've asked of God in prayer. (This wise mentor told me that if I truly believed in the awesome power of prayer, I should be very careful what I asked for and very careful not to forget either the requests or the answers.)

Now let me tell you two things -- flatly -- bluntly -- for what they are worth -- and then try to draw a conclusion that I think has changed me, and that I hope may change you.

1. When I look through the huge volume, I see the valiant but mixed-effect efforts of a novice. I see false starts, second guesses, compromises and adjustments. I see a lot of goals that have been reached and lot that haven't. I see plans that worked and plans that failed. I'm convinced, as I thumb through 30 years that I'm better off (and a better person) than what I'd be without the goals, plans, and work summarized here, but I also see how much I didn't and couldn't control and I feel grateful for the many things that worked out in spite of me.

When I look at the small volume, I feel the powerful peace of a puzzle fitting together. *There is not one prayer that was not answered* (not always as I had hoped but -- with hindsight -- better than I had hoped). The little book is a progression from grace to grace. It is a small,

personal testament of God's goodness and of His wisdom.

The first book is the story of a constant struggle with mixed results. The second book is a promise of God's willingness to give and to guide.

2. I believe that so far in my life I have put more *effort*, more mental energy, and more time into the first book than the second, yet have derived more benefit and more eternal *result* from the second book than the first. While they must happen together, *watch* and *pray* is more effectual than *work* and *plan*. In our practical, temporal, physical world, we rely too much on ourselves and too little on God.

The conclusion is that we ought to change the mix -- put more of our planning time into prayer. Try harder to watch for and to see needs, opportunities, possibilities, insights, *answers*. Without dropping the self-help, rely more on the spiritual help. Value (and pursue) self-confidence less and faith more. Strive more for guidance and less for control. *Think of ourselves less as owners and more as stewards*, subject our own independence to a chosen dependence on God. Seek to know and fit His plan more than creating our own.

Act Three

Methods

(“Hows” to go with the “whys”)

Commitments and Capacities

It would be nice if understanding a paradigm
automatically assured you of living it.

Unfortunately,
it doesn't.

We can understand calories and cholesterol
and still eat the wrong things.

And we can understand the insights and paradigms
of stewardships
and still live by the principles of ownership.

Our own habits and the norms of society
work against us.

It's hard to change and
it's hard to be different.

Thus this third act deals with the actual acts . . .
the *hows* which implement the desires
of the *whys*. . . .

The commitment that must be made,
and the three skills or capacities
that must be gained
in order to become a true steward.

Commitment and capacities.

This final act will come at them

from all angles

with metaphors to help us grasp them

and methods to help us live them.

Finding the Vicinity

There is a persistent old legend which insists that pirates needed only *general* maps to locate booty that they or other pirates had buried years before. It is claimed that they had a type of sixth sense and that, once they were close, they could find the exact spot by “smell,” or intuition, or instincts.

So it is with spiritual stewardship. The attitude, the feeling, the perspective and paradigm of stewardship cannot be located by some precise and detailed road map, or created by some do-it-yourself recipe of measured ingredients. But once it is *understood* and *desired* there are steps that can bring us into its *vicinity*, and from there, our own *true* sixth sense (the Spirit’s influence on our spirit) can guide us to the exact spot and we can *have* the treasure.

The full attitude and spirit, the full stewardship of the heart is a *gift* that is never independently found, discovered, or earned, but there are commitments and covenants that can be made, habits and patterns that can be developed, and adjustments in thinking and perspective that can be adopted . . . all of which *put us in the vicinity* of stewardship and which make us prepared and ready to receive the gift.

The Start:

The Commitment “Nothingness” and “Consecration”

The search for true stewardship must begin with the realization and the clear understanding of the nothingness of man and the “everything-ness” of God, followed by a “consecration” of ourselves and all we have to Him.

There is a particularly interesting scripture that says:

“Ye shall always rejoice . . . and be filled with love for God . . . and retain a remission of your sins . . . and grow in the knowledge of him that created you . . . ye will not have a mind to injure one another, but live peaceably . . . ye shall not suffer your children to go hungry . . . or transgress the laws of God . . . ye will teach them to walk in the ways of truth . . . to love one another and to serve one another . . . and ye yourselves will succor those who stand in need.”

I had always viewed these verses as a wonderful, practical set of *admonitions*, a list of suggestions for how we should think and live. But one day I did what should always be done with scripture, I read it in context . . . and realized with some shock that it was *not* a list of admonitions, but a list of *promises*. Because the verse immediately before it says:

“Remember, and always retain in your remembrance, the greatness of God and your own *nothingness* . . . humble yourselves . . . calling on the name of the Lord daily and standing steadfastly in the faith. And . . . if ye do this ye shall always rejoice, etc.”

Everything on the list that follows, the list of what I’d thought were admonitions, is a *promise*, a promise of something that will be ours if we are humble and grateful, faithful, and prayerful, and if we *remember our own nothingness*.

Even beyond knowing we are God’s children and His heirs, we must joyfully acknowledge the current reality of our dependence on Him. It is the stewardship attitude of “retaining in our remembrance the greatness of God and our own nothingness” that *gives us* the humble mind set in which we can truly rejoice, in which we can grow in knowledge, in which we have no inclination to injure others, in which we give service and succor, and in which we train children in gentleness, love, and service.

The crucial beginning point in our search for stewardship is the simple acceptance of God’s greatness and our relative nothingness. We are potentially *everything* through Him and through being His children, but of ourselves we are nothing. Such a realization develops attitudes of humility, of awe, and of worship.

C. S. Lewis said, “Beware of a professed Christian who possesses insufficient awe of Christ.”

Neal A. Maxwell said, “The more we ponder where we stand relative to Jesus Christ, the more we realize that we do not stand at all, we only kneel.”

Scripture indicates that we should “rely *wholly* upon the merits of Him who is mighty to save (Christ,)” and reminds us that we “offend God” when we fail to “acknowledge His hand in all things.”

The simple acknowledgment that we are nothing without the Lord and His spirit, and that we have nothing except what He has entrusted to us, is the beginning. With that acknowledgment must come something that scripture calls *consecration* -- the conscious “turning over” of everything to God (who, after all, is the owner of it all anyway). To get on our way in the search for spiritual stewardship, this consecration must be deep and real and complete within us.

