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Family. Money.

Five Questions Every Family \$hould Ask About Wealth

{ David Wills, Terry Parker, and Greg Sperry
of the National Christian Foundation }

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The illustrative stories in this book are true and are accurate in their essential details. However, the names have been changed to protect confidentiality.

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INTRODUCTION

Every family has a history. Flip through a photo album to the early years when the saga of a family begins, when time is measured by births and naptimes and first days at school. Turn the page to the season of carpools and sports teams. It's light speed from then on out. When dating and dances and diplomas come front and center, Mom and Dad can barely catch their breath. But by the time most parents are placing photographs in their children's wedding albums or framing the grandkid's pictures, they have learned to savor their own family's history, to appreciate what has passed.

Wrapped up in every family history – threaded invisibly throughout the memories – is money. That's right, money. How a family gets, grapples with, guards, and gives money is all a part of who that family is. Money, in part, defines a family's journey. And just as great memories like special events or vacations don't happen by accident, a family's view of money doesn't simply materialize out of thin air.

Photo albums don't create family history or values; they chronicle them. They capture something as it happens and preserve it for others to be reminded of it later. But in order to store a memory, you have to make it first. It is the role of parents to determine the culture of a family, to decide what is worth doing, worth tolerating, worth believing, and worth letting go. Parents teach this by example. And then, if a Mom and Dad plan to instill certain values into their children and bury them so deeply that

those children will instill them in their children, they have to get intentional. They need a plan.

The point of this book is to aid you with thinking through your plan. How will you determine the financial culture of your own family? How will you think about money personally, and how will those thoughts (your philosophy) affect what you do with money? And how will you involve your family as you move forward? A full four chapters are devoted to helping you develop a “Family Stewardship Philosophy.”

A philosophy is basically a set of answers. Your financial philosophy – the one you pass on to your children – will be the sum total of the answers to your questions about money. The key is to ask the right questions. As you read this book, you will be coached in the fine art of question-asking. Among others, you’ll be directed to think about:

Who really owns the things you own?

What assets have been entrusted to your care?

When is it enough?

Where should it go in the end?

Why will your children’s children share your Family Stewardship Philosophy?

These five questions will be answered by every family, whether they mean to or not. One way or another, their lives will be a living response to each one. Your answers to these questions are best formulated in the context of God’s Word. Every one of us has a financial philosophy. But most people don’t examine their philosophies. And they don’t look to Scripture to provide the foundation for the way they think about money. As you consider the truths in God’s Word about your money and its use, you can develop an approach that pleases Him. This is where you can lead your family with financial strength.

INTRODUCTION

But the way you chronicle and communicate that philosophy can be as unique as your own family. Some will write long documents and some may simply marinate long and hard on these pages. Some will make laminated copies for their teenagers and some will send an email to the kids and their spouses out of state. In any case, the point is not how your philosophy is passed on, just that it is.

Finally, this book is intended to guide you in a proven, effective way of communicating with your family about money: The Family Meeting. For some, this will be a challenge and, perhaps, a time of healing. For some, it will be a goal to pray and plan toward. The idea is to get you talking about money in a way that matters with the ones who matter to you most.

CHAPTER ONE

MONEY TO BURN

For Thomas Farynor, fire was an essential tool. As the baker to England's King Charles II, he couldn't perform his job without it. But fire is no inanimate hireling. Long after its usefulness is employed, the glowing coals can take on a life of their own. Such was the case on September 1, 1666.

As Farynor closed his bakery on London's Pudding Lane and headed upstairs to join his family for the night, he forgot to douse the embers in the oven. While the family slept, a spark ignited a nearby stack of firewood. At one o'clock in the morning, Farynor's assistant woke to find the house and shop filled with smoke. He quickly roused the others. With the stairs blocked by flames, Farynor escaped with his family through a window that opened to the rooftops. A maid, being afraid of heights, cowered inside where she soon died. It gets worse.

The construction materials in medieval London featured half timber frames and thatched roofs. Almost everything was coated in pitch to keep rain out. Strong winds blew that night and sparks leapt from the Farynor house, quickly lighting the hay-covered yard of the Star Inn at Fish Street Hill. Soon, the rooftops of other shops and houses were ablaze as the fire spread toward the town wharves where warehouses stored – of all things – winter supplies of fuel oil, mineral spirits, dried straw, and coal.

There have been modern fireworks shows that don't boast the precise choreography of pyrotechnics that swept through London that night. Equipped with nothing but buckets of water, the townspeople watched helplessly as the urban wildfire quickly engulfed one of the most influential cities in the world.

It would be several days before the Great Fire of London had run its course. When the smoke began to clear, eighty percent of the city that gave us Shakespeare was gone. 13,200 homes and 87 churches were destroyed. The face of London was changed forever.

The Great Fire of 1666 wasn't the first time London had been ravaged by flames. Nor was it the last time civilization's greatest advancement would become its greatest setback. Rome, Chicago, Shanghai, Moscow, and San Francisco are just a few of the charred casualties that come to mind.

When harnessed, fire is a vital tool for progress. But left to itself, the devastation is swift and, at times, legendary.

If there's a positive note to those tragedies, it would be found in the progress they birthed. Invariably, the infernos changed the way cities were built and how people lived. Overnight, the survivors emerged with a new philosophy for handling the power that had been handed down since prehistoric times. The lessons they learned from past mistakes fueled wise decisions in the future.

INHERITANCE OR CURSE?

Wealth is a lot like fire. It can be a vital tool empowering great achievements. But wealth has also burned many a family who brought it into their house. In the modern world, successfully acquiring wealth is one of the greatest advancements a family can ever experience. But it can also trigger one of the greatest setbacks.

In particular, when wealth is significant, it has a way of exploiting the natural frailties of family relationships. It confuses even the most basic communication between people. When wealth is near, a simple statement suddenly carries complex overtones.

Most of the time, the hidden meaning between family members isn't intentional. But often enough, it is.

In one of the most quoted passages of Scripture, the Apostle Paul wrote, "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil" (1 Timothy 6:10). Many pastors are quick to point out that money itself is not the problem. As we've all been told, it's the love of money that fogs the lens and seduces our motivations. This view would leave us to conclude that money, in and of itself, is a neutral factor.

But we shouldn't be too quick to grant money a pardon. Wealth is no inanimate hireling. Left to itself, it has a way of burning in the hearts of those that hold it too closely. It kindles the parched dreams that exist inside all of us. It promises to set our world on fire, if we could only experience its spark. Practically speaking, wealth is a primary factor in determining a person's autonomy, life options, and standard of living. Without wealth, a person faces one scenario; with it, the picture changes dramatically. As a result, the possibility of wealth introduces enormous tension between vastly different life circumstances. When a person's future hangs in the balance like that, it's only natural for sensitivities about money to be heightened and emotions to be amplified.

This hidden tension can do strange things to family relationships. Especially if the family does not discuss money openly. Inheritors can develop subtle expectations about their future and the family's wealth. Siblings often feel discomfort and uncertainty over the dramatic ways their lives might be impacted – despite statements to the contrary. The bequeather tends to minimize the significance of passing large assets from one generation to another, and they can find it awkward to share their plans for fear of how they'll be received.

Perhaps it was upon observing all these tendencies that the writer of Proverbs was prompted to caution, "An inheritance quickly gained at the beginning will not be blessed at the end" (Proverbs 20:21). No doubt he noticed that unless families were thoroughly prepared to face such powerful dynamics, they would soon face

the loss of things even more valuable than the wealth itself. Like an oil-soaked rag, the beneficiary of an inheritance seems all but predestined to a trial by fire. And all the best intentions of the grantor are mere water buckets against a raging inferno.

Ironically, what begins as a desire to bless the family too often becomes a crippling curse. And in the name of net worth, the family often loses what is priceless.

We spend our whole lives patiently dedicated to the growth and preservation of our family's net worth. Through carefully laid plans, we angle and maneuver to bring wealth into our family. We see wealth as a benign bounty. It is a mere object with no will of its own. But once inside our family, wealth is like a Trojan horse. When our guard is down, it reveals a sinister plot to erode the very thing that motivated us to pursue it in the first place. Without a plan to address this mutinous potential, our endowment becomes our undoing.

THE GREAT TABOO

It has been said that unmet expectations are at the root of all relational conflict. Wherever tensions are brewing, you can be certain that someone's expectations have been left unfulfilled. This is the case between nations. And it's true between family members as well. If you expect things to be one way, and your loved one has a different picture in mind, there is potential for conflict. The longer your expectations develop, the more they build momentum and gather energy. When the two agendas eventually collide, the violence of the impact is determined by the amount of energy behind each dream, and the damage depends on the character of each person to absorb the disappointment.

Significant wealth invites a host of expectations. It breeds them. The untapped potential of wealth makes it an endless source of suggestions and possibilities. Inevitably, a handful of those suggestions will solidify into expectations.

The key to resolving and avoiding conflict lies in aligning expectations before they have a chance to develop head-on momentum within the family. Just as expectations are the source of conflict, communication is the key to harmony. And the keys to good communication are humility and listening carefully. When our ideas are shared openly, the potential for friction can be identified long before it actually develops. Each person can adjust his assumptions before they reach a velocity that's harmful.

But talking about wealth isn't as simple as it sounds. In fact, for most families, it's completely unnatural. Holding an open discussion about family money would not only be awkward, it would be a violation of basic civility and decorum. It's fine to hold meaningful conversations about career goals, college choices, retirement plans, or marriage prospects. But the subject of family money is our great taboo.

There are good reasons why people respect these invisible boundaries. For starters, it was modeled for us by a generation now infamous for its wholesale commitment to privacy. (Under their watch, fictional television characters were depicted as sleeping in twin beds, rather than together.) What took place in the bedroom or the bank account were mysteries too private for public appraisal. Even the mention of those things was considered undignified and inappropriate. Perhaps they had good reasons for erecting those standards. Perhaps they didn't. Either way, very few of those who carry out this tradition of silence know what those reasons were, or are. We would do well to keep some subjects off limits, for sure, but the discussion of money isn't one of them. Without thinking, we may close off the entire house instead of just one room!

Another reason we stay mute about family money is the fear of interfering with the development of another's maturity and character. There's something about financial uncertainty that lights the fire of industry in a person. We don't want to deprive others of an important source of ambition. We've heard stories of people with promising lives being derailed by the welfare of an inheritance. Even though it's highly probable that wealth will change their

circumstances some day, we're apprehensive about acknowledging it openly. If we keep silent, we think, maybe the future benefactor will grow and develop just like someone for whom unearned wealth wasn't a certainty. Perhaps their trajectory in life will be maximized and they'll receive a great inheritance.

Another reason for silence is simple neglect. Perhaps the patriarch or matriarch assumes the unspoken messages are adequate information. Or maybe they intend to address it more specifically but aren't quite sure how to do it. In either case, the subject was meant to be broached, but somehow the conversation has yet to be started.

Rare is the benefactor who regards an inheritance as part of a God-given calling. In this paradigm, riches are a stewardship responsibility for the beneficiary. For those families called to those unique circumstances, wealth training is part of preparing a young person for life. And open discussion is just the foundation for a long-term process that encompasses the full potential of the individual, as well as the best stewardship of the family's money.

MONEY TALKS, WHY DON'T WE?

In spite of our vow of silence, the conversation is on. And in the absence of the words we would speak aloud, our thoughts are engaged in a steady dialogue. Where there is wealth, the money itself calls the names of our loved ones. It entices them to consider the possibilities. It preoccupies them with uncertainty. And eventually it tempts them to view family members as the obstacles between them and their ultimate destiny.

