

primetime television on major channels in our town. However, it was going to cost \$1,000 over our budget. Our committee prayed. We believed we should move forward. After our commitment to act, I received a call from one elderly church member who told me that she had been putting aside money to donate to another ministry, but that God had impressed her to give it all to our evangelism plan. She handed me \$1,000 in cash.



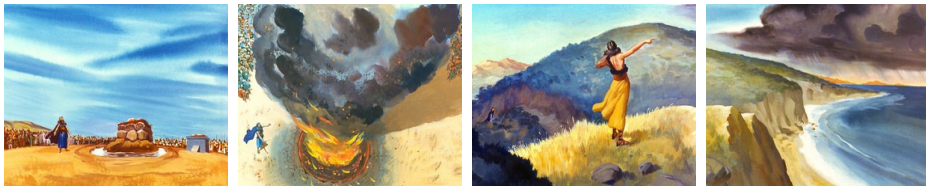
### Stewardship of Prayer

Do we need to exercise stewardship in our prayer life? Prayer is a part of the stewardship of my relationship to God. Just as I need to nurture my relationship with my wife, I must nurture my relationship to God. To nurture my relationship with my wife, communication is one key element. When we spend

time together, we communicate. If we are on a date and I do not pay attention to her, it will not help our relationship. The way I nurture my relationship with God is similar. Prayer is the channel of communication with God. If I don't pray, my relationship to God will suffer in the same way that my relationship with my spouse will suffer if I don't communicate with her. So not only is prayer a part of stewardship, I must be a good steward of my prayer life to strengthen my spiritual life.

### Conclusion

Prayer and planning are not incompatible, but rather integrated. Prayer is integral to my being a faithful steward. Prayer is communicating with God and that is what equips us to build our relationship with Him and to be faithful to Him.



**"God does nothing but by prayer, and everything with it."**

—John Wesley

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# The Stewpot

A potpourri of practical ideas to help you become a better steward.

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## STEWARDSHIP AND PRAYER

By Edward W. Fergusson, M.Div.

"Do you even pray?"

That question shocked me as a pastor, especially since my head elder was asking it very indignantly. The context was right after a board discussion regarding finances and the implication was clear: I was not relying enough on prayer to solve the financial problems of the church. At that time, we had just learned that the church finances were \$230,000 over what we thought they were. No one had stolen any money and the church treasurer was not inept. It was a complicated scenario where we had just missed something. The result was an inaccurate accounting picture that accumulated over time.



Part of the problem was the belief on the part of the members that God was going to "bail out" the church every time the people prayed. The elder told me that in the past they prayed and God answered. The problem was that God had not actually answered in the way that they thought, and now they're in trouble. They had prayed and kept on spending without paying close attention to how much money was really in the bank. Thankfully, with God's help and the faithfulness of church

members, we were back on track in just eight months. And, in case you're wondering, that head elder and I remain good friends to this day.

So how do prayer and stewardship intersect? How does faith play its role in church finance and stewardship? And how should stewardship impact our prayer life?

### Stewardship and Prayer

So what is the role of prayer in stewardship?

Stewardship is a total lifestyle. It involves our health, time, talents, environment, relationships, *spirituality*, and finances.

**Begin with prayer.** The essence of stewardship is caring for someone else’s property. In the parable of the talents, or the parable of the good steward, Jesus illustrates the principle that we are simply caring for that which really belongs to God. So why should we not begin by asking God what He would have us do with His gifts? Prayer is our means to communicate with God and discover who He is and His will for us.



**Plan.** While prayer is foundational in all we do, it is not all we do! Prayer is never a substitute for good stewardship and good planning. While we should pray before we plan, we should plan.

“This is a daily matter. Each morning consecrate yourself to God for that day. Surrender all your plans to Him, to be carried out or given up as His providence shall indicate.” *Steps to Christ*, p. 70.

But this does not mean we can pray and then abdicate to God

the results of our lack of planning. Jesus himself counsels us to count the cost before beginning to build (see *Luke 14:28-30*).

Planning should include calculating the cost of future repairs on a church building. Over time, the roof and carpet will wear out, the parking lot will need resurfacing, and the paint will fade and peel. Plan on it and begin setting aside money. It is not a lack of faith to plan, but it is lack of faith to plan without praying.

Ministry takes money. As Jesus counseled, don’t plan events without figuring out the cost. Have a budget and reserve raising money for the unexpected.

**Study.** God gave us brains. Good stewardship requires us to use them. We should do our research, study His word, learn good financial principles, and get good advice. The goal is to learn what God wants us to do with His gifts. We should bathe our study in prayer so we can hear Him clearly.

**Act.** Once we have prayed, planned, and studied, then we must apply what we have learned. Even this requires prayer because we must always move forward while listening. “Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, ‘This is the way, walk in it,’ whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left.” *Isaiah 30:21, NKJV*. Notice that God says we hear Him “whenever you turn,” and not while we are standing still; however, we must listen.

**Fail.** I collect sayings and here are a few about failing:

“Failure is failure only if we fail to try again.”

“Success is getting up one more time than you fall down.”

“Walking is a series of interrupted falls.”

The programs and projects of the church are God’s and not ours. Setbacks can and will occur, but don’t give up. Prayerfully learn from them and move forward. Even if the failure was the result of human error, God does not

stop working. If He did, there would be no redemption for fallen men.

**Expect Miracles.** You might be tempted to think, as did my elder, that I don’t believe in miracles, but I do! I just don’t believe God’s providence is an excuse for me not to do what He asks.

Once our church needed a new carpet. We could not afford to re-carpet the entire building at once so we broke it into three parts. We raised enough to complete phase one. Just as we completed fundraising for phase two, God



blessed a church member financially and he donated enough money to complete the entire project at once. I’ve observed that when God provides for the church, He does not do direct deposit. Instead, He blesses people who are then able to share that blessing with His church.

Another time we were planning for evangelism and an opportunity arose to put ads on