God does not want us to give up the use and management of what we have. He just wants us to give up the notion of owning things. True wisdom and scriptural admonition do not warn against appreciating or using what we have, just against valuing them, against setting our hearts on them, against thinking they belong to us.

Our challenge is not to take monk-like vows of poverty and get rid of everything we have. Rather, our challenge is to care for and magnify everything the Lord has given us and to *use* it for His purposes and according to His will. Often this will mean the sharing and giving of portions to others.

When the Lord asks us to concentrate all we have to Him, His statement is, like *all* of His commandments, for *our* good, our growth, our happiness. God’s commandments are not mandates from a dictator, but *loving counsel from a wise father*. He knows that stewardship is the *happiest* as well as the most accurate and appropriate way to live. The commitment He asks is actually an investment in our own joy!

The Search:

The Three Capacities

When something is lost, or its whereabouts unknown, there are two alternative ways to search. One is to run about frantically, turning everything upside down in hopes of chancing on to it. The second way is to sit and *think*; to reason and contemplate where something is and how to get to it; to pray and feel and try to sense answers that are beyond our own range.

Once there has been a total commitment made to the principle, once a personal covenant has been made that releases us from ownership and binds us to stewardship . . . thought and prayer will reveal three capacities . . . three kinds of effort which are not only prerequisites to the stewardship attitude but actual *elements* or ingredients of the attitude.

The Three Keys

I've never cared for poetry that rhymes.

It underplays freedom, overplays structure.

But occasionally sets of rhyming words are all right

if they serve a purpose, make a point, peg our memories.

And,

it so happens that the three capacities that draw and define
the attitude of stewardship
can be introduced as three simple rhyming words.

It's fortunate that there are only three capacities.

Three can be remembered, retained, related to the
day-to-day
especially when they rhyme.

Let me coax and clue and question you into them:

As you consider the prior outline and insights . . .

What three elements does stewardship include?

What are three prerequisites to the attitude?

What are three things that good stewards always do?

What three qualities combine to create stewardship?

What are three basic soul-patterns or practices

which, when constant and consistent,

cultivate stewardship?

Prayer.

Share.

Care.

Stewardship requires awareness of the Owner
and thanksgiving to Him, and stewardship operates by
a communication between master and steward
that we call *prayer*.

True stewards use their entrustments to benefit others
through an empathy, a sensitivity, a service
called *share*.

Stewardships grow as they are nurtured,
exercised, expanded, developed under the
Master's direction . . . a protecting, a watching-out-for
called *care*.

Let's re-introduce them now,
from another angle to give added dimension and sharper definition,
using alliteration rather than assonance:

The three capacities,
the three answers to the earlier questions are:

Gratitude,

Generosity,

Guidance.

Of course

gratitude can be prayer,

generosity can be share,

guidance can be care.

Gratitude: appreciation for all,

acknowledgment to God in all.

Generosity: willingness to use all for

God and for His work and His glory.

Guidance: His guidance of you, your guidance of what

He's given.

Gratitude, generosity and guidance

are the creations of stewardship

and also the results of it.

Having made their introductions,

each can now be discussed

both as a cause and as an effect.

The First Capacity:

Gratitude and Acknowledgment

I mentioned earlier the night when my two year old finished her sweet and spontaneous prayer and then she looked up at me and said, “I have *two* daddies,” pointing at me with one hand and straight up with the other.

Gratitude requires (1) things to be thankful for and (2) someone to be thankful to. Knowing that God is our Father, that He has given us all we have and wants to give us all that He has, brings a joy unspeakable. It also brings not only a *willingness* to live by the concept of stewardship and consecration, but a deep, joyful *desire* to do so.

Gratitude is an indispensable part of happiness. It is also an indispensable part of stewardship. Acknowledging God in all things and being grateful to him in all things is the first key in the search for stewardship.

My Swedish maternal grandmother could never say a prayer without crying. Her gratitude welled up so deeply that sobs and heartfelt weeping were as much a part of her prayer

as were words. She thanked God for everything because she acknowledged Him in everything. She glorified and praised Him because she couldn't think of anything good without thinking of Him.

The longer I have lived, the more I have come to appreciate the *gift* my grandmother had. It is an *art* to be able to feel as deeply as she did. Perhaps it was the hardship and struggle she had endured during her life that made her so aware of and so grateful for every small blessing. But perhaps it was also because she *acknowledged* God as the giver of all -- and because she fasted and prayed often and was acutely *aware* of God's goodness and God's gifts.

Using and Enjoying

Also mentioned earlier was the rabbinical saying, "God will ask us to account for the things he made for our enjoyment that we refused to enjoy."

Part of stewardship is *use* and the joy and growth of doing things with what we've been given. Most stewardships are more like a muscle than they are like a depletable resource: the more we use them the stronger they will grow, the longer they will last.

Stewardships, of course, must be used carefully and appropriately, but this is not to say they cannot be used joyfully. I believe that we glimpsed this future world before it was formed, from a pre-existing spiritual place, and that we shouted for joy at the prospect of coming here. And why not? Mortality is a time when God gives us stewardships over bodies, children, talents, opportunities, a beautiful physical earth, etc.

Remember that the Lord's sternest condemnation in the New Testament parable of the talents was of the steward who *buried* his talent -- who did not use it or magnify it or enjoy it. I

once wondered if the parable should have had a fourth steward who reported, “I *spent* my talents -- used them up -- I used them for learning and for good experience and for service.” Perhaps the master would have been pleased with such a steward. But then again, most God-given stewardships do not deplete as they are used, so perhaps the steward who multiplied his talents from 5 to 10 also *used* and *enjoyed* and was generous with those talents as the master intended.

Some have suggested that most stewardships fall into three categories, each starting with a T -- time, talents, and things. Each of these categories needs to be used well, developed wisely, and *enjoyed*. It has been said that “there is no greater form of thanks to a giver than to find joy in what is given.” Surely this applies to all God-given stewardships.

