

# How to turn 'ought to' into 'want to'

**C.** S. Lewis once gave some advice to his godchild, Lucy Barfield, about life. He said to his young friend, "Remember that there are only three kinds of things anyone need ever do. (1) Things we ought to do, (2) Things we've got to do, (3) Things we like doing. I say this because some people seem to spend so much of their time doing things for none of these reasons ... Things you ought to do are things like doing one's work in school, or being nice to other people. Things we've got to do are things like dressing and undressing ... Things one likes doing—but of course I don't know what you like. Perhaps you'll write and tell me one day."

It seems to me that his counsel is wonderfully sound. Some things we have to do — like fix tires that are leaking air, and eat and sleep every day. Some things we ought to do, like study in school, save money for the future, write letters to people who write to us. Some things we want to do and each of us knows that personal list.

**WHAT HAS FASCINATED** me is that certain things in my life shift from "ought" to "want," and it is exciting to see how that happens. For example we learn some "oughts" and we do them early on out of duty and then later on they mysteriously become "wants."

In the family where I grew up, we learned from my mother to eat everything that was served to us at dinner because we ought to. That included spinach and all kinds of squash, which my mother favored and my dad grew in our garden. I came to really love those foods, and now there is nothing better for me than spinach and vinegar and butter or even margarine. The shift occurred from "ought" to "want" because through experience I found out how good they are.

There are athletic skills that are the same. For example in skiing, even though it seems to a beginner risky and even dangerous, the skier must learn to put his or her weight on the downward ski. This means shifting the balance of your body



## From Your Minister

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weight down the fall line of a hill. Later on, as the skier moves beyond beginner skiing, what were at first strict rules that ought to be followed become the very ingredients of the excitement and joy of downhill skiing. I think the stewardship of life is like this too. How is it that we can develop lifestyle habits that are responsible? How do we become people who share our time and talents and our money in ways that advance the Kingdom of God? How do we do it not because of duty alone, but because of joy?

I think it is a lot like skiing and eating squash. For many of us we learn stewardship as a lifestyle choice, first by just doing it in the same way a skier learns how to trust proper technique and then seeing that the results work.

**THIS IS HOW** joy comes into the duty of stewardship. Stewardship of our money, time and skills is for Christians a serious duty because it is God's will for our lives. But the exciting thing about this part of Christian discipleship is that when I put into actual practice a behavior that is itself healthy the result is that, given time, the truth at the heart of this behavior choice validates itself and gathers its own momentum. I discover for myself that doing what is right becomes also doing what I want to do.

Now is a very good time for each of us to find practical ways to put to the test certain principles of Biblical stewardship of the earth and of ourselves. Do it systematically. We

can write down a concise plan of how we propose to make a difference with our lives in the world today. Where do I intend to invest my time and my special gifts and my money so that good things will happen because I cared? We can write down places and people and projects in which we want to be a share partner, then put positive behavior patterns into practice. We can make them a part of our life by decision and not by impulse. Character does not grow strong when we are governed by impulse but rather by decision and faithfulness.

This is the way discipleship in the Bible works. Think of how Paul teaches us about love in 1 Corinthians 13. First he warns us against choosing various kinds of gifts and behaviors while leaving love out. "If I speak with tongues ... but have not love, I am nothing ...." Then he exhorts us to put God's love into action in practical ways simply because we ought to, because it is right: "Love is patient and kind ... not jealous or boastful ...." Then he affirms to us a wonderful promise — the love of Christ we dared to put into practice is so durable and dynamic "it never ends...." It clears the mirror so that we can see, and of the grand themes — faith, hope and love is the profoundest of them. "But the greatest these is love."

**HOW IS LOVE** validated to me and to others? The validation comes as I dare to put my discovery of the love of Jesus Christ into definite action here and now as an intentional, deliberate choice and practical decision. Then, like a skier who trusts my weight to the downhill ski, I have the joy of seeing that the Gospel really works in life. There is no other way to prove the goodness of God but to decide to live in the goodness of God.

If what we have chosen is healthy, and there is nothing more healthy than the grace of God at work in a human life, we will either quickly or gradually discover that excitement and joy have replaced duty. We discover that stewardship as a way of daily life is not only thoroughly good and has excellent results, but that it becomes doing what we want to do.