To the degree that there is wealth, there must be communication about wealth. Keeping silent about your plans is tantamount to withholding affection. There's nothing wrong with deciding not to give money to family members. But failing to discuss your thoughts with loved ones leaves them to assume the worst about the reasons for your choices.

Staunch prudence toward the bedroom has been replaced by age-appropriate education about sex and boundaries. Likewise, reverence for the great taboo is giving way to healthy conversations about family money, personal dreams, and the preservation of family love and unity. This represents a new freedom: not freedom for freedom's sake, but an openness that deepens family relationships. It is in the context of relationships that families grow to need each other rather than simply needing what the other has. After all, passing on healthy relationships is far more valuable than passing on a healthy investment portfolio.

Consider This:

The best way to begin a dialogue is with a question, not a statement. When you were growing up, were there unanswered questions in your own mind about your family's approach to finances? Do (or did) your own children have the freedom to ask honest questions in your home? How can you foster that kind of freedom now?

CHAPTER TWO

PHILOSOPHY 101

Relationships are the greatest asset any family can possess. And yet, they cannot be purchased at any price. For many, the drive to gain success has ended with the loss of family. The ultimate gain in that equation is a profound sense of regret. At the end of the day, most people would trade anything for the treasure of experiencing authentic, loving exchanges with family members.

But contrary to common practice or wishes, families don't become strong by default. It requires attention to certain principles and disciplines that cultivate things like family identity and interdependence. Many families pursue closeness only to overlook the role that wealth (and wealth transfer) can play in either enhancing it or undermining it. Family wealth is a tangible dimension of a family's existence together. To ignore it, avoid it, or downplay it is as unnatural as keeping a secret room in the house that certain family members are never allowed to access.

Instead, wealth should be viewed like a family room where everyone gathers to enjoy each other. Granted, the privileges are not the same for each person. There may be a chair reserved for mom or dad. The television is not to be accessed without permission. And there may be certain keepsakes and valuables that are not to be touched or mishandled. But within the appropriate boundaries, the room is an environment whose main purpose is to foster the relationships between family members.

Wealth is an experience to be shared. This doesn't necessarily mean family wealth should be shared. But managing wealth is a natural arena for apprenticeship, especially if progeny will one day inherit the responsibility of managing the same wealth. As a parent, your philosophies about money are among your most defining attributes. These same characteristics will, in part, define your children some day. In an age-appropriate way, parents have an opportunity to instill financial philosophies in their children and equip them for success in life. And one of the most powerful ways to do this is by allowing children to witness their parents' experiences up close and personal.

Family wealth is an opportunity for family experience. We travel to the Grand Canyon to create an experience we share together. We pass around the pictures and describe our feelings in response to the events. And in the process, we get to know each other and develop strong bonds. In the same way, receiving a blessing from God is an experience worthy of sharing. We should describe our reactions to the events and share our perspectives with each other.

Relationships are born around common experiences. When soldiers share life-changing experiences on a battlefield, they become joined together in a profound and mysterious way. When students share classes, they develop a natural affinity for those who understand their pursuits. When a man and a woman meet with the prospect of matrimony, they hasten to spend time together and begin logging mutual experiences that become the platform of their partnership.

In each case, shared events are like deposits in a relationship bank account. They constitute equity that represents great value to the bearer, and they validate a sense of depth and commitment between the parties. When we invest in each other this way, we add value to the relationship. Families who lack these core investments can feel the tension of incomplete relationships that have been neither fully validated nor fully vested. Without these deposits, there can be no build up of equity.

But simply blurting your experiences to another person does not constitute a relationship. The purpose of communication is the respect and alignment of philosophies between parent and child. You speak. You ask questions. You listen. And as a parent, you train, cultivate, and coach.

One of the attributes of strong families is that they share core philosophies. That doesn't mean they all think alike naturally. But as they walk through life together, there's a trend toward like-mindedness in their conclusions about their experiences. As independent people, they each have a unique perspective to offer; but as an interdependent group, they tend to value the same things. And with similar core beliefs, they tend to pursue common interests. The stronger the family identity, the more they tend to be centered on issues like faith, community, and purpose. And when all is said and done, successful families are those in which the parents have provided good leadership and given their children a solid foundation of well-defined core beliefs and values.

Among the core beliefs is the family's perspective about wealth, also known as the Family Stewardship Philosophy. Just as you might impart a solid understanding of theology to your child, the family's paradigms about wealth and stewardship should also be established and offered for inclusion in the child's worldview. And it's never too late to start.

The concept of a Family Stewardship Philosophy begins with the idea that all wealth and possessions belong to God. As such, people are not owners of anything. Instead, we are managers – or stewards – of the possessions we hold during our lifetime. This goes for family possessions too. And at some point in eternity-future, we must give an account of our handling of things. Family money is one of the things we must steward, or manage. It's not simply a matter of getting ours and meeting our needs. First and foremost, we are agents assigned to accomplish God's purposes; and we're given a portion from His wallet to do it.

Families share many things. And by sharing a Family Stewardship Philosophy, their identity includes a shared definition of what it

means to honor God through the handling of the wealth He assigns to us during our lifetime.

Perhaps this is best conveyed through two scenarios. In the first (and most common), the family gathers in the lawyer's office. The executor clears his throat and reads the written document left by the deceased. This is the worst-case scenario. As the details of the will are disclosed, the children are hearing many things for the first time. And you are gone. This may be the first time they've heard about the size of the family estate. It may be the first they've known about the intended assignments of the assets. And perhaps most tragic of all, it's the first peek they've had into the heart and value-system of their own parent. Nothing can be more fulfilling than for parent and child to take full advantage of the living years to get to know each other at a significant level. And few things are more painful than to discover important details about a loved one when it's too late to share and interact over the subject.

When an adult child is not included in details about the family estate, he can feel very much like the person left out when friends whisper secrets to each other. The rejection it communicates can be severe. To the well-intending parent, it may seem like a display of strength and quiet love to maintain an element of mystery and surprise. After all, there's a big gift involved. But the situation is much more complex than opening Christmas gifts or birthday cards. If a stranger left an unexpected inheritance, it makes a strong statement of legacy about the giver. But parents shouldn't be deceived into thinking surprise enhances their legacy with their children. Their greatest legacy is a close relationship. And rather than a grand crescendo, the surprise inheritance often leaves the child with a final message of exclusion and insignificance. And another thing you might leave behind is sibling rivalry that can last a lifetime.

The parent is not required to give anything or communicate anything; but the wise parent understands the statement that is made whether he speaks or not. More than anything, the child wants to know his parents. That means being informed about

important family issues and what's desired of him or her in light of it all. When the parent says nothing, in some cases it's as if he or she didn't think the child was capable or deserving of being included. And unmet expectations are virtually guaranteed.

In the best-case scenario, generational wealth-transfer is merely a formality that consummates a long-standing relationship of mutual respect and trust. In this version of the story, the family gathers around a special dinner (on a regular basis, perhaps annually or even more often) to celebrate God's goodness and His calling of stewardship on the family. Instead of lawyers, the parents speak for themselves. Their thoughts are carefully prepared. They share the desire to enjoy a strong family legacy and to be good stewards of everything they share together. They allude to the responsibility of handling the "extra" God has given them as a couple, and how their vision for the surplus might impact their children and others. They initiate conversation by asking probing questions and coaxing their children to share their thoughts as the dialogue unfolds. While the parents may not base their stewardship decisions on the children's wishes, they are careful to make them feel included. They listen with their eyes and ears to everyone's input. The children feel valued, and the family's bond grows stronger. As a result, they build a bridge over which the Family Stewardship Philosophy will be transferred to the next generation. By transferring a family philosophy along with the family wealth, the success of the family legacy is much more likely.

Unfortunately, the latter scenario is not the most common. In most cases, people spend 40 years accumulating wealth, 20 years trying to preserve it, and about 40 minutes deciding how it will be dispensed when they're gone. You owe it to yourself to have a plan that is well thought-out. And you owe it to your family to hold that first meeting at home where they can benefit from your attendance, not in the lawyer's office where they will experience your permanent absence.

In the pages that follow, we will talk more about The Family Meeting, including a four-step plan to guide you. For now, simply

bask in the reality that most children really want to talk to their parents ... not because they want their inheritance, but because they love their family. And family wealth is just another opportunity to share life together. You share other philosophies with each other. Developing a Family Stewardship Philosophy that reflects your family's identity is as natural as expressing your beliefs with each other. Dream together. Discuss what wealth means to you. And find out what it means to the people who mean so much to you.

Consider This:

The art of good conversation takes practice. That's because most of us would rather talk than listen. But listening is required if we're going to really communicate with others. The first step of listening is the question. Ask a good one and the discussion is off to a healthy start. Ask a yes-or-no question and you probably won't get very far. Forgo questions altogether and the result may well be a monologue, not a dialogue.

Just like conversation, the art of thinking and planning takes practice. A strong philosophy is developed by digging into the truth. And the first step in digging is the question.

You don't need to write out answers to these yet, but take a minute to look over the five questions below. You'll be answering them in later chapters.

Who really owns the things you own?

What assets have been entrusted to your care?

When is it enough?

Where should it go in the end?

Why will your children's children share your Family Stewardship Philosophy?

CHAPTER THREE

THREE STEPS TO FAMILY MONEY HARMONY

Over the years at the National Christian Foundation (NCF), we have seen firsthand how money can separate families. And conflict can come from the most unexpected places. One such family owned a silver service once made for the Czar and Czarina of Russia. The priceless pieces had been in the possession of an aging aunt for decades. Her niece and nephew – siblings – were the sole heirs in the family, and each speculated as to how the ownership of the silver might be decided after her death. Unfortunately, the woman never specified a clear plan in her will. Then, her nephew borrowed the service for a special party. And whether through neglect or scheming, he never returned it.

For 13 years, a feud brewed under the surface between the brother and sister. Through it all, the two never spoke directly to each other. Instead, they lobbed their hostilities back and forth in the form of notes and messages delivered through others. Finally, the two came face to face on the occasion – ironically – of the aunt's funeral. At the end of the service, the congregation dismissed to a reception at the brother's home. Turning to leave, the two met as others in attendance looked nervously on. The brother spoke, "Tell my sister she's not welcome at my house this afternoon." To which the sister replied, "Tell my brother I wouldn't

come to his house if it was his funeral.” In effect, their relationship was buried along with their aunt that day. And it all started with a silver service. If we’re not careful, possessions can become the downfall of the family.

If there’s one thing that every family desires, it is summed up in the word *harmony*. Families want many things. But in the end, nothing is more valuable than a family atmosphere in which each person values everyone, as well as the way their diversities blend together. Like the writer of Proverbs observed, “Better a dry crust with peace and quiet than a house full of feasting, with strife” (Proverbs 17:1). And yet, family harmony doesn’t happen by itself. In fact, wealth is often a complicating factor that can distract family members from the goal of pursuing togetherness.

In music, harmony is achieved when distinct coordinated notes are played simultaneously, forming a chord. The word chord itself comes from a shortening of the old Middle English word accord, which speaks of an agreement reached between separate and distinct parties. The concept of developing a Family Stewardship Philosophy must acknowledge these principles. A family philosophy must be a joint creation of the family, not a mandate handed down by the leader. In order to pass from generation to generation, it must acknowledge that children become adults and leaders themselves. In this sense, families are egalitarian entities, despite the authority of parents over progeny. A family philosophy is to reflect and celebrate the unique personality and calling of each person. The small child with the eccentric interests will one day be the adult setting the tone for the next generation. This is God’s choosing. We should embrace the bents of our own family and incorporate them into our shared philosophies, vision, and direction.

