

**“God is Personal, but Never Private”**  
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“God is personal, but never private,” reads the subtitle of chapter 3 of *God’s Politics*, the latest book by the influential evangelical leader Jim Wallis, who also serves as the editor of *Sojourners* magazine. I first met Jim about ten years ago, at the dining room table in the parsonage next door to Community United Methodist Church in Naperville, Illinois, where my wife was the Associate Pastor. Jim had recently launched *Call to Renewal*, a national federation of churches and faith-based organizations working together to overcome poverty, and he was in our community to lead a town meeting of local religious and civic leaders. He was our guest for dinner before the meeting that evening.

He writes, “God is personal, but never private. If God is not personal, there is little meaning to faith. Without a personal God, there is no personal dimension to belief. There is no relationship to God, no redemption, salvation, grace, or forgiveness. There is no spiritual transformation without a personal God, and no power that can really change our lives beyond mere self-improvement.

“However, that personal God is never private. Denying the public God is a denial of biblical faith itself, a rejection of the prophets, the apostles, and Jesus himself. Exclusively private faith degenerates into a narrow religion, preoccupied with individual morality while almost oblivious to the biblical demands for public justice.”

Powerful stuff that got me to thinking about stewardship.

Stewardship, too, is always personal, no argument there. Personal stewardship is the answer to the question, “What is God calling me to do and to give in response to God’s grace in my life through Jesus Christ?”

But to a far greater degree than it should be, stewardship has become intensely private in our prevailing culture. It used to be that there were certain subjects that one did not discuss in “polite company,” among them politics, religion, sex, money. It seems that money (read stewardship in church settings) remains the sole remaining taboo. We just don’t want to talk about it.

Comprehensive Christian stewardship is not about a pledge card. It is a way of life, a calling that informs every decision we make and every action we take. Comprehensive Christian stewardship is a lifestyle, not the act of writing a check on Sunday morning to drop in the offering plate. And our lifestyles are public. The public choices – and the private choices, too, of course – we make about the resources God has temporarily entrusted to us say a lot about our priorities and about our relationship with God. So in that way, stewardship is not only personal but also very public.

There is another public dimension to stewardship, too, one that we rarely talk about. It’s about mutual accountability. Foundation president Tom Marston likes to re-cast a portion of the United Methodist marriage liturgy, the part where the bride and groom say to each other, “With all that I am, and all that I have, I honor you,” to “With all that we are, and all that we have, we honor God.” There’s a statement of mutual, corporate stewardship that is public by its very nature. In many of our churches we’re a long way from that kind of understanding of stewardship, but it’s a destination well worth the journey.

As the stewardship voice of the Florida Conference, the Foundation is ready to help you, your family and your church with anything related to comprehensive Christian stewardship. For more information please call, click or write us at 1-800-282-8011, extension 106; [www.fumf.org](http://www.fumf.org); or PO Box 3767, Lakeland, FL 33802.