Acceptance and “Thy Will Be Done”

One of the great hymns sung throughout the Christian world is called, “Thy Will, O Lord, Be Done.” Its words illustrate the Savior’s pattern of always doing His Father’s will. As stewards we must not only be grateful and joyful regarding our stewardships; we must be fully *accepting* of them, even if they are not always what we had hoped for or expected.

In most cases, we do not determine what stewardships we are given. What we do determine (and what becomes the judging factor of our lives) is how well we accept and how well we handle the stewardships that come to us. When an assignment or position seems more than we can handle, we say, “Thy will be done” and grow into it with humility and the Spirit’s help. When a trial or sorrow comes that seems more than we can bear, we say, “Thy will be done” and find hidden strength from the Spirit. When we become prosperous we say, “Thy will be done” and try to use anything we have for His purposes.

The fact is, it is dangerous to pray for things and not conclude with “Thy will be done.” *Asking* is such a powerful process, with such a strong connected promise of *receiving*, so we must be careful not to ask persistently for things that may fall outside of God’s will.

The Gift of Spiritual Stewardship

Stewardship itself, this beautiful and peaceful *attitude* herein called *spiritual stewardship* is not something that is earned or obtained but something that is *received* as a gift from God. Thus *gratitude* is an integral part of true stewardship. We can prepare and position ourselves to be more worthy and more receptive to the gift, but it is still a gift.

“My peace I give unto you,” said the Lord. “Peace be unto you” was His most common greeting. True peace comes with stewardship where we cast our burdens upon Him (Psalms 55:22), thus making the “yoke easy” and the “burden light” (Matt. 11:30).

The feeling of peace and guidance that God gives to those who acknowledge Him and accept their own stewardships is the very gift that all the world wants. That soft silent sureness, that gentle guidance, the peaceful pattern of inspired insight . . . the ongoing opportunity to serve, to strengthen, to shepherd as steward.

We all feel gratitude. How *much* of it we feel is the question. The beautiful thing about human *capacities* is that they can be *expanded*. Gratitude and the acknowledgment of God in all things is the first capacity of stewardship and as it expands we become happier . . . and we become truer stewards.

Generosity and Service

As with many things, the middle step is, for many, the hardest. We can all improve on gratitude, and for those with awareness and faith that first key (of thankfulness) is *natural*. Likewise, we all need greater abilities and capacities for the third key of guidance; but again, for all who believe in an all-knowing, all-powerful Creator, what could be more natural than to seek His help?

The middle key, the second capacity of generosity and service, is perhaps somewhat less natural. Indeed, *until* we have achieved an attitude of stewardship, many would contend that our inclinations run opposite. Self-preservation, self-interest, even self-indulgence seem instinctive. Generosity and service usually do not. It is in this sense that “the natural man is an enemy to God.”

Yet it is clear, even obvious, that a steward must purge selfishness and develop generosity. It is clear that the Master desires stewards to use what they are given to serve, to

give, to build, and to benefit others. Jesus said it in many ways, including, “He that is greatest among you shall be your servant.” (Matt. 23:11)

The “middle key” of generosity and service is the outgrowth of keys one and three. The more grateful we are, the more we want to repay, and the more we realize that we can give to Him only by giving to others of His children. And the guidance we receive, if it is from the right source, will point us toward generosity and service.

In Central Europe, a small village was badly bombed in World War II. One of the casualties was the statue of Christ in the town square that was knocked down by the blasts and broken into pieces. Townspeople painstakingly reassembled the pieces and were able to restore the statue except for the hands which were too shattered to be reassembled. Rather than sculpt new hands the townspeople simply added an inscription which read, “His only hands on earth are yours.”

Is any principle more certain or more repeated than the simple truth that we serve God by serving others? Is it any mystery that His gifts, our stewardships, all of them, have the common purpose of bringing joy and salvation to His children? Is it any wonder that all Satan’s efforts work counter to this, pulling toward selfishness, indulgence, and ownership?

How do we *become* more generous? How do we overcome the natural man and become *servant* spiritual stewards? Again, the quality may be beyond our individual grasp. Deep and true generosity may be a gift and the best pursuit may be to ask for it. But there are some things we can *think*, and some things we can *do* that may position us better to receive and add power to our asking.

Goals of Growth and Service (“Broadening and Contributing”)

We live in a goal-oriented society. We learn to set objectives, manage our time, and be effective in *achieving* things. But too often, all of our goals revolve around *doing* and *getting*, and we have no goals for *being* and for *giving*.

Check on the latest goals you have set. “Get the promotion, finish the house, do the project, reach a certain income level, get the shopping done,” etc. There is nothing wrong with these objectives. They may be just what you need. But that is the point. What do *others* need?

Stewards must try to balance *being* and *giving* goals with *doing* and *getting* goals. When we sit down to think, to plan, we should focus some of our mental effort and faith on goals which *broaden* and develop ourselves, and goals which *contribute* to others. We should set goals for learning, for expanding, for developing a gift, for using a talent. And we should set goals for helping friends, assisting family members, giving to and serving those in need.

The more we think about goals of being and of giving (of broadening and contributing), the more they will begin to be part of us and actually begin to . . . *happen*. We will *become* more as stewards, and we will sense that what we become and what we give last forever, whereas what we get and what we do are forgotten by tomorrow.

Simplifying

“Our life is frittered away by detail,” said Thoreau. “Simplify, simplify, simplify.”

Edward Abbey said he loved the desert because there was less there, so he could appreciate each tiny individual thing more.

Scriptures tells us to “seek not to be cumbered.” Does this mean not to seek so many things or does it mean to seek to get rid of unnecessary things? Perhaps both. Ghandi, as mentioned earlier, decided he needed nothing material. And Christ, when asked what one must do to be saved, said to give all to the poor and follow Him.

We came home from a weekend trip not long ago and found that our home had been broken into. Drawers were pulled out. Everything was exposed. But nothing was missing. Linda remarked, “We must have done a better job of simplifying that I thought. Whoever broke in couldn’t find a single thing worth stealing.” There were things in our home worth stealing, of course, and I found myself with a new sense of appreciation for them as I took inventory after the break in. All the things we cared about were there, were safe. Apparently the intruder was looking only for money, one thing there is very little of around our home.

The anxiety I felt that day as I checked to see what was missing made me worry about simplifying and about stewardship. I was worried not so much about *having* things as about *valuing* things, about caring too much for them and thinking of them as mine.

