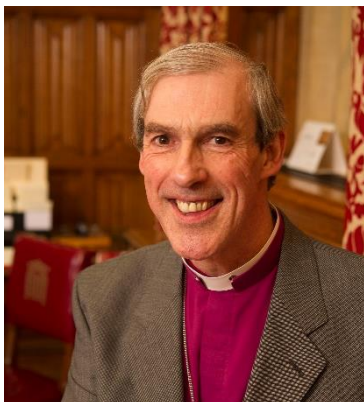


Intro for Stewardship e-Newsletter



I've been thinking recently about the difference between "needs" and "wants". Some things (like water and warmth) we clearly need. In fact, Abraham Maslow produced his now well-known "hierarchy of needs" many years ago to act as a sort of basis for thinking about human rights.

Other things we "want" – but can actually manage perfectly well without – such as chocolate and fast cars. One of the most obvious distinctions between rich and poor countries in today's world is the way in which certain things which would be regarded as luxuries by the poor are thought of as necessities by the rich.

So where does "stewardship" fit on this spectrum? Many individual Christians (and whole congregations) still regard it as a "want": a bonus, or luxury which remains an optional aspiration: something which can be admired when we observe it in others but isn't strictly "necessary" in the overall scheme of things. Generosity is a laudable virtue – but one which is generally reckoned to be more easily cultivated by the "well-off"; a category within which most of us would hesitate to include ourselves.

But, having reflected a little on this, I have come to realise that good stewardship is in fact a basic "need" for all of us who claim to be Christians. It isn't an "extra" or an "add-on". It is actually an essential aspect of genuine Christian discipleship.

That is, first of all, because we need to be practising stewardship if we are to grow and develop as followers of Jesus. Giving lay at the heart of his life and ministry. He gave his entire self in the service of those around him – and, ultimately, his life for the salvation of the world. As he said, "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve – and to give his life as a ransom for many". We too are called to "give": of our time, our attention, our gifts, our money and possessions – in order to become the people he has made us to be. If we're not giving, we're not growing – and if we're not growing, we will never discover what it means to be fully human. Putting others first and engaging in self-sacrificial service is a central feature of life as a Christian.

Second, other people need us to be practising good stewardship. That's true of the people we know and come across with all their various issues and problems. It's true of people in other parts of the world whom we will never meet but who rely on charitable aid from the so-called "developed" world – especially when disasters strike. And it's true of our fellow Christians in the more deprived parts of Cumbria. Our stewardship enables the provision of ministry and mission right across the county. Without the necessary resource (human as well as financial) we are forced to make unwelcome cuts of every kind.

Finally, God needs us to be good stewards of everything he gives us – because that is how his kingdom comes on earth as it is in heaven. We are his agents and ambassadors – and he relies on us to be his partners in both caring for the environment he has made and sharing all the blessings we receive from him.

So I'm left in no doubt about whether "stewardship" is a need – or merely a want. We tend to think of generous giving as something which makes us poorer. But in God's upside-down economy, it is failing to give which leaves us truly impoverished.

James Newcome