The musical concept of harmony involves unity, but it should not be confused with uniformity, where all notes would be identical. This is an important distinction to grasp. Family harmony does not imply that everyone marches to the same drummer. The individuals in your family must follow their own dreams, goals,

and pursuits. Proverbs 22:6 explains that the calling of parents is to train up their children in the way they should go. This means encouraging your children to make good decisions and follow the unique path God has laid out for them. This requires a different kind of leadership from parents.

Parental leadership is not one static note that never changes. Our children are initially accountable to us and ultimately accountable to God. As they grow, our leadership shifts and changes. The foundational melody of your family's stewardship philosophy may stay the same, but the way you impart that philosophy may change drastically over time. You will model it to your small children, share it as they get older, and invite their involvement as they become adults. Finally, you will pass it on to them when you die.

Harmony is one of God's universal themes. He gives unique gifts and perspectives to each of his children; when blended together, they form a whole that greatly exceeds the sum of the parts. In this way, harmony always preserves a healthy sense of individuality and freedom. Each member of your family is allowed to sound their own notes with clarity and to be who God uniquely created them to be.

For harmony to be achieved, however, these separate notes will need to be coordinated and synchronized. Otherwise, they are destined to be sounded in isolation or out of sync with the rest of the family score. That's where the statement of philosophy comes in. What you need is a tangible expression of your own unique dreams, inspiration, values, and style – lyrics that are written with your family's unique voice in mind.

CRAFTING YOUR FAMILY STEWARDSHIP PHILOSOPHY

A well-developed Family Stewardship Philosophy records and illustrates your beliefs about the source and purpose of your wealth. It also serves as a clear and common foundational tool that

guides and helps your family understand the four phases of wealth management: acquisition, preservation, utilization, and transition.

Developing a Family Stewardship Philosophy requires effort. As in music, creating harmony with family money also requires a certain level of knowledge, practice, and dedication to pull it off. More specifically, this involves clarifying your family's knowledge and core beliefs about money, expressing and examining them as necessary to bring them into alignment with the truth of God's word. It also involves communicating these beliefs through discussion and written statements that note your convictions, objectives, and intentions in a way that others can pick up and understand. Additionally, it involves making commitments about the wealth that is entrusted to you, which practically demonstrates your dedication to your core beliefs and objectives, as well as to God and your family.

Working through this three-step process of clarification, communication, and commitment, is worth the effort. Like a great piece of music, your Family Stewardship Philosophy can serve to create a lasting legacy that can inspire and be passed on to your family and future generations.

Prior to delving into these three steps in more detail, it's wise to pause and reflect upon the nature of stewardship itself, and all that it implies. To this end, we'll begin by looking to the first verse of a song penned by one of the ancient world's most recognized musicians and songwriters.

STEWARDSHIP REVEALED

Psalm 24:1 reads: The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.

You may have guessed by now the identity of the song's author. While he is more commonly known as a shepherd, warrior, and past king of Israel, David was also an accomplished musician and prolific songwriter.

He is also known for his intimate relationship with God. Described as a “man after God’s own heart,” David immortalized what he learned about God by writing it down and setting it to music. Though the music has not survived, David’s lyrics have. Even today, these words provide those who follow after him with important insights about God’s identity and character.

David’s seemingly simple lyrics contain a powerful truth. Namely, that God owns everything. Note that “everything” includes not just inanimate objects, but all the earth’s inhabitants as well. God’s claim of ownership is all inclusive, and covers both you and your family.

Other claims of God’s ownership are found throughout scripture. A sampling of these include:

Leviticus 25:23 – The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants.

Haggai 2:8 – “The silver is mine and the gold is mine,” declares the LORD Almighty.

Romans 11:36A – For from him and through him and to him are all things...

I Corinthians 6:19-20 – Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

In light of the above, it’s clear that our use of the word “ownership” is somewhat misleading. The fact of the matter is that all we possess, everything we think we own, is really on loan to us from God. Therefore, we are not really owners, but stewards of the resources God has entrusted to us. God owns everything. We simply are allowed to manage some of it for a time.

This concept is also borne out in our practical experience. The reality of physical death reinforces the notion that we can only have “possession” or control of material things for a limited time. Though we may be able to exercise control over material possessions during our lifetimes, we never truly have ownership of them. Unlike God, our claims of ownership are limited by the grave. God is the only true owner. We are simply managers – or stewards – of God’s resources.

Consider this real-life couple (whose names have been changed so they can remain anonymous): when Stan and Mary first met, Stan was earning at comfortable six-figure income and Mary earned \$14,000 a year as a school teacher. Stan’s observation that Mary tithed her income while he did not was a first step in a life-long lesson in stewardship. “Her silent witness spoke volumes about my need to be as obedient in my walk as she was in hers,” Stan recalls. When they married over twenty years ago, they understood that their combined assets didn’t belong to them. That made the decision to give a natural one.

Mary explains stewardship this way: “For us, it’s an act of worship ... because it’s all His. Success is very, very seductive, and it’s very addictive. If you’re not careful it can control you. The real key to my ability to worship God was to get the financial side of my life under control. That put everything else in perspective.”

This biblical understanding of ownership and stewardship is foundational for any valid Family Stewardship Philosophy. Since everything belongs to God, His claim of ownership extends to our family possessions too. And at some point in eternity-future, we must give an account of our handling of things.

Understanding our calling as God’s agents carries with it a sense of responsibility and wonder. Responsibility, in that all our financial decisions become spiritual ones, made as part of a sacred trust. Wonder, as we realize that the God of the Universe allows us to take part in His continuing work on earth. Such an understanding also has a grounding effect, insulating us from money’s potential negative charge. If we misunderstand our role, we will

easily fall prey to wealth's seductive power. Seeking to assume God's role and master wealth, we will in turn become mastered, dissolving family bonds and our loyalty to God, the true source of all wealth.

Given what's at stake, it's crucial that you understand what your family believes about wealth. You need a clear and common Family Stewardship Philosophy to achieve family money harmony. But where and how do you begin? Like all journeys, you start out by taking the first step.

STEP ONE: **CLARIFICATION**

Before you can communicate what you believe to others, you need to have a clear understanding of what it is you actually believe yourself. Thus, developing a Family Stewardship Philosophy begins by examining and clarifying your core beliefs, feelings, and attitudes about wealth in light of scripture.

Why is this important? To a great degree, all of us are products of our environment. Throughout our lives, we are bombarded with competing ideas, claims, and experiences that affect how we view money, either consciously or unconsciously. Over time, we develop attitudes, habits, and behaviors that ultimately reflect the beliefs we've practically adopted.

Many of us never give this a second thought. Even if we have taken the time to spell out what our guiding beliefs and principles are, we've often never considered whether our actions and words are truly in alignment. Upon closer examination, we may find that the game of Monopoly, for example, has a more formative influence on our family's understanding of wealth than does the Bible.

For this reason, it's important that we bring our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors concerning money out into the open. This allows us to evaluate them in the light of God's word. The typical discovery process begins with individual study and prayer. The next four chapters in particular are designed to help guide and

focus your thinking in this regard. They provide biblical insights and questions to fuel further thought and spark discussion. You may want to encourage other family members to work through this book in a similar fashion or together as a group.

As you reflect upon your beliefs, you're encouraged to write out your thoughts in a notebook or journal. Feel free to record anything significant that God brings to mind. What did your parents teach you about money? What were your feelings about wealth growing up? Have your beliefs changed over time? Do you remember any people, stories, or events that had an impact on your view of money? What was your first experience with generosity? Were you the giver or the receiver?

As you move into the next step, communication, you may also want to draft one or more statements that express your core beliefs and values, as well as the vision, mission and purpose God has given you for your family's wealth. While such an exercise may at first seem limiting or confining, in reality it can provide a launching point for expression and improvisation. Putting pen to paper also helps to focus your thinking and clarify what it is you actually believe. Additionally, it serves as a means of documenting your wealth-related goals and objectives, which paves the way for tangible discussion and interaction with your family. Remember, wealth is a tool; a means, not an end ... and God has a purpose for you and your family, and your wealth.

STEP TWO: **COMMUNICATION**

Developing a Family Stewardship Philosophy cannot be done in isolation. Communication is at least a two-way street. It involves us sharing our thoughts with others in the family, while really listening to what they have to say as well. To achieve any type of family harmony, such communication is absolutely essential.

The ultimate goal in writing out your beliefs and objectives about wealth is to share them with your family. As a steward,

rather than an owner, your role in communicating is a humble one. Any family gathering to discuss finances is essentially a manager's meeting. As the leader of your home, your job is to report on the owner's wishes as you understand them, not your own. As you write, your goal is to do what Paul commanded: "Find out what pleases the Lord" (Ephesians 5:10).

As you share, you may rethink or revise what you've written previously. That's fine. Remember, the goal at this point is not technical precision. Your goal is to foster communication, promote sharing, and strengthen your relationship with the ones you love.

Also, remember that as you work through these steps, there is no set boundary between them. They are meant to describe a relational process, not a tightly defined sequential series of steps. As you work through this communication step or the next one, you'll likely find yourself going back to earlier steps for further clarification or communication. This is perfectly normal. Again, the goal is family money harmony, not flawless efficiency.

Some families do not relish the thought of open dialogue or discussion on this topic. They fear that instead of harmony, conflict will result. They may be right. Or they may be wrong. In either case, the potential for conflict is not reason enough to abandon the attempt. In fact, conflict may be exactly what the doctor ordered, as it is often God's way of getting our attention, bringing accountability, and correcting flawed perspectives.

Jesus' words in Matthew 7:3-5, which speak of us being able to spot specks in the eyes of others while remaining oblivious to the plank in our own eye, illustrate how inept we often are at recognizing our own faults. While it may be easy for us to spot the flaws in another's logic or life examples, we're often blind to our own failings or inconsistencies.

For anyone to see potential holes in their own thinking and behavior, they need a different perspective. This may come from within the family itself, or with the help of one or more strategic outsiders or advisors. Exactly how this is done will vary, depending

upon your family's relational dynamics. More time and attention will be given to this topic later in the chapter entitled, "The Family Conversation Guide." For now, just know that if conflict is imminent, communication is the key to correction, forgiveness, healing, and a renewed sense of trust and family commitment.

After clarifying your beliefs and communicating with your family about wealth, you're ready to address the final step, commitment.

STEP THREE: COMMITMENT

Conversation can only take us so far. At some point, if we really believe what we say we believe, we have to act on it. When actions are tied to our thoughts and beliefs, they become more tangible. This can involve making decisions about relationships, or about financial plans. Putting off those decisions is a decision in itself. It's a decision not to commit. And what it suggests is that we lack conviction about what we profess to believe.

In the final analysis, we will be judged not for what we intended to do, but what we actually did. The Apostle James put it this way in James 2:17: "... faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead." Pretty harsh words.

The true test of the work you put into the first two steps is what you actually do about it. Printing out new confessions of faith or purpose statements is not enough. Talking about it is not enough. You need to demonstrate your commitment to God and your family by stepping out in faith and putting your beliefs into practice. Your words and actions need to match. This way you can leave a legacy that is both taught and caught.

Stan and Mary McKinney not only committed themselves to a life of giving, they imparted that lifestyle to their children. Their two college-age daughters have caught the spirit from their parents. They participate in family meetings to prayerfully decide how to direct the family's donations. "About four years ago one of our

daughters gave me a very thoughtful birthday card,” says Stan. “The best part was her handwritten note that said, ‘You taught me the joy of giving.’”