Do we need to get rid of everything like Ghandi, or move to the desert like Abbey, or sell all we have and give to the poor like the rich young ruler Christ addressed? Is simplifying and giving up everything the kind of generosity that will get us to the stewardship attitude?

I think not. In fact, giving up everything would be, for most of us, a kind of anti-stewardship. In a sense we would be saying, “I don’t want responsibility for anything.” A true steward would say instead, “I want all that I can care for and use well for the good of others and myself and for God’s purpose and glory.”

There is an interesting difference between having and needing. If we think we *need* all

the things we have, then it is hard to consecrate them, hard to give them up, hard to use them for the benefit of others. On the other hand, if we realize how little we really need, how simple our basic requirements really are, then it *allows* us to be more generous, to see what we have as stewardships and to care for and develop the things we have been given without selfishly hoarding or hiding them.

Over the years, in our family, we've tried to give our children *experiences* that would increase their gratitude and their generosity -- and that would help them see how little they really need. We spent one summer in the remote Blue Mountains of Eastern Oregon, living a completely primitive life and building a log cabin from scratch. We all learned that we didn't *need* closets full of clothes, or cars, or television, or even plumbing or electricity. We did need food, some basic shelter, and we needed each other.

Another summer we lived in a tiny mountain town in Central Mexico among amazingly poor but remarkably happy peasants. Everything all of us learned was capsulized by our eight-year-old daughter when she was asked what the experience taught her. She answered: "That you don't need shoes to be happy."

The kind of simplifying required to gain greater generosity and a deeper attitude of stewardship is the kind in which we give things up *mentally*. As stewards, we should accept the generosity of God and enjoy the stewardships He gives, anxious to use them and give them as He calls us or as opportunities come. We should stop short of the aggressive pursuit of things far beyond our needs and should ask God to give us only what we can care for well and use for His purposes. We should strive to be conscious of how limited our real needs are, and thus make it easier for ourselves to give when we see needs and to serve when we have the chance.

Watch and Pray

Perhaps there is no greater three-word motto for life and for learning how to *give* than the scriptural admonition spoken by Christ to “watch and pray.” (Mark 13:33) I believe this short phrase (which I referred to in the second intermission) is a how-to formula for everything from *parenting* (watch children closely enough to see who they really are and what they really need, and pray to their Eternal Father to help you help them become all He wants them to be) to *business enterprise* (watch for opportunities, needs, new methods, etc. and pray for the ability to do *your* best and to do what *is* best).

The combination of our own *awareness* and *God’s help* causes us to ask the right questions *and* get the right answers. The formula works best of all for the development of deeper generosity. First we must *watch* -- with our ears and with our hearts as well as with our eyes. We must watch for the less-obvious emotional or spiritual needs like simple encouragement or basic friendship as well as the more obvious physical needs. One reason most people don’t give much is that they don’t see very many needs. Watching also leads to thinking, and thinking is something we all need to do more -- for its power, for its insight, and sometimes for its pure enjoyment.

Second, we must pray -- first to become better at seeing needs, then to know how and when and where to give help. Pray for additional opportunities to give, to serve, to help. Such prayers are readily answered by a Father who wishes for His children to serve one another.

It is sometimes useful to change the formula to “watch and ask” because *ask* can refer to other people as well as to God. Ask people if you can help them in any way. Ask how they

feel. Ask why they look a little down. Ask them how their big meeting went. Ask them what is on their mind. Ask. Ask. And then *listen* and discover the needs that will give you opportunities for generosity.

Watching, asking, and prayer will often lead to spontaneous and creative ways of offering help. Awareness on the streets of Boston one day led us to help a transient not with money (which we feared he would spend on wine) but by taking him to lunch and hearing a remarkable story of ups and downs and of what had led to his current state.

Awareness on another day caused us to notice, as we ate in a restaurant, a young couple who looked very nervous about eating at such an expensive place. We paid their check anonymously and were repaid by the relief and confusion we watched in their faces.

An intuitive impression at another time led Linda to give a large tip to two people who were doing some repairs at our home. They told us later that the extra money kept them from having their electricity cut off on the cold day that followed.

Little random acts of kindness are often humorous as well as fun. We like to pay small road or turnpike tolls for our car *and* for the car behind us . . . and then watch the rearview mirror as they try to figure out who we are and why we did it.

The Purging of Selfishness

The most hurtful thing anyone can say to me is that I am selfish. It hurts the most, I think, because of all the criticisms I might receive, it is the most true! My only consolation (and it is not much of one) is that I am not alone. Selfishness is the curse of so many. I say curse because it stops us, damns us, keeps us in such a narrow tunnel, unaware and unappreciative of

so much.

“One who is all wrapped up in himself,” the saying goes, “makes a very small package.”

As one *I purges* and eliminates selfishness, he makes more room in his soul for generosity and service, increasing this second capacity of stewardship. There are four methods that help in the purging of selfishness.

1. *Practice empathy.* Sit down with your spouse, or with a child, or with a friend, and try to tell them how they are feeling and what they are thinking. Have them stop you and correct you where you are wrong. Try *hard* to get inside their heads to think their thoughts, and inside their hearts to feel their feelings. Don't be discouraged if it is hard at first. You can get better at this. Empathy is a skill that can be developed and improved.

2. Ask yourself (frequently), “What would Jesus do?” The very question will jerk you away from selfishness and toward selflessness.

3. Try to form a mental habit of catching yourself thinking “What do I want?” and instantly replacing the thought with “What does he need?” or “What do they need?”

4. *Ask!* Simply ask in prayer to feel more for others, to care more for them, to be more sensitive to their needs, to know what you could do for them, and to become more “transparent” and less aware of self.

A Guidance Mentality

Socrates said, “The unexamined life is not worth living.” Many high achievers say, in essence, “The unplanned life -- the life without clear goals and objectives -- is not worth living.”

