



Depth Perception™

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What exactly is ours?

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When listening to ministry leaders describe ministry, it is common to hear them identify ministry as *"their ministry."* When listening to people talk about material goods and stewardship, it is common to hear them say, *"It is all God's Stuff."*

How did we arrive at such a theology? Why do we claim ownership of ministry and non-ownership of material wealth?

Returning to the Scriptures and letting them guide us, we discover that God is the Initiator and Completer of ministry (1 Corinthians 3:5-11). This work is accomplished by those who share what they have (Acts 4:32-37). So, the ministry is God's—not ours. And, the economic source of ministry comes from we who thankfully share out of what God gave to us.

How then do we understand the Psalmist who says the earth is the Lord's and everything in it (Psalm 24:1)? Doesn't this imply that whatever we have is on loan from God?

Yes, but we must remember the question often asked of people who misuse material things: "Was it not yours?" See Acts 5:4 for an example.

Parents have long believed that children treat possessions better if they must struggle through earning and saving money to make their own purchase. Today's business literature identifies a similar dynamic: entrepreneurs and small business owners demonstrate greater care and thrift for business assets than do mere employees who simply manage the assets of another. Consider a homeowner versus a renter. Who is most likely to care for the home and help it retain its value?

Part of understanding stewardship is realizing that God has given us not just temporary use, but temporary ownership. We are free to use what we have. That is what makes our relationship with God more profound when we choose to use material possessions in support of God's ministry.

-mark l. vincent