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## PERSPECTIVE

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Earl Palmer

**T**o his godchild C. S. Lewis gave the following advice:

Remember that there are only three kinds of things anyone need ever do: things we ought to do, things we've got to do, and 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.

His observation is sound. We *have* to do things like fix tires that are leaking air and eat and sleep every day. We *ought* to do things like save money for the future and write letters

avored and my dad grew in our garden. As a result, I love those foods now. Nothing sounds better to me than spinach with vinegar and butter. Through actual experience I found out how good those foods are, and my motivation for eating them shifted from "ought" to "want."

Athletic skills often follow that same progression. Beginning skiers, for example, are reluctant to put their weight on the downhill ski. It feels risky—even dangerous. Yet to ski, one must shift the balance of one's body weight down the fall line of a hill. Experienced skiers, however, know that following those strict rules produces the excitement and joy of

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to people who write to us. We *want* to do certain other things—each of us knows our personal list.

My fascination is with the things in my life that shift from ought-to-do to want-to-do. Some of the "oughts" of my youth—the duties I was coerced into—have in my adult years mysteriously become "wants." For instance, my mother made me eat everything that was served to me at dinner—including spinach and the several kinds of squash that my mother

downhill skiing.

The stewardship of life is no different. We develop responsible lifestyle habits and learn to share our time, talents, and money to advance the kingdom of God in a progression from duty to joy. We learn stewardship as a lifestyle choice in the same way a skier does—by following the rules, which leads to trusting proper technique because it produces the desired results.

Joy crowns duty when I discover for myself that doing what is right becomes doing what I want to do. Handling money wisely, for example, is for Christians a serious duty that God has required of us. When I fol-

low his instructions about this part of Christian discipleship—when I practice this healthy behavior—in time, the truth at the heart of this behavioral choice validates itself and, gathering momentum, comes me to joy.

To build momentum for yourself, systematically put to the test certain principles of biblical stewardship of the earth and of yourself. Write down a concise plan of how you propose to make a difference with your life in the world today. Where will you invest your time, special gifts, and money so that good things will happen because you cared? Write down places and projects in which you can share. List people in whose lives you can make a difference. Then start making a difference—by decision, not by impulse. Character does not grow strong when we are governed by impulse. Duty is graced with joy through decision and faithfulness.

Think of how Paul teaches us about love in 1 Corinthians 13. First he warns us against practicing gifts while leaving love out: "If I speak with tongues...but have not love, I am nothing." Then he exhorts us to love simply because we ought to, because it is right and describes actions that show love: "Love is patient and kind...not jealous or boastful." Then he affirms a wonderful promise—the love of Christ we dared to practice never ends. That love clears the mirror to let us see. Finally, Paul affirms that of the grand themes of faith, hope, and love, the profoundest of them all is love.

How is love validated to me and to others? By those of us who dare to put our discovery of the love of Jesus Christ into definite action here and now—intentionally, deliberately choosing a practical expression of loving. Then, like skiers who trust their weight to the downhill ski, we 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 love of God at work in a human life—then we will either quickly or gradually discover that excitement and joy have replaced duty. We experience that faithfulness, as a way of daily life, is not only thoroughly good but has excellent results. The “ought” of our life in Christ becomes our “want.”♦



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*“I’ve been asked by the Search Committee to put one last question to you. Do you play third base by any chance?”*

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