But a man named John Taylor once said something that was on another, higher level, something far more expansive: “It is necessary for man to be placed in communication with God; he should have revelation from Him, and unless he is placed under the influences of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he can know nothing about the things of God. I do not care how learned a man may be, or how extensively he may have traveled. I do not care what his talent, intellect, or genius may be, at what college he may have studied, how comprehensive his views or what his judgment may be on other matters. He cannot understand certain things without the Spirit of God, and that introduces the necessity of revelation. Not revelation in former times, but present and immediate revelation, which shall lead and guide those who possess it.”

Do we want to live our lives with an analytical mentality, with a goals-and-plans

mentality? Certainly these are important, but there is a higher realm, a higher mentality that acknowledges the incompleteness of even our finest analysis and the shortsightedness of even our best goals. A self-determined life is certainly better than an aimless existence. But self-determining, self-guiding thought is risky and limited by short-sightedness. Too many (and too rigid) self-set goals can crowd out guidance, reducing our room for this third capacity of stewardship.

To one who strives to be a steward, the world's measurements or phrases are not adequate. "A successful life." "A full life." "A life of experience and service." Successful by whose standard? Full of what? Experience in what areas? Service to whom? To those who believe in the love of a Heavenly Father, in the individuality and uniqueness of each of His children, and in the crucial and pivotal nature of mortality in God's eternal plan -- to those who *believe* in these, the goals must be a *guided* life. We must seek a life governed by an orientation that gets us not necessarily to where *we* think we want to be or to what the world calls success, but that gets us to where God wants us to be.

It does us little good to scale the heights if we are climbing the wrong mountain or if we have leaned our ladder against the wrong wall. Reason tells us that a good steward is one who has his own thought and takes his own initiative, but who knows his master's heart and communicates sufficiently with Him to be sure he is going His way and doing His will. This mind-set is best called a *guidance mentality*. This kind of living and striving is called a guided life. It requires faith, strong mental effort, and consistent prayer, because divine answers and guidance do not come automatically or easily, nor do they come in long-term blueprints for whole sections of our lives. We walk by faith, receiving confirmation from the spirit on one

small step at a time. A poet who understood this once penned the words:

I said to the man who stood at the gate of years
Give me a light that I might step forth.
And the voice came back,
Step out into the darkness and put your hand in mine,
For that is better than a light,
And surer than a known way.

Faith over Confidence

An easy way to understand *guidance mentality* is to recall your biggest or most overwhelming challenge, or perhaps a promotion or opportunity for which you felt unprepared or inadequate. Most of us can remember such a time, and how the weight of the challenge drove us to a deep humility and perhaps to our knees in prayer. Abraham Lincoln said, “There are times when I am driven to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I have nowhere else to go!”

The humility and consciousness-of-inadequacy caused by some tests or challenges pushes us toward a guidance mentality. We pray and ponder, and perhaps even fast* as we seek answers . . . , and we emerge with a strength and a direction that is not our own.

To strive to live *all* of our lives (not just moments of crisis) with the same degree of

*The ancient process of fasting -- going without food or water for 24 hours, is regaining prominence and popularity as a way to deepen our spirituality, remind us of our dependency and humility, and put us in closer touch with God in times of decision or when we are in need of important answers.

humility and the same God-given strength and direction is to adopt a guidance mentality.

In situations where we are overwhelmed, the world's formula of self-confidence and positive mental attitude are almost amusingly inadequate. Our strength does not come from looking into the mirror and saying, "Every day in every way I'm getting better and better" or by telling ourselves, "I can do anything." Indeed, the strength comes from an opposite approach -- from saying, "Of myself I cannot do this, I do not know what to do." It is our humility, our nothingness, coupled with our faith in God's power that brings the infusion of strength and insight that allows us to do His will and meet the challenge He has given.

Faith does not require self-doubt, weakness, or insecurity. On the contrary. The Lord's spirit according to scripture is not one of fear, but "of power, and of love, and of a sound mind".

When we go forth with faith, with a guidance mentality, and with a stewardship attitude, we will find our foreordinations, we will feel His power, and we will know the meaning (and the joy) of phrases like "Cast your burdens on me" and "My peace I leave with you."

Asking and Confirmation

Much of our popular culture portrays *asking* as a sign of weakness. Independence and rugged individualism is interpreted as not needing anyone else, not needing help, not needing to ask.

In fact, asking and listening are huge strengths. They are also skills, even *arts*, that can expand us far beyond our own capacities and make us the beneficiaries of the experience, the insight, and the gifts of others. Asking for advice, asking for opinions, asking for assistance, asking for input . . . all are indications of intelligence, of respect, of an open mind -- not of

weakness or a lack of independence.

Good stewards must ask if they are to be wise managers. They must ask others who have had similar stewardships. Most importantly, they must ask their Father, the God whom they serve.

Our all-wise Father, however, will not answer questions that are lightly raised. Mere asking is not enough. Open-ended questions are not enough. God, whose plan includes a world where we live away from Him and learn to be self-determining, will not take away our agency by guiding us according to His initiative which would supersede our own. He wants us to think and ponder, even to struggle and wrestle with things, seeking His guidance and inspiration along the way. Then He wants us to make our own best decision and bring it to Him for *confirmation*. God's promise is that, once we have made the effort and made our best decision, He will either confirm its correctness in our minds or cause a stupor of thought that indicates the need to start over, to rethink the decision.

One of the most powerful and effectual prayers imaginable would go something like this:
“I have given every effort to this decision and have made my choice as to what I think is the right course -- but since I know so little, before I proceed, may I have your confirmation that it is right.”

Confirmation may be a burning, or it may be a soft, pure softness. A confirmation feels *right* and a stupor of thought feels wrong (somewhat like folding your hands with one thumb on top feels natural and folding them with the other thumb on top feels foreign or strange).

It is communication between steward and master that allows the steward to *know* the Master, to do His will, to feel and share His joy, and to become more like Him. Real prayer is

real communication that involves thanking and asking, listening and heeding.

Years ago in New York, I had the opportunity one evening of saying a closing prayer after a study group we had held with a very wise elderly gentleman who had led the discussion. As I was voicing the prayer I was somewhat disturbed to hear the unmistakable sound of a pencil writing on paper. Not wanting to look up, I went on with the prayer, my eyes closed and my head bowed, wondering who in the room was rude or irreverent enough to write during the prayer. When I finished and looked up, I saw that it was the older man who held the pencil. In keeping with my own immaturity, my first thought was that he was doing some sort of evaluation on my prayer. I imagined perhaps a B for content, a C for grammar, etc. He noticed my consternation but said nothing until a few minutes later as he left the room. He said simply, “I sometimes worry that I will forget the answers that come in prayer if I don’t take some notes.”

