

Take a Year's End Inventory

"Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms, " (1 Peter 4: 10).

As the calendar year of 2013 came to a close, many businesses paused to take an inventory. In such a process, of course, there's a careful tallying of assets. And until the new total is compared with that of the prior year, an enterprise doesn't really know whether it has reached its goals, exceeded its goals, or fallen short of its goals.

In like manner, it's always a good thing for us to take a *spiritual* inventory at the end of one year and the beginning of another. We were all headed toward well-deserved eternal misery because of our sins. But our Savior paid a huge price - suffering and dying on the cross - to change that dreadful fate for us. In his Word he reminds us, *"You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body, "* (1 Corinthians 6:19,20). Our Lord Jesus has "set us up in business," so to speak - the business of being a Christian. He has "stocked our shelves" with time, talents, and treasures. He has made us managers of these resources, and he expects that we will be good stewards of them.

HOW HAVE YOU USED YOUR GIFT OF TIME?

As the new year begins, you and I can count 525,600 God-given minutes that we were given in 2013. How were they managed by us? Were many of them selfishly squandered? Were others frivolously wasted? When we count up the portion of time we devoted to the work of our Lord, is it a meager percentage? Besides a relatively small amount dedicated to attending worship services (which, by the way, is an important allocation), how else did we redeem the time our Master made available to us? *"Be very careful, then, how you live,"* the Bible tells us, *"not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, "* (Ephesians 5: 15,16).

HOW HAVE YOU USED YOUR GOD-GIVEN TALENTS?

"Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, " the Apostle Peter tells us. In other words, each of us has been blessed by our Lord with certain gifts that we are to employ in his service and in service to others. Most members of a congregation possess not one but several gifts and talents for this purpose. Our church and church body have important needs. Are you and I offering our best to meet these needs? Or are we merely applying the majority of efforts to our job and leisure pursuits?

Maybe we ought to sit down and take an inventory. Make a list of each talent you possess, and then note the ones that can be effectively applied in the work of the Lord's kingdom. Finally, complete the calculation by identifying those you applied for the Lord in the past twelve months. In doing this, the Savior's accounting system should be kept in mind. *"From everyone who has been given much, "* he says, *"much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked, "* (Luke 12:48). Were we profitable servants in 2013?

HOW HAVE YOU USED YOUR WORLDLY TREASURES?

In just a few more months, as happens every year, the Internal Revenue Service mandates that you and I also take a monetary inventory. We'll be required to reckon how many dollars came into our possession in 2013. As Christians, we realize that the source of all our wealth is our gracious Lord who endows us with the life, health, and skills necessary to obtain compensation. In return, he asks that we dedicate a first-fruit portion of his gifts to him.

Does an honest inventory reveal that our Savior received what he asked from us? Or did we give him "leftovers"? The Old Testament law called for a tithe - a ten percent allocation - but Christ's gospel has freed us from that requirement. Indeed, love for our Savior and gratitude for what he has done for us should make us want to move beyond what was once obligatory. As you and I conclude our counting of dollars for the IRS, we should

compare our offerings to our income. Jesus reminds us, "*Freely you have received, freely give,*" (Matthew 10:8).

When a business inventory identifies under-utilized assets, the wise manager immediately implements a corrective plan. If you and I are to be good Christian stewards, "*faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms,*" the same course should be followed. Jesus doesn't demand it, and he graciously forgives our past failures. But at the same time, we should want to do better because, as the hymn writer envisions Jesus saying,

"I gave my life for thee, My precious blood I shed,
That thou might'st ransomed be, And quickened from the dead.
I gave my life for thee; Come, give thyself to me!"

Blessed by the love of Jesus,

Pastor Terry

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