Commitment is the key. Without it, your words will not ring true, empty promises that serve to wound and drive your family apart. With it, your words will be a wellspring, a source of wisdom and inspiration bringing your family closer to each other and to God.

If you do continue on, prepare to be challenged, and inspired. Achieving family money harmony is not easy, but it is certainly possible with God’s help.

Consider This:

Before reading this book, did you ever question your approach to your finances? Have you ever wondered why you’re blessed and others are not? (Or the other way around?) Have you ever examined your spending patterns, your giving habits, or your attitude toward wealth? If so, did you find satisfying answers?

How have the concepts in this chapter—Clarification, Communication, Commitment – encouraged you in your pursuit of answers? What do you hope to accomplish as you read on? Record your thoughts about ...

Clarifying your beliefs about wealth

Communicating those beliefs to your family

Committing to act upon those beliefs

CHAPTER FOUR

ACQUISITION PHILOSOPHY

We are born to manage, to care for, to be fruitful, to multiply. Just as we are formed by our Creator and destined to return to Him some day, we are also appointed to gather our provisions in between. We are creatures who hunt and gather. We experience scarcity and abundance. And along the way, the journey teaches us about the character of our Lord.

For some, acquisition requires great effort. For others, almost none. Some are barely able to acquire for the day, while others seek to acquire for generations to come. In either case, everyone develops a philosophy about the acquisition process. But whether you work at it or not, you have a basic paradigm about the work of acquiring. Some people loathe the idea, dreading each new day. Others consider it a great conquest, exercising their dominion over their world by using their gifts and talents. For most people, their identity is linked to acquisition, or the lack thereof. We are organized into demographic categories – blue-collar or white-collar – wealthy or poverty-stricken – based on the degree we in fact, do acquire. However, these circumstances say less about us than the philosophy with which we approach the process. Acquisition is not only the first stage of your financial life, it also forms the foundation of your Family Stewardship Philosophy.

It's a basic fact of human existence that we are not self-sufficient beings. Our very lives depend upon us procuring and consuming necessary amounts of food and water. Additionally, our bodies are often ill equipped to brave the elements and our environment without some form of covering or shelter. We need clothes and dwelling places to protect us from extreme conditions and other organisms that may cause us harm.

It's no wonder then that we refer to food, clothing, and shelter as the bare necessities of life. Since these necessities are external to our own being, we have to acquire them in order to survive. Acquisition is therefore fundamental to human life. If we don't acquire, we die.

God knows we have to acquire things to keep on living, and that such a life of dependency and uncertainty can produce fear, worry, and anxiety. But more than that, God wants us to know that He knows, and that He is using our dependency to produce faith in Our Provider. Consider the words of Jesus as He speaks on this subject in His famous Sermon on the Mount:

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them."

(Matthew 6:25-32)

God's message is clear. Don't worry about it. Trust me. I've got your back. I know you need certain things to survive. You don't need to run after these things the way pagans, or those who don't know me, do. Have faith in me. You're valuable to me, and I'm willing and able to take care of you.

Sound advice to be sure, but it leaves you with the impression that we're not expected to do much of anything, other than wait on God. This is great in theory, but it doesn't seem to apply to the real world. In fact, it seems to be a good argument for being lazy. Fortunately, the text does not stop there. Verse 33 reads:

"But seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

The assumption in this passage is that we're already active – already seeking to acquire those things that will meet our needs and sustain our lives. "To work or not to work?" is not the question. You cannot justify being a sluggard here or anywhere else in scripture. A passage such as Paul's warning against idleness in 2 Thessalonians 3:6-14 (especially the rule in verse 10, "If a man will not work, he shall not eat.") makes this abundantly clear.

The real question is one of loyalty: "For whom am I working?" This question is tied to a concept we touched on earlier – that of ownership. If we acknowledge God as the owner of all things and ourselves as stewards, then the focus of our work will be on pleasing Him. In this light, seeking "first His Kingdom and His righteousness," makes sense, because these are the things that are important to Him.

So how exactly do we do this? We begin by getting our priorities straight, making sure we're aligned with God's vision, mission, purpose (His Kingdom), and core values (His righteousness). To do this, we need to understand how He views wealth, as well as what's important to Him, how He operates, what motivates Him, and what He expects of us in this regard. In short, we need to get to know Him better and seek to follow His lead.

If we do this, He will reward us with true wealth and ensure that all our needs are met.

A GOD'S EYE VIEW

God wants our eyes to be upon Him, and not distracted by the process of acquisition. In fact, He's pretty adamant about us not relying upon or worshipping anything in place of Him. Hence He calls on us to love Him with all our heart, soul, and mind, and to have no other gods before Him. As the source of all wealth, He deserves the credit.

God's plan for our wealth acquisition is perhaps better described as wealth reception. Since He owns it, wealth is His to give, not ours to take or create. (The term "wealth creation" when applied to man is somewhat a misnomer.) Thus, our job is to receive it from Him, acknowledging Him as the producer and provider.

As our *heavenly* Father, He also has a perspective that is different from our own. While we see wealth primarily as a material reality, God's view includes both material and heavenly wealth, the latter of which is superior to the former. Understanding this difference in perspective helps us to see the benefits of "un-acquiring" material wealth we've worked so hard to acquire. For as we follow God's leading and give away our temporal wealth to support his Kingdom, we effectively deposit eternal wealth in His heavenly treasury. Giving up what is seen for what is unseen requires and demonstrates faith — faith in our unseen heavenly Father who promises that our investment will not be squandered, and that our temporal needs will be attended to as well.

When we love God, focus on Him and His agenda, and see things from His perspective, He'll give us whatever wealth or material possessions are necessary to meet our needs and accomplish His purposes. We love, we follow, He gives, and we receive. No worries.

Sounds simple doesn't it? It is, when you focus on God, seek His Kingdom, and keep your priorities straight. The key is whether you trust God to call the shots or not. Do you believe His ways are best? Is He going to treat you fairly? Do you trust that He has your best interest at heart? Will He really make sure your family's needs are met?

When you begin to believe the answer to any of these questions is "no," you're on the road to becoming your own boss, and claiming ownership of your own life and your material possessions. While this may seem like a good idea at first, it never is. The key to knowing why this is so lies in understanding the "Possession Principle."

THE POSSESSION PRINCIPLE

Simply put, the Possession Principle says that *whenever we seek to possess something, it possesses us*. Stated another way, whenever we attempt to acquire something, we end up being acquired.

This is especially true when it comes to money. As we acquire it and witness its ability to meet our daily needs and beyond, we recognize that having money means having power. If we're hungry, we can buy food with it. If we need clothes and a house, we can buy them too. No worries.

If having money is good, it stands to reason that having more money is even better. If we have enough, we'll never need to worry about going hungry, not having anything to wear, or being homeless. We can buy everything we need. We can secure our family's future with it. We can go places and do things that others with less money can't afford to do. In fact, we can even pay people who want some of our money to do things for us. We can retire. We can do whatever we want to do and have anything our heart desires. The possibilities are endless. All we need is money ... more money.

It's easy to understand why wealth is so appealing. It offers us a false sense of contentment, security, rest, and freedom. And these intangibles are all ours for the taking – as long as we have enough money. But how much is enough? What should be our “finish line” amount? The definition of wealthy, after all, is “having more.” But few wealthy people ever think they have over-accumulated. And there is always someone to compare ourselves to, such as a neighbor who has accumulated more, and we so easily drift into coveting more “security” through more wealth. Covetousness (one of the “Big Ten”) is simply wanting more and more of what we have enough of already.

Faith in God and acquisition can certainly oppose each other. When we seek to possess money, we can quickly become possessed by it. Our desires, time, and attention become reoriented in our quest to acquire more and more. We become dependent upon it, placing our hearts, trust, hopes, and dreams for the future in its care. And in the process, we become enslaved by it, possessed by that which we sought to possess. We're no longer free to love and serve our Heavenly Father, nor to experience the freedom and joy that pleasing Him brings us.

WHAT'S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT?

Jesus knew the seductive power of wealth, which entices us to love and serve it rather than God, creating the illusion that we are really the ones in charge. The truth of the matter is that “ownership” is a myth. Since we can never actually take the place of God, we simply transfer our allegiance, becoming mastered by that which we sought to master.

Jesus warned us about this. In Matthew 6:24, he says, “No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”

The problem with serving money is that it's not able to keep its promises. Its offer of contentment, security, rest, and freedom is temporary at best, limited to this material, temporal realm. The hope it offers is ultimately a false hope, destined to bring heart-ache to anyone whose trust is placed in it rather than in God. As one of the wealthiest men who ever lived, Solomon speaks with experience on this point when he writes:

"Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This too is meaningless. As goods increase, so do those who consume them. And what benefit are they to the owner except to feast his eyes on them? The sleep of a laborer is sweet, whether he eats little or much, but the abundance of a rich man permits him no sleep. I have seen a grievous evil under the sun: wealth hoarded to the harm of its owner, or wealth lost through some misfortune, so that when he has a son there is nothing left for him. Naked a man comes from his mother's womb, and as he comes, so he departs. He takes nothing from his labor that he can carry in his hand." (Ecclesiastes 5:10-15)

The Apostle Paul offers a similar warning in the New Testament, as he writes to his protégé, Timothy:

"People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs." (1 Timothy 6:9-10)

So what's a person to do? How do we acquire wealth without falling in love with it? For starters, we should understand the Possession Principle, and recognize that things come with strings. When we seek to hold onto wealth or material possessions, they take hold of us. Knowing this will help us see wealth's offer of romance for what it is – the empty promise of a fickle mistress

that seeks to ensnare us and rob us of the real fulfillment, stability, inspiration, and liberty that God offers.

To counteract the risk of our obsession with possession, we should also understand that the foundation for blessing in God's economy is dependence, not independence. For as Jesus says in Matthew 5:3, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven." Seeking God's Kingdom first means recognizing the reality of our poverty, for in fact we don't really "own" anything. When we acknowledge this and place ourselves in a position of complete trust, obedience, and dependence upon our Heavenly Father, we are free to receive God's blessings without becoming enamored with them. And this is key, because: "without faith, it is impossible to please God ..." (Hebrews 11:6).

HOW'S YOUR LOVE LIFE?

The best way to protect yourself from wealth's advances is to strengthen your relationship with your Heavenly Father. The more you know him, the more you'll love him, literally, because God himself *is* love. When your love for God is strong, you'll be less tempted to love the wealth He enables you to acquire. Rather, you'll love and be devoted to the giver, not the gift, and you'll be free to use this gift in a way that is pleasing to God.

Below are some questions and insights that are designed to stimulate your thinking and help you assess your philosophy as it relates to wealth acquisition. You may find it helpful to record your thoughts for later discussion with your family members.

1. What writings, individuals, and/or experiences have had the most influence in shaping your thinking about wealth and its acquisition? Are there any stories or examples you can think of that really stick out?

2. Read Deuteronomy 8:10-18. Do you recognize God as the owner and source of all your wealth? If so, how does this affect your approach to acquiring wealth?

3. John Wesley (1703-91), English evangelist and founder of Methodism, believed it was important for Christian stewards to ask why they sought to acquire wealth. He identified the following as Godly purposes for wealth acquisition:

- *To provide for your needs*
- *To provide for needs of those dependent upon you*
- *To pay creditors*
- *To provide for stable operation and continuation of business or trade*
- *To care for those in need (sick, widowed, orphaned, poor, imprisoned, etc.)*
- *To support the church*

What purposes do you see in your life for continuing to acquire more wealth or more things? Do these purposes fall in line with “seeking first His Kingdom and His righteousness?”

