

## **Good News for Troubled Times**

### **Part 5**

Current events in our economy and workplaces call for extraordinary ministries, which must respond as needs arise. For the greater glory of God, I offer the concluding piece in my five-part series of workplace articles.

Part 1 *Overworked and Overstressed*, the story of Naaman (2 Kings 5: 1-14)

Part 2 *When The Bottom Falls Out*, God's message through Isaiah (Isaiah 40: 21-31)

Part 3 - revised *God's Opportunities, New Directions and Beginnings* (John 3:14)

Part 4 *Why Have You Forsaken Me*, holy ground (Jesus' cry from the cross)

Part 5 *Stewardship*, living and doing by God's values (thematic)

### **Part 5 Stewardship**

Mention this 's' word to people, and watch them grab their wallets and run. Churches have long equated *stewardship* with *money* whenever they do fund-raising. This confusion with money is unfortunate and harmful, because stewardship has everything to do with responding to God and divine blessings, not having our money taken away.

Stewardship's center is God. We recognize God as the center of Creation and the source of all that we have and enjoy. We understand God's nature as love, expressed in giving us abundant blessings. God blesses Creation with extravagant generosity, to sustain, nurture and enhance our lives. Themes about God's activities are developed throughout Scripture; but, the psalms (eg., #23) are especially helpful in their expression of feelings of joy, awe and wonder.

In response to God and what God gives us, God wants our gratitude. God expects gratitude, but our expressing it actually does more for us than for God. Gratitude begins with looking outward, beyond ourselves. It prods us to recognize what is good in life and the blessings that we have. This is spiritually and psychologically healthy, because it shifts our attention from self and what we don't have to God. It helps us to be and feel happier, regardless of what is happening to us.

Scripture develops the theme of gratitude throughout its 66 books. But, it is not the only source on the subject. TV journalist, Deborah Norville, has an article about gratitude, called *Blissful Thinking* in the October 15, 2007 issue of *NEWSWEEK*. She talks about the positive effects of gratitude, and how it helps us to be happy.

From receiving and expressing gratitude, we moved to Stewardship's next feature: giving. This concerns how we use our time, talents and treasure for the benefit of other people. To give begins with looking outward beyond ourselves, and choosing to share what we have until it feels good.

Stewardship's point about giving assumes divine abundance, not human scarcity. Life and God's blessings are like an endlessly flowing river, not a pond. As we receive, we share with others, confident that God will continue to supply and bless everyone. Making

this difficult for us to grasp is our tendency to think in finite terms. God is different. God thinks infinitely and acts, extravagantly.

Many of Scripture's stories record God choosing to work in Creation through people. The stories suggest that God wants us to enjoy the experience of sharing and giving. Yes, God expects us to share; but, on this deeper level, we see how God wants us to feel happy as we share what God gives us with other people.

A second NEWSWEEK article, from August 11, last year, puts a contemporary lens to the benefits of giving. In My Turn, Kirk Douglas shares what he has learned about giving. It is immensely satisfying to give. It makes him and other people happy; he feels good when he gives. Evidently, the more chronologically enriched Mr. Douglas becomes, the more he appreciates the value and joy of giving.

Stewardship also concerns our use of Creation. Creation is God's, not ours. God willingly and extravagantly shares Creation with us and all of God's creatures. It is not any person's or organization's treasure, to pollute, exploit or hoard. This is God's universe - not ours. It is governed by God's laws - not our choices. The principle behind God's laws is love - not greed or fear, which are antithetical to love. God enforces divine laws with consequences which come from breaking them.

Current damage to our economies, industries and enterprises, no doubt, are the result of many factors. Two, however, keep resurfacing as predominant. One is greed - the practice of doing whatever one pleases, regardless of the greater good to anyone else. Fear is another - which paralyzes thinking, and often leads to precipitous reactions. At the root of both is selfishness. One's self becomes the center of one's life and activities - not God. Self-gratification, fueled by the expectation of scarcity, motivates decisions and actions.

Current economic events and prevailing values have damaged tens of thousands of people. Stewardship has something practical to say about that. Stewardship is a collection of God-centered values which work. They remind us that this is God's world, governed by God's laws. Stewardship teaches us about how God works in Creation. It gives us hope that God does heal what is broken, and gives new life to what is lost. It encourages us with the reminder of God's extravagant abundance and generosity. It reassures us that, for all that the world does against God's values, the world's values will not prevail! It challenges us in our places of work and personal lives to honor God, thank God, and share what is God's with all people. Scripture's teachings guide us. Bright rays of truth from our contemporary world (the two NEWSWEEK articles) inspire us.

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