I remember lying awake most of that night, trying to grasp that prayer, to this man at least, was real communication, that we had to listen as well as ask, that the guidance received should be remembered and implemented.

As mentioned, “Ask,” is the most frequent admonition in scripture. Only when we ask can God guide us without infringing on our agency. And sometimes “ask” is more than an admonition. It is a commandment.

As with anything containing great *power*, caution must be applied to asking. Beware of what you want, for you will get it. G. K. Chesterton said, “Do not ask for pleasure, or you will rob yourself of the chief pleasure, which is surprise.”

Accountability, Repentance, and Course Correction

An individual I greatly admire established a personal pattern while yet a young man in which he prayed for guidance each morning and then gave an accounting to God each evening as he knelt in prayer before retiring -- an accounting of what he had done and of how he had tried to receive and follow guidance during that day.

The point is that guidance must never be taken lightly. When we ask for it, when we receive it, we must be willing to remember it, to follow it, to do it!

With accountability comes repentance and the wondrous saving miracle of forgiveness. Progress in this life is possible because Christ's atonement facilitates the overcoming of mistakes, the wiping clean of slates, the true forgetting of guilt, the correcting of course, and the transforming opportunity of turning weaknesses into strengths.

All have need of repentance, which, while it involves sorrow and remorse, is nonetheless a joyful and positive principle. Repentance is prerequisite to guidance and must be consistent and ongoing, dealing with small sins of omission as well as large ones of commission.

I remember a Sunday School story that made the point:

In the old country lived Olga, who had committed a grievous sin. She went, sorrowing to her somewhat self-centered and self-righteous friend, Helga, who told her she would take her to the wise sage on the mountain top who would know what must be done.

The sage heard Olga's confession and told her to go into his garden and bring back to him the large heavy stone that lay there. Olga went willingly.

While Olga toiled with the huge stone, the sage gave Helga a burlap bag. "Go into the garden," he said, "and gather up as many tiny stones as you can carry and bring them to me."

Helga went grudgingly.

When Olga returned, the sage asked her to return the large stone to the place she had found it. This, he told her, was repentance. When Helga returned, the old sage asked her to go back and replace each tiny stone in the exact place she had found it.

Giving Back Our Agency

As part of His plan for our joy and our growth, God has given us *our* agency. It is an outright gift, something which (unlike stewardships) can never be taken back or even given up. Agency must be ours or it would not truly be agency. Agency is God's first outright gift in His plan to help us become as He is. Agency is the power with which we choose, and with which we use the stewardships He gives.

Now the question: What can we give to a father who had *all* and who is in the process of giving all to us, his children? As our love for Him and our gratitude to Him grows, we desire deeply to give something in return. He tells us that we can give to Him by giving to others. So we try. But is there anything we can literally give to God directly? Only something we own. And the only thing we own is our agency. Can we give it to the Lord?

In a sense we can! We can by saying, "Thy will be done" and by trying to know and do His will in all things. And we can by saying, "I relinquish my agency to thee. *Use* me as an instrument." And we can by adopting, obtaining, and practicing the attitude called *Spiritual Stewardship*.

We are here to *choose* for ourselves. We can choose to be part of His family. We can choose to be His stewards. We can choose by giving our choices to Him.

Evaluation

A good steward must know two things: (1) exactly what he has been given stewardship over, and (2) what his master wants him to do or to “bring to pass” with those stewardships.

We ought to perform the kind of *spiritual inventory* of the talents, gifts, opportunities, and other stewardships we have been given, to keep track of them and to note their use and their expansion. We ought to check our three capacities (gratitude, giving, and guidance) on each stewardship. This ought to be done in writing -- in a journal or other private place -- and it ought to be referred to and updated regularly.

Use the following chart as a guide -- or develop your own way of analyzing. If you use this chart, fill in *your* unique, personal, and individual stewardships under the general ones already printed. List every personal gift you have. Make a complete inventory.

Then grade yourself in some way (perhaps with an academic grade or maybe on a scale of 1-10) on each stewardship in each column across the page. How grateful are you for the stewardship? How much do you give it and serve with it or through it? How well do you do in seeking guidance and His will for that stewardship?

When your stewardship inventory and evaluation is complete, set it aside . . . then come

back to it after three months of implementing and working to increase your three stewardship capacities . . . re-evaluate and measure your improvement.

Stewardship Inventory and Evaluation

Stewardship	Gratitude	Giving or Sharing	Guidance: Doing His Will With It
<u>General Stewardships*</u>			
Material Possessions			
Goals, Objectives			
Talents, Abilities			
Options, Choices			
Time			
Your Body			
Friends, Associates			
Children			
Spouse			
Trials, Challenges			
Strangers, New Acquaintances			
Opportunities			
Earth's Beauty			

* Give yourself one general grade on each of these general stewardships. Then break them down into specific personal stewardships and list them on the remainder of the chart, grading yourself. on each one.

Summary, Application, Implementation

To implant the three components of stewardship,
to expand the three capacities deep
in our hearts, we
restate them, rephrase them, re-look at them
from other angles;
metaphors of treasure hunts,
of conditioning exercises,
of the three fruits, the three seeds . . .
new names and different perspectives for the same three things.

Here's one more: The simplest yet: A.B.C.

The three capacities of stewardships are:

Appreciation

Benevolence

Conforming.

Appreciation, awareness, acknowledgment,

Benevolence, the betterment or benefit of others,

Conforming all things (including our will) to His will.

Nothing new, just new words:

Appreciation = gratitude = prayer.

Benevolence = generosity = share.

Conforming = guidance = care.

Use whichever set you like.

Use all the sets and move to expand the three capacities:

Apply them everywhere, on every stewardship.

(Think through how *appreciation*, *benevolence*, and *conforming* applies to each individual stewardship you have.)

ON THINGS:

Appreciate all material things, acknowledge all as God's.

Benefit others through "your" property. Give it freely.