4. How much is enough for you to accomplish God’s purposes within the spheres of influence He has placed you? Do you have a finish line in this pursuit of wealth?

5. Read Proverbs 23:4 and Matthew 11:28-29. How much time, emotion, and mental energy do you expend to increase your financial holdings? Do you tend to view God as a taskmaster, or as a loving and gracious heavenly Father?

6. Do your expectations of yourself with regard to work match up with God’s? Are you neglecting other responsibilities the Lord has

entrusted to you in your pursuit of work and wealth? (Remember, there are endless opportunities to utilize our time: work, play, time with spouse, children, friends. One or more of these will and must get the short end of the stick.)

7. Do you see a relationship between spiritual success and financial success? Do you feel closer to God when you're more financially successful? Do you envy others who are more successful than you in acquiring wealth?

8. If you were put in Job's place, and all you had was stripped away in a day, would you still be able to praise God? Would you be able to trust God enough to say, "though He slay me, yet I will trust Him?"

9. It has been said that riches enlarge rather than satisfy appetites. How do you counter the temptation to love and pursue wealth for the sake of wealth? Have you ever felt the effects of the "Possession Principle?"

10. In what ways does wealth compete with your love for God? Does it seek to become the source of your security and identity? Is the size of your bank account a source of pride? How do you "affair proof" your relationship with God?

11. Do you want more and more of what you have enough of already?

CHAPTER FIVE

PRESERVATION

PHILOSOPHY

Acquisition may be the basis for meeting our needs, but it's not intended to stop there. All creatures hunt and gather. But God made man to have a more sophisticated existence. In addition to acquiring, we also store and preserve. And for good reason. It is wise to preserve enough so you are ready when God presents His calling.

Some time before the National Christian Foundation (NCF) was started, I (Terry) got a call from the White House to consider an appointment to the 5th Circuit court of Appeals, the one below the Supreme Court. Unfortunately, I had borrowed money to help support the growth of our law firm. The obligations were reasonable for my current salary. But they left little room for spontaneity. And since a judge's salary would have been meant a significant drop in income, I couldn't take advantage of the opportunity. In response to that situation, I began to rethink my preservation goals so I'd be ready to support myself in such a way as to be ready to answer a similar calling if God presented it. In 1994, I felt God's call to work full-time with NCF. And thanks to those preparations, I was able to make the transition.

Proverbs explains, "In the house of the wise are stores of choice food and oil, but a foolish man devours all he has" (Proverbs

21:20). Just as we are more sophisticated than the other creatures, our methods of preservation are intended to go beyond simply finding and devouring. And mankind's methods of preserving and growing wealth can be quite complex.

But just as the acquisition phase introduces potential idols, so does the preservation phase. During the exodus from Egypt, learning to rely only on God was one of the Israelites' primary lessons. They weren't ready for preservation. So God designed manna to decay within 24 hours. It couldn't be preserved. God knew that preservation itself was a potential idol that would keep His people from getting to know about His character.

The same can be true for us. Unless we approach preservation with the basic mindset that we are stewards instead of owners, we can lose sight of God in the process.

Jesus described the ultimate danger of this scenario:

"The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to myself, 'You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.' But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'" (Luke 12:16-20)

If devouring all we have is on one end of the spectrum, hoarding all we have is at the other. Both extremes are to be avoided. And somewhere in the middle lies wise stewardship.

RIGHT REASONS FOR PRESERVATION

An essential part of wise stewardship involves the sound, timely investment of the resources God has entrusted to us. Some Christians today deny this truth, portraying fellow believers who

invest financially as temporal-minded, clingers to earthly treasures, focused on “building bigger barns.” Again, that may be true for some, but it is certainly on the far end of the aforementioned hoarding extreme. The Bible, on the other hand, is filled with example after example of the case for prudent investing, and nowhere is this illustrated more clearly than in the familiar Parable of the Talents, from Matthew 25.

In the story, an employer left town after giving three of his employees each a share in his property. His clear expectation was that each man would invest what he’d entrusted to them. “After a long time” the man returned to “settle accounts.” The Scripture doesn’t tell us specifically how the first two men invested, it just says that they did and were commended for earning a return on their investment. The last man buried his share instead and incurred the wrath of his employer.

A famous and often-quoted exclamation comes from the employer as he praises the two men who invested wisely: “Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!” The point is simple: whatever the “things” God has entrusted to us, whether “few” or many, He expects us to invest them faithfully. In fact, He will entrust more as we prove faithful in our investments. Now, one could argue that this parable is referring to investing of another kind – “Kingdom investing” through charitable giving or even spreading the Gospel. But at the very least, there is a double meaning here. Undoubtedly, the parable squarely applies to the wise investment of the resources, financial or otherwise, God has showered upon us.

Consider the impact this application has on a believer’s giving strategy. At NCF, we have witnessed countless individuals and families pour out great wealth into the churches and ministries closest to their hearts – wealth that was not only created during the acquisition phase, but also greatly multiplied during the preservation phase. What if such people had “unloaded” their financial portfolio too early in life? What if they had liquidated

assets too quickly that could have matured a bit longer to produce an even greater amount for Kingdom impact?

Admittedly, this concept appears to contradict a philosophy that we teach often to givers: don't just plan to give upon your death, but do it now, while you are still alive, while you can experience the impact of your gifts and watch the ripple effect of your generosity over the years. But what we are talking about here is not delaying your giving until death. Rather, we're saying, there is a time and place for everything (see Ecclesiastes 3), and there is a time for growing your investments in order to reap a greater return, which can then create greater leverage in your giving.

Many of the people that give through NCF are doing so from a "ripe" financial portfolio, one that was planted, watered, and tended to over time through God-given savvy, the advice of wise counselors, and favorable market conditions. Oppositely, some have given too much too soon – albeit with a commendable, generous heart – to a charity or to their heirs, at times endangering the very ones they wished to bless.

Each Christian must seek God's will to balance current giving opportunities with the potential of future financial investment gain, for greater future giving. God is abundantly able to make this clear to those that seek His guidance.

POTENTIAL FOR DYSFUNCTION

Folklore abounds with dysfunctional models of the Preservation Philosophy: Jack relinquishing the cow for those magic beans, Ali Baba saying "Open Sesame" to make withdrawals from the cave of the forty thieves, the eternally renewable assets of the golden goose. In each of these stories, vast stores of wealth are acquired by chance or perhaps even foolhardiness. The way the protagonists of these stories stockpile their goods is unique, to say the least.

Another equally unhealthy model crops up in our newspapers from time to time. An elderly woman dies alone with her seven-

teen cats. Lo and behold, this recluse has been squirreling away her “pin money” in coffee cans in her attic for decades. She has no descendants and no friends to speak of, but man does she have assets! She donates her millions posthumously to a charity that shelters homeless felines, which can’t believe the windfall.

In the fairy tales, the implication is that the treasure, once “happened upon,” becomes available in endless supply. Whether stowed away in a cave or stored in a city in the clouds, it is safe. Start spending the enchanted cash because there’s more where that came from! The effect of the reclusive cat lady’s bequest is similar. The money stored for years in her attic arrives untouched to a bewildered beneficiary. In each of these models, great wealth is preserved from moth or rust or thievery for the ultimate denouement. That’s the stuff of fairy tales. The hero collides with the gold at the exact right moment. The treasure remains intact and someone receives “pristine wealth” in the end ... right?

HAPPY ENDINGS?

So what’s the problem with fairy tales? Is it the fact that they are, well, fairy tales? Most of us don’t typically buy magic beans or discover buried treasure. We don’t have access to a golden goose or a magic harp. And what about a surprise inheritance doesn’t ring true? Is it the complete absence of reality? After all, most of us don’t walk away from a probate attorney’s office stunned by the news that Great Aunt Gertrude left us her moldering old house and the six million dollars hidden there.

The main problem with these mythical examples of preserving wealth is the ending. In each story, the ending reveals a purpose. According to the fairy tales, the purpose of life is to acquire untold wealth. Period. In the legends, it goes without saying that the acquisition and preservation of money and things is an end in itself. It’s what life is all about. Maybe the legends are more imbedded in current thought than we admit. Like on our bumper stickers: “Whoever dies with the most toys wins,” right?

To write the story of our lives with wealth as the penultimate goal is to miss the point. To preserve that wealth purely for our own purposes is equally off-center from God's plan. In Matthew 6, Jesus observed, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." The word "treasure" here means "receptacle for valuables" or "storehouse." Jesus was talking about the focal place of value in your life. It is the same word Paul used to refer to Jesus Christ himself: "My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:3).

When we disconnect from God's purposes, we spoil what we save. Martyred missionary Jim Elliot said, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." We can hide away our assets in a "secure" place for our own purposes and risk losing everything, or we can invest – whether setting aside money purposefully or giving – in the invisible, eternal Kingdom of God and wait for the rewards. In his book *Money, Possessions, and Eternity*, Randy Alcorn illustrates this principle:

Imagine for a moment that you are alive at the very end of the Civil War. You are living in the South, but your home is really in the North. While living in the South you have accumulated a good amount of Confederate currency. Suppose you also know for a fact that the North is going to win the war and that the end could come at any time. What will you do with all of your Confederate money? If you were smart, there is only one answer to the question. You would cash in your Confederate currency for U.S. Currency – the only money that will have value once the war is over. You would only have enough Confederate currency to meet your basic needs for that short period until the war was over and the money would be worthless.

The believer has inside knowledge of an eventual major change in the worldwide social and economic situation. The currency of this world — its money, possessions, fashions, and whims — will be worthless at our death or Christ's return, both of which are imminent. This knowledge should radically affect our investment strategy. For us to accumulate vast earthly treasures in the face of the inevitable future is equivalent to stockpiling Confederate money despite our awareness of its eventual worthlessness. To do so is to betray a basic ignorance of or unbelief in the Scriptures. Kingdom currency, backed by the eternal treasury, is the only medium of exchange recognized by the Son of God, whose government will last forever. The currency of His Kingdom is our present faithful service and sacrificial use of our resources for Him. The payoff in eternity will be "a sure foundation," consisting of treasures beyond our wildest dreams.

In earlier chapters, you were encouraged to dream with your family. Many families dream of wealth and what it can buy in terms of vacations, houses, or things, and save accordingly. But you can take your family on a much more satisfying journey. You can involve them in a time-released adventure of obedience and faith by setting aside your treasures in order to fund Kingdom work both now and in the future. Let others talk of security while you champion sacrifice. Let others pursue the fairy tale while you write a story of epic and eternal proportions. This is the stuff of happy endings.

PRESERVE THE RIGHT HEART

Sure, all this sounds right and good. But how is it really done? Anyone who knows human nature knows it would be easy to reduce the ideals mentioned above to mere lip service. It is all too easy to practice giving in order to appear generous or to create the pragmatic self service of a tax shelter. The Pharisees weren't any different. They employed spiritual sounding phrases to mask

their greed. It took ingenuity, but they managed to get by with it until Jesus called them out. What's to keep you from faking a pure motive just as they did? As a follower of Christ, how can you preserve the goal of using your money and possessions for the Kingdom?

"Moth and rust" may be capable of destroying our property. That's because what we own isn't permanent in value. But there is something neither moth nor rust nor thieves can touch: our hearts. We may not be able to protect our assets, but our hearts are worth protecting. When Jesus is present and His Spirit is at work, the intentions of our hearts can chart our course and change the world. Saving and investing money toward that purpose is only part of what God can do through us. It is only a tool in his hand.

