

How the Bible Actually Defines 'Good Stewardship'

In John 6:12-13, the feeding of the 5,000 ended this way:

"When they were filled, He told His disciples, "Collect the fragments that remain, that nothing may be lost." So they collected them and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten."

Then those men put the baskets in their mini-storage—or in the freezer there.

That's what we might have done in our society. My wife and I got our first mini-storage in 1998, mostly for our large library. That's what we say, because the books are around all the walls. Whatever we call it, the fact is, the middle is old furniture, china, overhead projectors, teaching tools, old luggage, old clothes and all—even after the giant purges we have done and many things we have given away!

People save different things based on the usefulness left in them. Some men have large piles of lumber that might come in handy. Homemakers like to have enough canned goods for a disaster. Clothes that might fit us again someday, or come back in style, are another useful item. The list of things people hang on to is long—just as long as the time that we hang on to them. How long do you have to *not* touch something to decide to give it away?

Usefulness is a good thing with its own economic term: utility. But it can seduce us. As long as an item can be useful, we can be tempted to keep it. Jesus sees that as a danger signal for the third soil (Mark 4:19)—"the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it proves

unfruitful.”

Wealth is good; miserliness is not. Possessions are a blessing; hoarding is a curse. We can distinguish usefulness from usefulness for us. How do we steward the usefulness of things we own?

One way is **our life-stage**. Does the item fit how we live now? Could it fit how we might live in the future? My wife and I had enough Christmas decorations, china and crystal to rival Macy’s. But with children grown, we’re in a life-stage where Christmas decorating is less elaborate, so we gave most of it away.

Another is **the item’s durability**. A treasured piece of furniture become a beat-up thing after several moves. In a mini-storage, linens yellow, book-bindings decay, clothes become moth-eaten. Jesus said something about that in Matthew 6:19: “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal.” Go see this on display at your own mini-storage. (He left out mice, though).

A third is **its usefulness to others**. I’m guessing Jesus sent those baskets of leftovers away in the hands of the people. Take children’s clothes. We will never again be responsible to clothe a child from birth to adulthood. We gave those clothes away—we gave away their usefulness to someone who does have that responsibility. Even the beret and the knickers. Just in case, you know.

Remaining life is an economic term that comes into play here. When you redecorate beds or homes, you replace items that have a lot of remaining life—not because they’ve worn out but because they don’t have the look you want. They have remaining life, and you still like them, and maybe there’ll be a place for them in the future—? Maybe—but for sure someone else could use them right now.

Last is **the cost of an item's usefulness**. Books are the hardest to give away for us; their value is enduring. But now we just search online and find the content we want, much more easily. The convenience cost of using the books is too high now. You may have tools, lumber and household items, but if you have lost interest in such projects or aged out of them, the motivation cost of using them is more than you want to pay.

As Spirit-filled Christians, we want to know and obey what He says about these stored items and their usefulness. "Knowing the times" applies to our old stuff as well as the end of the world. Let's be attentive to His time—even in our mini-storage. {eoa}

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