Conform your handling of things to meet His will for their use.

ON JOB OR POSITION:

A. Thank Him, see that it humbles rather than puffs up.

B. Try to use your position to *give, lift, help* as God would.

C. Magnify it to become all it can be.

ON CHILDREN:

A. Thank God for the joy He gives you through me.

B. Give them respect as your brothers and sisters -- your equals.

C. Ask God to help you raise His children.

ON BODIES:

A. Be grateful and joyful for what they let us experience.

B. Use them for their good and for doing good.

C. Tune them, sharpen them in God's image.

ON ABILITIES:

A. Be aware of what they are and who they came from.

B. Use them and let them shine for others.

C. Multiply and magnify.

ON FRIENDS:

A. Thank God for them, thank them for what they make you.

B. Introduce them to each other.

C. Serve them.

ON THE EARTH:

- A. See it, be awed by it.
- B. Share it, try to paint it or poem it.
- C. Care for it, not as something we've inherited from our fathers but as something we've borrowed from our children.

ON OPPORTUNITIES:

- A. Be thankful and humble rather than self-congratulatory and proud.
- B. Judge them by how much they'll do for others.
- C. Bring them to fruition with God's guidance.

ON TALENTS:

- A. See them as tools in God's hands.
- B. Let God's hands use them to help His children.
- C. Seek to empower and expand them through His energy.

ON TIME:

- A. Thank God for it as a mortal measurement and motivation.
- B. Learn to take time and give time.
- C. Give it to God, use it for Him.

ON TRIALS AND TESTS:

- A. Know that they make you more like Him who has suffered all.

- B. Give others a chance to help you.
- C. Take *care* of them (as in “resolve”).

Training Exercises

“Training,” “conditioning,”

the connotations are physical.

The images are workouts, weights, sweat and effort
to reshape our bodies -- stronger and firmer.

Is there training

of other types that can reshape our attitudes?

Is there conditioning of mind and spirit

that strengthens wisdom

and sharpens the accuracy

with which we see ourselves and the mortal world?

Are there exercises that expand our stewardship capacities?

Read the rest of this verse

as if it were a workout chart,

designed not to increase biceps or heart rate,

but to develop gratitude, generosity, and guidance.

Gratitude exercises:

1. *A ten-minutes “thanks only” prayer*

No asking, just thanking.

For everything, for each thing. For people and places

For what’s outside and what’s inside.

Press yourself

beyond the usual.

Exceeding the time limit is permissible.

2. *Morning-first-thoughts” of stewardship and glorifying.*

Consider three realms -- as measured by

your first conscious thought when you wake up:

lower realm: “What do I have to do today?”

higher realm: “What do I choose to do today?”

highest realm: “What would God have me do today?”

And how can I glorify Him during this day?”

Generosity exercises:

1. *Donating.* Contributing, tithing. Give a regular amount regularly.

2. *Anonymous giving.* Find needs,
and then find ways to help in secret.

3. *Give time.* Volunteer, take time, spend time.

Guidance exercises:

1. *The W.W.J.D. habit.*

Ask yourself, several times a day, in all situations,

“What would Jesus do?”

2. *Inventory of talents and gifts.* Actually write them down. Use the chart provided earlier.

Ask yourself if you are magnifying each, using each for

His glory.

3. *Record your requests.*

Asking, since it draws down Heaven’s powers,

is a powerful (and should be a thoughtful) process.

Keep a record of what you ask for,

then *work* in parallel with the request

and be awed and grateful when you receive.

Knowing the Owner

The ultimate performance and implementation of stewardship (as well as the great *reward* of it) is to come to know the Owner, the Master, Him to whom we are stewards.

The scripture tells us that man’s eternal goal is to know God.

In knowing Him, we will do His will. In doing His will we will know Him. In knowing and doing, we will love Him, and love as He loves.

How to know Him? The question of the ages.

We know whom we love.

We love whom we serve.

In life we *always* love those we serve -- especially as we serve diligently, over time. Parents love their children, good ministers or priests or Rabbis love their congregations because they serve them.

In life we do *not* always love those who serve us. Sometimes we resent or resist the service. Other times we take it for granted.

To know God we must love Him, to love Him we must serve Him.

End of Act Three

The Hope:

That you now feel that the
attitude, the paradigm, and the power
of stewardship
can be pursued;
that you know the three capacities
and will do the work
that expands them.

The hope is that you will obtain it.

Assistance and Connections

Spiritual Stewardship is an end in itself. But it is also closely associated to other attributes and qualities of a free and abundant life. As illustrated on page 000, a spiritual stewardship has synergistic ties to *spiritual serendipity*, to *balance*, to *leadership*, and to *joy*.

This final book section is written to readers who do not want to *finish* stewardship as they come to the end of this book -- but rather to *start* stewardship, to begin both its implementation and its connections.

For Linda and me, one of the blessings of writing is that it has put us in touch with thousands of “kindred spirits.”

When our first parenting book, *Teaching Your Children Joy* was published, it spawned an international co-op of parents called HOMEBASE that links families through a monthly newsletter and tape and through a curriculum called *Joy School* for preschool-age children. *Teaching Your Children Responsibility* added another tier of involved families and a program called TCR to help parents supplement their children’s elementary education and teach various

forms of responsibility in the home. Then *Teaching Your Children Sensitivity* attracted parents of teenagers who receive monthly materials to help their adolescents overcome the problems that stem from self-centeredness. The final book in that series, *Teaching Your Children Values*, became a national #1 best seller and attracted parents from all over the world to a program we provide in which families focus on one specific value each month. Linda's book, *I Didn't Plan to be a Witch*, has helped countless mothers view their favored role with more humor and joy.

Many of the same parents who use the "Teaching" programs for their children now use the book and program called *Lifebalance* for themselves. *Lifebalance* is a whole new approach to goal-setting and time management that balances achievements with relationships and structure with spontaneity.

Spiritual Serendipity and *Spiritual Stewardship* seek to complete the balancing process by adding spiritual dimensions and developing attitudes of guidance and true leadership.

We find that there is an incredible bond that develops between people who share the same goals for their children and who pursue the same kind of balance and spirituality in life. The books and programs have become umbrellas under which have gathered like-minded families, sharing similar struggles and seeking similar solutions. For further information or to ask questions about either the parenting or lifebalance programs, call (801) 581-0112. To simply order books or materials, call (800) 772-4859.