Ultimately, God's purpose for our lives centers upon love. Paul wrote, "Whatever we do, it is because Christ's love controls us" (2 Corinthians 5:14, NLT). When preserving is removed from Christ's love, the process of decay begins. C.S. Lewis understood this: "To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket – safe, dark, and motionless, airless – it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable ... The only place outside of Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers of love is hell."

Perhaps the question to be answered is this: Am I preserving to lessen risk or am I risking what I preserve for the higher purpose of God's love? If Christ's love is what controls us, we will be willing to risk. It means we hold everything – including the things we maintain in our investment portfolio – with an open hand. It also means our plans – financial plans included – are directed and controlled by that love.

In the end, the story of our lives is always a love story. Even the part where we investigate saving plans and investment strategies. Even that falls under the broad category of love. Though the word isn't mentioned, the following verses about wealth are replete with God's love for us and the imperative to love others as lavishly as He loves us: "Tell those rich in this world's wealth to quit being so full of themselves and so obsessed with money, which is here today and gone tomorrow. Tell them to go after God, who piles on all the riches we could ever manage – to do good, to be rich in helping others, to be extravagantly generous. If they do that, they'll build a treasury that will last, gaining life that is truly life" (1 Timothy 6:17-19, MSG).

THE MAP OF YOUR HEART

The capacity of your own heart for real treasure is vast indeed. Scripture tells us, "He has also set eternity in the hearts of men" (Ecclesiastes 3:11). We were made to preserve God's purposes within our own hearts. When we do, our earthly treasure becomes an extension of something eternal.

The following questions are provided to help you map out the true dimensions of your own heart, to aid you in determining the focal point of value in your life. That's where you'll find your real treasure.

1. How would you write the following Bible verse in your own words? "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:19-21).
2. Have you ever experienced the reality of "moth and rust" – a time when an investment that seemed perfectly safe instead caused you loss? What did you learn from that experience?

3. Have you ever buried what has been entrusted to you instead of wisely investing it?
4. Have you ever been involved in an investment deal that seemed “too good to be true,” only to find out that it was?
5. Jesus instructed the Pharisees to practice both the “latter” (the pursuit of justice, mercy, and faithfulness) and the “former” (careful giving). How can your giving incorporate both?
6. Now turn your attention to saving. What has been the purpose of your preservation plan in the past? In other words, why have you saved money and assets? Are you saving Kingdom currency that lasts or the currency of this world that fades away?
7. How are you building a treasury that will really last? Can you “connect the dots” between your saving, your giving and the eternal work of God’s Kingdom?
8. What does it feel like to know your gifts impact the Kingdom of God? How does this encourage you to save more in order to give more?

Consider This:

Let’s get specific. Answer the next question in list form, with as much detail as you can. ***What assets have been entrusted to your care?*** Now look over your list and take a moment to consider how your answer to the question, ***Who really owns the things you own?*** might impact your handling of each asset you’ve listed.

CHAPTER SIX

UTILIZATION PHILOSOPHY

If you were to run a race, how fast would you run? Would you sprint? Or would you jog in order to preserve some energy? Of course, you can't really answer that question unless you know the kind of race we're talking about. The 100-yard dash and the marathon require vastly different strategies. And until you know about the finish line, you can't run effectively.

That's the way it is with financial stewardship too. You can't define the pace until you know the finish line. After you've acquired and preserved, how should you utilize your wealth? In order to answer that question, you need a clear definition of the finish line.

One of the founding visionaries of NCF, Larry Burkett, believed that everybody should set a modest standard of living based on need, then give away the rest. He lived this conviction himself. And in one memorable year, his book sales were particularly strong, enabling him to give away \$800,000. The IRS took notice, and audited him the following year. For his part, Larry was asked to bring the appropriate receipts to the audit in order to validate all his giving. When he showed up, he only presented one such receipt. He had given it all to one charity. Explaining the

simplicity of his approach, he insisted that God owned it all. His only obligation was to provide for his family, and to give everything else away. Larry knew what it meant to stop at the finish line each year. And he never lacked for anything.

Deciding your “financial finish line” is one of the most important steps you will take in life. For most people in the world, there is no line to cross financially. More is better, and the sky’s the limit. But for the steward of God’s wealth, the race strategy is completely different. It’s not about how much we acquire, but what we do with it along the way. And that means having a clear picture of the purpose of our running. In this race, there’s not much value in finishing with plenty of reserves left over.

Needless to say, your “financial finish line” is embedded in your Family Stewardship Philosophy. Lifestyle is a personal choice. Ultimately, it reflects your understanding of the role wealth plays in life. And those philosophies should be clarified, communicated, and committed to action.

So what’s your financial finish line? Do you plan to let your net worth accumulate indefinitely? Would you stop if it reached \$200,000, \$2 million, \$20 million, or \$200 million? Should you stop? How much is enough to meet your personal needs? And at what point do you consider how it might be best used to meet others’ needs? Is your finish line about increasing your standard of living or your standard of giving? Jimmy Seibert, a pastor in Waco, Texas, had this to say: “Some decide to live simply so others can simply live.”

Maybe this concept doesn’t resonate with you because you’ve chosen a career path that doesn’t lend itself to excess wealth. You may relate more to a “get by line” than a finish line. But the truth that our lives are to be spent wisely doesn’t begin and end with our bank accounts. Anything we acquire – prestige, achievements, abilities, titles, things, reputation – all can be considered part of our lifestyle. The extent to which we will chase after something determines our lifestyle. Achievements and accolades are as alluring as financial gain. When we are willing to stop short of any personal goal in order to give ourselves away, that is the finish line.

Elizabeth Fry and Catherine Booth had a lot in common. Born fifty years apart in England, each woman contributed everything she had to the cause of Christ. Both women found they could not look away from the bleak Dickensian poverty of London without doing something. With laser-like focus, despite the strict boundaries that limited feminine leadership in their day, both women sacrificially gave their resources of time and money to the specific social concerns that caught their hearts. Each had a clear picture of the finish line.

Elizabeth came to Christ through the ministry of the Quakers in her hometown of Norwich when she was 18. At twenty, she married Joseph Fry and the two of them moved to London. Although she had eleven children, a visit to the women's section of Newgate prison prompted her to action. The very next day she revisited the prison with food and clothes. But her compassion didn't stop there. Over time, she established a school for children who were incarcerated with their parents. She also founded the Association for the Improvement of the Female Prisoners. Still, she wasn't finished pouring out whatever resources she had. After seeing the frozen body of a young boy in the winter of 1819, she began a "nightly shelter" in London for the homeless. Following a visit to Brighton, she instituted the Brighton District Visiting Society in which Christians made regular visits to the poor to care for their needs.

Likewise, Catherine Booth found it impossible to sit on her hands when the lost and needy were in her sights. Her compassion was rooted in a deep love for God's Word. By the time she was 12, she had read the Bible through eight times. As a young girl, she became involved in a local organization known as The Band of Hope. Later, she and her husband, William, founded the Salvation Army. She eventually became known as the Mother of the Army. One can easily imagine her place of nurture and encouragement alongside her husband, who adopted the title of General. She spoke at children's meetings and ministered to alcoholics.

Catherine Booth was a slight, shy, sickly young woman who fought her nervousness every time she rose to speak to a group. She was born into a working class family and married a man who, like her, viewed what little resources they had as expendable. Elizabeth Fry, in stark contrast, had it all. Born into a prominent banking family and eventually married to a banker, she was blessed with all the comforts of a vast estate, servants, money, and status. In addition to her elitist lifestyle, she was gifted with a surplus of dynamic energy. To the observing world, the two women were far from alike. Andrew Murray said, "The world asks, 'What does a man own?' Christ asks, 'How does he use it?'"

Both Catherine and Elizabeth, who lived during Andrew Murray's day, had ready answers for his second question. Since they knew the finish line, they knew how to run. They paced themselves in such a way as to allow plenty for others. They didn't just give, they showed up. Whatever they had, they used for the Kingdom. Time, possessions, money. But there is a glaring disparity between the two women, and it lies in the answer to Andrew Murray's first question. Although both Elizabeth's and Catherine's contributions to the world are dizzying in scope, the sources of those contributions couldn't be any more different.

FIVE MINUTES WITH YOUR CHECKBOOK

What if Elizabeth Fry had visited Newgate Prison, observed up close the squalor and despair within its walls, and then spoken of her love and compassion for the prisoners without ever taking action? Over time, it would be safe to say her words were meaningless. But that's not what she did. She acted on the God-inspired impulses of her heart. She looked around at what she had and used it accordingly. By giving what she owned, she made a connection between the love of God and the people who needed that love.

Elizabeth Fry's heart was evident in her actions. Billy Graham made a statement that may make some of us squirm: "Give me five minutes with a person's checkbook, and I will tell you where their heart is." What do your checkbook, personal financial statement, and tax returns say about your heart? Has a connection been made between His love and the people who are on His heart? The resources you own — which are, after all, not yours but God's — are often the means by which this connection is made. When we withhold our resources from the needs of others, we withhold our hearts as well.

CORE BELIEFS

Perhaps you've read the stories of Elizabeth Fry and Catherine Booth and felt a crushing guilt that you aren't visiting prisons or establishing a non-profit ministry or taking clothing to the homeless. Or maybe you're just overwhelmed. You see the need. You feel it. It is right on your doorstep in your church or your city. You see devastation on the news. You get solicitation letters that tear at your heart. But you don't even know where to begin.

What if the need was not the right starting place anyway? Sure, destitution and poverty are compelling. None of us wants to be guilty of harboring a calloused heart. But — bottom line — is it possible to respond to every need you see? What if the question to be asked as a steward wasn't: "Who needs my resources?" but rather: "How can I glorify God?" The shift is subtle, but powerful. It places our decisions about giving and the impact of our giving on God alone. And it sharpens the focus of our living. It's not about us: "Not to us, O Lord, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness" (Psalm 115:1).

One of the greatest benefits of being a steward is that we aren't expected to meet every need. Each steward has a unique calling and unique assignments that go with that calling. Instead of simply

making financial transactions, we pursue communication with God and strive to manage His resources in the process.

The needs that exist – in your family, your church, your community, your world – represent the vastly varied ways we might invest. You can't live in a city, watch the news, or simply interact with others for long without noticing the possibilities or the opportunities. As the parable of The Talents from Matthew 25 reminds us, the Master has given you something. That something is His and you are merely His manager. Allow Him to guide you as you invest, creatively and wisely and compassionately, in ways that will please Him.

YOUR MASTER'S HAPPINESS

When you have invested, what is the final result? You no longer fear your Master's displeasure? You're satisfied that a need has been met? Or your bank account is smaller and your energy is depleted? Maybe. But isn't there something more to this?

It would be a tragic mistake to miss the final words the master says to his faithful servants: "Come and share your master's happiness." Many years ago, Christians often heard the mandate to "Give till it hurts" from the pulpit. Someone has rightly revised that statement to read, "Give till it feels good." The final result of investing in the Kingdom is a festival of joy in the Lord! Giving deserves a party!

In his book *The Dangerous Duty of Delight*, John Piper calls Christians to pursue what he calls Christian hedonism. His subtitle tells us the book focuses both on "The Glorified God and the Satisfied Soul." The act of giving, of investing in the Kingdom, demonstrates this dual approach to life. By offering our resources to God for His use, we highlight His glory and heighten our own joy. Piper encourages us to unashamedly experience the element of delight in sacrifice. He says, "The radical implication is that pursuing pleasure in God is our highest calling. It is essential to all

virtue and all reverence. Whether you think of your life vertically in relation to God or horizontally in relation to man, the pursuit of pleasure in God is crucial, not optional.”

