

Stewardship of Resources: Accountability

1 Corinthians 4:1-2: *This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy.*

In their introduction to the paper “Kingdom Stewardship,” Brett Elder and Stephen Grabill describe our responsibility as believers in this way:

“At the beginning of the twenty-first century, an unprecedented opportunity exists to disciple the church in the fundamental biblical pattern of holistic stewardship. As the church becomes increasingly aware of issues of sustainability, seeks to understand and foster the role of business, and expands the message of the grace of giving as a central motif of the Christian life, an environment for personal and corporate transformation is beginning to take root. Christ-centered stewardship – management of God’s resources for his intended purposes – will begin to foster more accountability among businesses and ministries, more collaboration among ministry efforts for greater effectiveness, and healthy motivations and patterns of giving in the lives of all Christians, regardless of wealth, location, or status.”

Hello, my name is Barbara Shantz, (TWR’s Global Development Liaison) and welcome to this third step in our “Faith Reliance” series. This video examines the subjects of stewardship and accountability for the resources that God has given us.

Neither the word “stewardship” nor the word “accountability” seems very exciting until it is not used - then things get VERY exciting. It’s like maintenance on a bicycle. The useful thing about a bicycle is that it gets us from one place to another. But if a bicycle is not regularly maintained, with the right resources used for the job, the bicycle does not stay useful very long.

First, you hear a little click in the gears – something’s not quite shifting right, but you don’t have time to look. A few days later you hear a “thunk” as you want to shift into another gear, but instead, it’s stuck in 1st gear. It’s a little embarrassing, and a lot more work, to have to pedal so fast to get around. But you can hope that no one will notice, because you just don’t have time to pay attention to this mechanical problem.

Finally, one day you're pedaling madly to get to your destination, and the bicycle chain loosens and simply falls off. As you're standing by the side of the road, late for work, you wonder why you didn't pay attention to that first "click." There were plenty of warning signs along the way, but the urgency of daily life convinced you that you didn't have time for maintenance. Unfortunately, none of us has to look very far to see once-reputable ministries that have had to deal with tragic circumstances because attention wasn't paid when things first came up.

As ministry leaders, we want to think the best of our staff. As donors, we want to think the best of the ministries we support. And as ministries, we want to think the best of those who give us resources. But each of these relationships takes time, and, humanly speaking, listening to one another is not always our first choice of activity.

Ecclesiastes 4 outlines evil in a most convincing manner. One of my favourite sections in this book talks about being a smart leader. In Verses 13 and 16 we read the following:

Better was a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king who no longer knew how to take advice. There was no end of all the people, all of whom he led. Yet those who come later will not rejoice in him.

There is much to be said about finishing well. What kind of legacy will we leave? Wise leaders and donors alike need to pay attention to small warning signs like:

- The accountant who never takes a vacation and stays late each day. (potential embezzler)
- The pastor who goes abroad every year to raise funds and takes up offerings from the congregation as well.
- A woman commenting about undue attention being given to her by a co-worker at the ministry office.

In each case, and hundreds more, these small "squeaks" should give warning. They may be nothing at all and entirely innocuous, but as Ecclesiastes warns us, we need to be servant leaders and pay particular attention to those who have no voice:

Ecclesiastes 4:1: Again I saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun. And behold, the tears of the oppressed, and they had no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there was power, and there was no one to comfort them.

In Christian ministry, each person or penny that we become responsible for is a responsibility not only to those around us but also to God. We all know that we are dust and to dust we will return. As such, we try to skip steps of maintenance to save precious time. Fortunately for us, God knows that we are dust. Unfortunately for us, humans aren't so forgiving. So decide now to steward each resource that you're given – whether people or funding – to its fullest purpose, because the accountability you have for your job and every other responsibility is great.

The most common tensions I've seen in Christian ministry, though, are between those who fund ministries and those who receive that funding. In the ministry of giving and receiving, who should have the final say? Donors sometimes wonder what has happened to their money and then wonder why the ministry is asking for even more. Ministry leaders are often left wondering why donors are forever asking for reports – and, what has been done with the money? They often feel like saying, "We're doing ministry here. We don't have time for writing reports!"

Every ministry that I know of has these tensions. It's simply part of the balancing we need to do as we move forward in ministry. I suspect that as long as God's Great "Co-mission" is in motion, we will have these concerns. I'm happy to let you know that a lot of work has already been done for us in this area.

The Lausanne Movement has published a model for conversations on how, with utmost dignity, to work through the everyday issues that arise when money changes hands cross-culturally. Here's the website for questions and answers you might want to ask concerning cross-cultural stewardship and accountability: www.lausannestandards.org

As believers, each equally working to disciple others for Christ, we've been given the greatest message of all time to steward. As the apostle Peter tells us in 1 Peter 4:10-11:

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

On the Faith Reliance Web page, www.twr.org/faith-reliance, you can see a list of books, videos and articles pertinent to this third step we've been taking together regarding Faith Reliance in ministry. Comments, questions or critiques are welcome at faith-reliance@twr.org

The next video in this series deals with the topic "Fundraising," and I look forward to seeing you there!