Credits

Dedication

For Corry DeMille who, for 15 years as my personal assistant and office manager, never gave less than her best to any stewardship.

Acknowledgments

Gratitude goes to the many who read all or portions of the manuscript and offered opinions, insights, and suggestions -- among them, Craig Petersen, Cub Wolff, John Tanner, Sam Stewart, Randall and Margaret Mackey, Jim and Connie Cannon, and most of all -- Linda.

And special appreciation for tireless typing and editing to Lia Davis, and to my daughter Saren.

I had just knelt with my precocious two-and-half-year-old daughter at her bedside for her evening prayer, trying to help her talk candidly and personally to God. As we finished, she looked up full into my face and, with a sparkle in her round, blue eyes, made a proud (and profound) declaration:

“I have two daddies!”

“Who?” I asked.

She answered without words but with a beaming smile and a pointing finger which pointed first at me and then straight up in the air.

Then she went on, “And, I have another brother. A big, big, big brother named Jesus!”

I patted her on the head, told her that she was exactly right, and tucked her into bed.

It wasn't until later, lying in the silence of my own bed, that I thought about the fact that there was no deeper insight in the world, no more profound or important statement of truth, no fact that could impact more on how we see or how we live.

The literal reality of God as our father and Christ as our eldest brother is the *root* of all that we understand about the purpose of this earth and of this life. Without this insight, religion itself is vague, symbolic, and even impersonal.

Why do we refer to God as Heavenly Father? The answer may be, “He created us, and thus is like that of a great father.”

Many, in their deepest moments, feel a purer, deeper answer -- that “Heavenly Father” is not merely a title, or a symbol of respect, but a simple, literal reality that we truly are children of God.

The Treasure Map

**(based on limited travel and
partial experience)**

*. . . written while still on the search
but closer to the destination. . .*

_____ Additional signed copy/copies of *Spiritual Stewardship* @ \$13.00
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*Indicate to whom you want the book(s) inscribed, i.e., "For Bill and Susan."

Enclose check payable to S.J.S. HOMEBASE, or put VISA or MasterCard number
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Part One: The Fiction
(Overview and Excerpts)

Like *Spiritual Serendipity*, this book opens with a *story*. In *Serendipity* the story was an ancient fable. Here the story's a six chapter novella about a man who had died and, in his spiritual recollection, sees with fresh clarity the folly of his materialistic, ownership-oriented life.

From his new perspective he realizes how much he has neglected what is truly important

and is able to trace how his neglect and misplaced priorities undermined his own best chances for happiness and negatively impacted those he loves most.

Following is a brief excerpt from the opening of the novella and a second excerpt from the concluding chapter. In between, there are four chapters which essentially tell the personal story of a misspent (but very typical) life -- going from early ambition and altruism to “success” and then to mid-life crisis. The main character is just beginning to discover and to re-prioritize when he dies.

The novella concludes with a mysterious encounter that allows him to give those he loves who are still on earth a “hint” about how they might avoid the regrets he now feels. The hint, of course, involves an attitude of stewardship.

Part Two: The Direction

(Overview and Excerpts)

The second part of the book is a somewhat exhaustive (hopefully not exhausting) collection of brief quotes and written sentiments about the folly of perceived ownership, the negative ramifications of materialism, and the benefits and renewed clarity of an attitude of stewardship.

Several pages from this section are included here as illustrations and examples.

Taken collectively, the 100 plus quotes and brief passages are arranged to lead the reader toward a personal conviction and to give him broad and authoritative *support* in attempting to adopt this new attitude.

Part Three: The Paradigm
(Overview and Excerpts)

Fourteen insights are presented in this section, intended to knit together in the reader’s mind to reveal the inaccuracies and dangers of an ownership mentality and the clarity and benefits of a stewardship paradigm.

As shown in the table of contents the fourteen insights are:

Insight A -- The Plan of Our Father

Insight B -- The Adversary’s Alternative (Plan B)

Insight C -- All Things are Mine Saith the Lord

Insight D -- Owning, Renting, or Stewardship

Insight E -- An Antidote for Pride

Insight F -- Definitions and Roots

Insight G -- Ownership vs. Stewardship (charting contrasting effects)

Insight H -- Stewardship and Joy

Insight I -- Stewardship and Serendipity

Insight J -- Stewardship and Leadership

Insight K -- Stewardship and Balance

Insight L -- Connections Between Stewardship, Serendipity, Joy,
Leadership and Balance

Insight M -- Provident Living

Insight N -- Being In the World but Not of the World

The insights will bring the reader to the brink of his own personal search for the attitude of stewardship.

A few excerpts from part three follow:

Part Four: The Treasure Way
(Overview and Excerpts)

As the book turns from the theory, concept, and connections of stewardship to the actual pursuit of the attitude and the quality, a treasure hunting metaphor is used.

Because stewardship is a paradigm, it is not best pursued through methods of techniques but through clarified understanding and by breaking it down into its component parts. The three essential parts or elements are:

1. Gratitude and Acknowledgment
2. Generosity and Service
3. A Guidance Mentality

Gratitude and acknowledgment includes subsections on “The Art of Thankfulness,” “The Ability to Use and Enjoy,” and “Acceptance of a Higher Power and Purpose.”

Generosity and service include subsections on “goals of growth and service,” “Broadening and Contributing,” and “The purging of Selfishness.

A Guidance Mentality includes subsections on “Faith Over Confidence,” “Accountability, Repentance, and Course Correction,” and “Giving Back Our Agency.”

Some excerpts follow:

Part Five: The Finish
(Overview and Excerpts)

The focus in this final section is application of the attitude and the incorporation of it into a deeper form of spirituality.

This is as close as the book comes to being prescriptive. A methodology called “stewardship blanks” is explained and suggested as an augmentation to the process of planning a day. And a group of “word associations” is introduced as a way of self-programming the mind and heart to keep a continual awareness of the stewardship concepts.

A brief excerpt follows:

Part Five

The Finish

(based on faith -- in self and in God)

. . . written as I try for the same things you do . . .