CHARTING YOUR COURSE

Each of William and Catherine Booth’s eight children became their closest collaborators in their life of giving and ministry. They caught their parent’s vision and after their deaths expanded it beyond their wildest dreams. The ripple effect of Elizabeth Fry’s many endeavors extended all the way from her home to Florence Nightingale and Queen Victoria. Because these women involved those around them in their dreams of Kingdom investment, the eventual pay off was staggering. They grasped Jesus’ words: “I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.” (Luke 16:9) These two women surely knew how to make friendships for the Kingdom. As you make decisions about when and where and how much of your wealth you will invest in Kingdom work, how will you involve your family? By involving your loved ones in your decisions, you will be teaching them that their Master owns it all. You will model what it means to manage what isn’t yours in the first place. How will you include them in the decisions as well as the delight? In the sacrifice as well as the satisfaction? And how will you strategize for this kind of impact in their lives after you’re gone? As you show them the way to be a “good and faithful servant” who doesn’t bury God’s gifts, but invests them, you will invite them to the party where they’ll hear: “Come and share your master’s happiness.”

RUNNING THE RACE

It’s a mistake to assume your financial finish line is defined merely by the frugality of your lifestyle choices. To think that God desires

followers who carefully avoid excess for discipline's sake is to miss out on the point ... and the joy. Rather, the limits you set in your financial decisions are merely means to a much greater end. The finish line is determined by giving, not only by self-denial.

We're talking about a Utilization Philosophy, not an omission philosophy. Sure, as you use your resources for the Kingdom, you end up conceding your right to spend those resources on yourself. And, thus, the boundaries are set. We are constantly making spending decisions. When you have more than enough, are you more likely to go to the mall? Or to look to the giving needs around you? Your giving may preclude the purchase of a certain car or home or vacation or certain things. Giving determines lifestyle. Not the other way around.

The following questions are meant to point your thinking toward how your finances may be used for God's purposes:

1. Read Hebrews 11. In this chapter, often called the "Hall of Faith," the writer lists Old Testament saints who spent themselves in faith. Most did not own anything of earthly value, but what they had they expended for the Kingdom. Who are your "heroes" in scripture? Whose life would you like to emulate? How did these people utilize their God-given resources?
2. Who are your heroes today? Do you know anyone whose lifestyle of sacrificial giving inspires you to live the same way? Try to think of a few people you know personally as well as public figures.
3. In the last chapter you made a list of the assets He has entrusted to you to manage. Go back to that list and expand it to include your assets that are not financial. If God were to "settle accounts" with you today (as He did in the Parable of the Talents discussed in Chapter 5) what would He find? How have you invested your assets and how have you just buried them?

4. How does the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25: 14-30) inspire you to go beyond preserving your wealth to using it for the Kingdom?

5. Is there a cause or country or church that has your heart? How can your resources match up with the needs that you are most passionate about?

6. If your answer to the above question is disturbing in its lack of depth, begin a prayer journal or a file in which you record these things:

- *Any news articles that prompt your attention and concern*
- *Any ministry newsletter or announcement at your church that stirs your heart*
- *Any personal observations of need as you go throughout your day*

In addition, pray that God would give you a soft heart and an open mind to what He is doing in the world. Dream a little! Begin to consider creative, compassionate ways to share your wealth.

Consider This:

When is it enough?

A finish line is a symbol of victory, of the satisfaction of culmination, of the final act of reaching a goal. It is in the context of the race toward obedience, toward satisfying the heart of God, and reaching the goals He's given you that determining a finish line makes sense. When an obedient Christian says, "No!" or "Enough!" to endless wealth accumulation it is in order to accomplish something noble and heroic for the Kingdom. It is decreasing self purposefully so that He might increase. Is there something God is calling you to do that will require a reduction of your assets or a diminishing of your lifestyle?

CHAPTER SEVEN

TRANSITION

PHILOSOPHY

The first responsibility of stewardship is to take good care of the resources entrusted to you. The second responsibility is to deliver those resources into capable hands, both all along the way and when you're done. When your leg of the relay is complete, you don't want to hand the baton to just anyone. On a relay team, the responsibility for a clean transition falls on the previous runner. Botching the transfer, or turning things over to the wrong hands altogether, can negate the gains you've made along the way. And while you won't be around to see how it turns out, it's still part of your assignment to leave a wise plan in place before you go.

A relay race may be the perfect metaphor for what happens between you, your wealth, and others when you die, but it's a limited expression of the way to handle wealth during your lifetime. You're a person, a partner, and a parent after all, not just a financial athlete! Waiting until you die to make one dramatic hand-off is only part of the picture. John Wesley said, "My own hands will be my executors." In other words, transitioning wealth is an ongoing pursuit that begins in this lifetime. As you consider your plans for that final hand-off, remember that hand-offs are for the living as well.

When a mother carries a child in her womb, she takes great care to eat right and control the quality of the baby's environment. And when that phase is complete, she doesn't hand the baby over to just anyone. Though the child is no longer connected to her physically, it's important to place her baby in capable hands. Nurses, doctors, extended family, and babysitters must all meet certain criteria before the mother feels comfortable entrusting them with her little one. Even when the child marries someday, the parent desires to know that her child will be cared for by his or her new spouse. Although children move on from their dependent beginnings, parents do everything they can to ensure that the next environment will be a positive one. That's the way it is with stewardship. Each steward is responsible for the next transition.

Whether it's during your lifetime, or after your death, eventually this phase of stewardship will end. And when it does, your possessions will be passed to someone else. Will the next steward be ready to carry the baton? Is there anything you should be doing to help him or her prepare? Have you prayerfully considered how God would have you allocate the resources that have been under your care? Are you confident that the next stewards are prepared to manage those resources while still carrying out God's plan for their lives?

Your answers to these questions are of supreme importance because they must be weighed in light of your accountability to the real Owner of the assets entrusted to you. Paul writes, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10).

Indeed, each one of us will someday give an account to God about how we managed the resources that He graciously bestowed us, and this certainly includes how we handled the final transition of those resources. This is a most momentous stewardship decision with eternity-altering implications that must not be taken lightly.

PREPARING FOR THE INEVITABLE

Typically, the transfer of your wealth to others is inevitable. But the timing and beneficiaries can vary greatly. In fact, your preparations can mean the difference between effective stewardship and squandering. It is not common for a successor, when he or she replaces a trustee, to be responsible for the trustee who follows. But you can change that pattern. You may have already built a great track record of stewardship. Through careful wealth transfer, you have an opportunity to build a legacy of stewardship.

Regardless of when you distribute your estate, there are three places it can go. It can go to your heirs. It can go to charity. Or it can go to taxes. While the three potential destinations rarely change, the percentages for each are very much up to you. Of course, if you don't lay out careful plans, these decisions will all be made for you. Your Family Stewardship Philosophy is designed to help you orchestrate the transfer of wealth in a manner that reflects your family's values and interests.

When thinking about your Transfer Philosophy, there are several key questions to answer first. For starters, what type of inheritance do you want to provide your heirs? Or perhaps more importantly, what do you hope an inheritance will accomplish for your heirs? Is the inheritance first a spiritual heritage? Is it possible to design the inheritance to dovetail perfectly with God's calling for the heir's life? How can wealth be an enabling tool? How might it be a distraction? What is the best timing for an inheritance, so as not to derail the heir's maturation? How much should you allocate to make the maximum impact? Are your heirs prepared to preserve, grow, and utilize wealth responsibly in their role as God's stewards?

One man pulled me (Terry) aside for some confidential advice at a seminar in a hotel ballroom. We ended up in a broom closet with two chairs, where he handed me a large notebook put together by a big accounting firm. "My accountants tell me this will pass \$70 million to my children tax free," he announced. But he wanted my

perspective before he signed the documents. So I pointed out that in the process of accomplishing his tax-free giving, he had just created three taxable estates. In addition, he would have to face God and report that he had stewarded the money entrusted to him by simply passing it on to his kids.

Sensing his desire to be used by God, I suggested another consideration, "If God lays it on your heart to put \$10 million into a ministry in 10 years, you won't be able to give it without their permission." The man was 60 at the time. In light of our encounter, he asked me to help him re-think the plan.

I began, "The first thing you need to decide is how much you think is wise to give to your children." He explained that two were in failing marriages, and one was a Christian. But after considering the likely outcome, he wanted a plan with more meaning. "Why don't you give it away now?" I suggested. "You don't need all that money." As a result of our meeting, he opened an NCF Giving Fund (donor-advised fund) and began giving it away immediately. Over the years, the balance has continued to grow. And more importantly, the new plan has brought new purpose to his life of stewardship.

After understanding the purpose of your life and wealth and having set a finish line, the question of your heirs is arguably the most important aspect of your estate planning. Ironically, many people give it the least amount of thought. The default plan is to divide the remaining estate equally among the heirs, pass on as much as possible at the lowest possible tax cost, and to hold no significant discussion about those plans before death. But this approach, while common, overlooks factors that are crucial to being a good steward. If wealth is a stewardship issue, then perhaps the unique abilities of each heir should be considered in the allocation. When it comes to our children, we should love them unconditionally, but we should treat them uniquely according to their differences. Are there different skills and interests that suggest an unequal distribution? If so, should those numbers be kept unseen? How much concern do you have about the ability of your

heirs to handle assets, manage wealth, or run a family business? Do they possess the desire necessary to excel at this assignment? Is it part of their calling?

It's easy to overlook the character that develops when a young person is allowed to work for his own sustenance. Most people assume they should give riches to their children upon their death. But that's not the only option. The Bible presents a principle that says you can't serve God and money. If that's true, why in the world would parents want to start their kids off in life with the equation really high on the money side and hope they get the God side up somehow? In contrast, nobody regrets the lessons learned when facing hardships.

This is not to say that an inheritance is not advisable. In fact, it's Biblical. But it shouldn't be approached carelessly. Parents tend to give with no strings attached, reluctant to be accused of controlling from the grave. But in reality, everybody who gives, controls from the grave. Recognizing this, one grandparent who currently gives through NCF decided to turn it for good. To each of her grandchildren, she is giving \$50,000; but to qualify, they have to go on a six-month Christian missionary trip by the age of 23. They don't have to go. But if they opt out, the money will go to a predetermined charity. This woman's wisdom insures that if the money passes to the next generation, it will likely be accompanied by godly character.

Once you decide on a plan that fits the relationships in your family, does it make sense to discuss your plans openly with each family member? Why or why not? What is the likelihood that family conflict, indignation, or disunity will result from raising these issues? In many cases, those tensions already exist below the surface and need to be addressed anyway.

MORE THAN A WILL

Of course, you can navigate all these questions on your own and include your answers in your will. But creating a Family

Stewardship Philosophy goes much deeper. While it may not be appropriate to disclose your plans before death, the idea is to interact with your family to instill and cultivate the right mindset for stewardship of your estate. It's also a chance to bring family differences out in the open while you're still available to help defuse them and restore unity. Once you're gone, that process is impossible to begin.

Another question to consider is taxation. Do you know the percentages the government will require for estate taxes upon your death? How do those percentages change with the various estate planning options before you? What will be the impact on your survivors when settling those tax obligations? Will the government be an effective steward of the resources it receives from your estate? Is it better stewardship to transfer some – or most – of your wealth before you die?

Have you considered charitable giving as part of your estate distribution? Why or why not? What impact would it have on taxes and inheritable wealth? What are some ways you might involve family members today in the process of managing your charitable giving? The more you do together, the better prepared they are to succeed you in stewarding the family estate. To the degree that families share experiences, they will also share relational wealth and strengthen the family bond.

MAKING THE HAND-OFF

Death is a transition of life that often triggers a transition of resources. Many would much rather ignore death than prepare for it. But the tendency to shrug off that which makes us uncomfortable doesn't serve us well in this case. The hand-off of your wealth is inevitable. The question is: Are you prepared? And are you so prepared you've already begun making practice runs, handing off to your own family or those in need while you can still do so and enjoy the results?

This chapter may have stirred up your thinking about your giving, both in life and in death. The following questions are offered to help you form your own Transition Philosophy:

1. Has there been a time in your own life when wealth was transferred to you following someone's death? How would you characterize that experience? Positive or negative? Planned or haphazard? Gradual or sudden? Kingdom-focused or self-focused?

2. When John Wesley thought about transferring his wealth, he clearly considered it an ongoing task. He said, "If I die with more than 10 pounds and my books, you can count me a thief and a fraud for all eternity." How does the idea that wealth transfer can begin now strike you? Is it a new way of thinking? If so, how might you re-consider your current plans?

3. Who are your heirs? As honestly as possible, answer the following questions:

- *How ready (in ability, maturity, character, and calling) are your heirs to handle the family estate?*
- *How ready are they to know the facts about your plans and your estate now?*
- *Is there any possibility of misunderstandings or conflict? Is there any way to preclude those things?*
- *What are the needs of your heirs? Would it bless them for you to meet those needs or would it be best to allow them to take the sole responsibility of meeting them?*

4. How would they respond to your desires related to charitable giving?

5. Finally, how might your heirs join with you now in your charitable giving? What is the taxation impact of your current plan? Have you looked at the tax percentages from different angles and

are there some changes you could make in your giving now that might protect your family from heavier tax liability later?

6. Giving can come from a heart full of treasure or from an empty heart. In Matthew 23, Jesus offered a scathing commentary on the Pharisee's lifestyle. He accused them of practicing the acts of righteousness without a heart of righteousness:

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices — mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law — justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.” (Matthew 23:23)

Consider the pattern of your giving over the past few years. Have your gifts been connected to “the more important matters of the law” or have they been mostly responsive or the result of mere habit?

Consider This:

Where should it go in the end?

Remember the three places your money can go when you die ...

- *It can go to your heirs.*
- *It can go to charity.*
- *Or it can go to taxes.*

This chapter has encouraged you to develop a Transition Philosophy. As your thinking takes shape about this subject, make some rough speculations: What percentages of your wealth might you assign to the three destinations for your estate listed above?

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE FAMILY CONVERSATION GUIDE

This chapter is devoted to guiding you through the process of creating a Family Stewardship Philosophy. If the preceding pages leave you inspired about the potential of your family's legacy and unity, here's your chance to take action.

As a young child, Sam Patrick remembers watching his father write checks and place them in the offering plate at church. His father's example set the course for his own family years later. But Sam and his wife Andrea wanted to be more proactive with their own three sons. They felt their example in deed wasn't enough.

"We wanted our sons to catch a glimpse of what Andrea and I were enjoying," Sam explains, "and we wanted them to be able to carry our giving legacy forward after our deaths. We realized that we needed to be intentional if we wanted to instill our passion for giving in the next generation." Their first family stewardship meeting took place in 2001. Sam did most of the talking, though everyone was given an opportunity to contribute.

"In the beginning I was nervous about giving up control," admits Sam. "But as it turns out, I've never felt as if I've had to go along with decisions that made me uncomfortable. The kids have challenged us, and they've moved us in different directions. But my most common reaction has been, 'Why didn't I think of that!'"

At the National Christian Foundation, we have encouraged hundreds of families through this process. Many have found it extremely helpful to have an outside party guide them and mediate the conversation. Usually that person is a close, like-minded financial advisor. You may want to choose someone to walk your family members through each important step, someone who can lend insight into family dynamics that might not be obvious to those living in the middle of it. The observations of an objective outside party frequently help family members uncover hidden feelings and desires that are unspoken. As a result, relationships are enhanced and each person grows closer to the family and its mission. If you contact us, we would love to discuss various options with you.

Whether you invite a third-party counselor or not, the process of creating your Family Stewardship Philosophy is the same. Since there are so many variables between families, it's not advisable to suggest a "one size fits all" plan to follow. However, the components are essentially identical. The following four steps below will give you an outline to follow as you prepare and pursue this collective goal of forming a Family Stewardship Philosophy.

Remember, the purpose of this initiative is to encourage your family toward realizing God's calling for your stewardship together. Developing and stating your philosophy together provides several benefits:

- *Strengthen your convictions about the purpose of wealth and its most appropriate uses*
- *Prompt family members to reflect on personal beliefs about the source of possessions*
- *Identify the values at stake when wealth is transferred and develop a practical plan for estate distribution to children, heirs, and other beneficiaries*
- *Clarify purposeful intentions behind inheritance plans and recognize opportunities to develop preparedness among beneficiaries*

STEP ONE – ENGAGE

Every family has its own unique personalities and circumstances. The idea of approaching family members to talk about estate matters is either appealing, intimidating, or somewhere in-between. Trust your instincts. Your intuition is a helpful guide when deciding how and when to introduce this process. You must also decide whom to include. Ideally, all adult children – and probably their spouses – are relevant to the discussion. Just recognize that it might not be possible to avoid awkwardness and discomfort completely. But in the end, the permanent rewards of this family experience far outweigh the temporary feelings you may need to endure along the way. Conjure whatever courage you need to keep your family from being deprived of these blessings.

However you personalize it, the first step is to introduce each person to the concept of a Family Stewardship Philosophy. Tell them how this idea came to your attention, and why it has meaning for you. Let them know your vision of what to expect from the process – what commitments are required, and what benefits will result. Give them each a copy of this book to help everyone where you are hoping to go. Give them some time to absorb the idea and let them know you'll be following up in the near future.

STEP TWO – PREPARATIONS

As the parent, it's important for you to have a solid command of your convictions, values, and objectives related to your estate. You are the leader. And while you don't have to be overpowering, your preparedness will set the tone for other family members. The more they sense that you take it seriously, the more they will be encouraged to do the same.

It is recommended that you personally think through each of the components of the Family Stewardship Philosophy on your own before meeting with others. When you know where you stand, you will be free to listen and encourage others to explore and express their feelings, desires, and priorities.

STEP THREE – **FAMILY MEETING**

Whether you convene once, or interact over several meetings, the family gathering is essential to the process. Your family's situation may dictate the logistics. But getting together enables open discussion and the most efficient communication. The format of your time(s) together depends on personal factors; however, the goals before you are the same. Each person should be asked to comment on the components of the Family Stewardship Philosophy. You may want to address them in order:

1. Begin with a brief overview of your life [lives] and those things that have impacted your beliefs, especially concerning wealth, work ethic and money
2. Develop a Statement of Purpose
 - *What is your family's collective purpose?*
 - *With regard to wealth management, what role does the family play in God's universe?*
3. Express Convictions about the Source of Wealth
 - *If God owns it all, what does it mean that He has entrusted the family with your possessions?*
4. Take Inventory of Motives Surrounding Wealth
 - *Why accumulate wealth? What temptations exist that might have negative consequences?*
5. Examine the Value of Goals
 - *What is the purpose of lifetime preservation of the family estate?*
 - *What is the purpose of lifetime distribution?*
6. Define a Philosophy for Utilization
 - *What lifestyle is reasonable?*

- *How will you define and regulate personal lifestyle goals to protect against materialism?*
- *What is your “financial finish line”?*

7. Decide on a Plan for Wealth Transition

- *Are there any unspoken expectations regarding an inheritance?*
- *What do the family’s stewardship goals suggest about the balance of giving before death and inheritance?*
- *What do the family objectives suggest about the timing of wealth transfer?*

The following study questions can also be helpful to facilitate discussion:

ACQUISITION

Scripture reference to read: Deuteronomy 8:11,14,18

1. *To what factors do you attribute the acquisition of your wealth?*
2. *What purpose do you see in the ownership/use of wealth?
(i.e. What motivates you to acquire it?)*
3. *What influences have shaped your thinking about money, its acquisition, and use? What passages of scripture, collateral writings, experiences, or individuals have been most meaningful to you in this regard? What do they teach you?*
4. *Assuming you will continue to acquire assets, what will characterize such acquisition? What will your family, business partners, and employees think about you as you continue to accumulate wealth?*
5. *How would you explain the common and primary values (spiritual, financial, etc.) shared by the members of your family?*
6. *Where on your list of priorities does the acquisition of wealth fall?*

PRESERVATION

Scripture reference to read: Proverbs 30:7-9

- 1. Why have you preserved some of your wealth?*
- 2. What are the reasons for preserving your wealth as opposed to giving it away?*
- 3. How do you balance preservation and faith?*
- 4. What scripture or principles guide you in determining how you are to preserve your wealth? (such as saving or giving away)*
- 5. Have you set a goal as to what amount, or percentage, of your wealth you will preserve?*

UTILIZATION

Scripture reference to read: I Timothy 6:17-18

SPENDING

- 1. Do you feel that the spending of your wealth brings with it responsibilities or obligations?*
- 2. What are the primary alternatives you have with regard to spending wealth?*

FAMILY

- 1. How do you react to the idea of a family foundation or an NCF Giving Fund that is used by the family as a vehicle from which gifts are made?*
- 2. How, if at all, do you see financial gifts as a tool for instilling character development, responsibility, spiritual maturity, etc. in your children and others?*
- 3. If you regularly give to your children, why do you do so? If you do not, why not?*

4. Ideally, what type of family involvement in the gift decision process would seem to be most fulfilling for your family during your life?

CHARITABLE GIVING

1. Concerning charitable giving, what compels you to give?

2. To what extent is your charitable giving each year driven by your income tax status?

3. Have you developed a list of criteria or a mission statement that guides your giving? If yes, please delineate.

4. How do you evaluate the impact of your gifts and/or hold your specific charities accountable?

5. Where are your passions and priorities when it comes to charitable giving?

6. What is your perspective on tithing?

7. What priority does giving hold in the list of ways you utilize your wealth?

TRANSITION

Scripture reference to read: Luke 12:20

1. What is your primary goal in transferring your wealth?

2. How does that goal serve God's Kingdom?

3. Does your plan take the latest tax laws into account?

4. What legal instruments need to be in place to achieve your wealth transfer goals?

5. *How should you communicate with the recipients of your estate in order to prepare?*

6. *How frequently will you update your plan?*

STEP FOUR – **DOCUMENT YOUR PHILOSOPHY**

One of the most important steps is to write a draft of your responses to step three above. By documenting your family's discussion and ideas, you create a tangible reference point that can be shared among family members. This will reinforce your convictions and encourage unity. It also makes it easier to recall the conversations and revise your thoughts as they develop.

Consider This:

Why will your children's children share your Family Stewardship Philosophy?

We began this book with a look at the everchanging nature of every family. If you have children, you know this to be true. Not long after children arrive in our homes they become adults more quickly than we could ever imagine. Most of them become parents and experience the dizzying fast-forward quality of parenting for themselves. Sometimes it seems there isn't enough time to prepare our children for adulthood. They're out the door before we've had a chance to give them all they need.

What growing, changing, evolving families need are foundations. Not just moral and spiritual foundations, but firm foundations that anchor them financially. That's why developing a Family Stewardship Philosophy is so important. It lays the groundwork for all your decisions about wealth. While it's possible to pass on monetary wealth to your family, it's even more essential to pass on a philosophy.

The questions posed throughout this book are not designed just to make you think. They are meant to lead to answers. Answers that are foundational. Answers worth passing on to your children. And their children. And so on. Answers that are eternal and enduring enough to weather the questions for generations to come.

About the authors



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