

(dot) Stewardship: January 2012

First Fruits, Regular Fruits

Life was cyclical on the small farm where I was raised, and each season of this life cycle offered fresh, new delights. Peas, lettuce and wild mushrooms were the tasty springtime first-fruits. The summer yielded a schedule of strawberries in June, tomatoes in July, corn in August and pumpkins in the fall. Even the winter had its tasty treats with smoked ham and snow-ice-cream.

If you haven't had tried snow-ice-cream, please allow me to share my mom's recipe. Take a big bowl of fresh snow, add a bunch of sugar and vanilla, stir it up, and then stir in just enough milk that it's a little too thick to be slurped through a straw. It's an annual tradition that no family with children, or taste buds, should miss. It's a first-fruit of winter that's sure to produce a that's-what-I'm-talking-about moment!

Of course, life is now vastly improved by hydroponic vegetables. And I admit that fresh, leafy green lettuce grown in vitamin water in a sterile greenhouse is tasty in my winter salad! I'm amazed that I can buy a plump, juicy, fresh, red strawberry in Kansas City almost any day of the year. The first-fruits have become the regular fruits. And first-fruits really should be regular fruits, as regular as a paycheck! Proverbs 3:9-10a says, *"Honor the Lord with your wealth / with the firstfruits of all your crops; / then your barns will be filled to overflowing."*

As Christians, we acknowledge the Lord as the provider of all by offering Him the first-fruits. The multiplication of first-fruit offerings is a biblical theme that appears repeatedly throughout the scripture. Abraham was willing to give Isaac – his first son – to the Lord, and that opened the Lord's blessing to literally millions of descendants. In John chapter six, Jesus received a gift, only five barley loaves and two small fish, and multiplied it to feed thousands. The Lord is still in the business of multiplying first-fruits!

It's January, a great time to get life in order. I challenge you to offer the Lord the first ten percent of your first paycheck in 2012. Then, offer Him the first ten percent – at least! – of your second paycheck. Then establish a pattern for your life: There will be no increase without gratitude for the Lord's provision. When we prove that the Lord is first in our lives, we give Him the opportunity to richly bless!



The New Normal: Resourcing the Local Church in the Face of Changing Realities

Since 2008, the local church has been faced with tough economic realities, forcing it to accomplish more with less. On February 15th from 11:00 AM to 12:00 PM (CST), Dr. Mark Lail will be talking with Pastor Russ Long about this "new normal" of biblical stewardship in the modern church. Join us for lively discussion, and be ready to share your experiences with the group!

REGISTER NOW

Third Wave 2012 Stewardship Scholarship

In January 2012, Stewardship Ministries partnered with Nazarene Youth International to offer the first international stewardship scholarship and encourage students around the globe to reflect holy stewardship in their own cultural reality: *Stewardship in many Languages*. Thanks to a generous donor, four \$250 scholarships were offered to students enrolled in a Nazarene institution of higher education during the 2012 school year, including those seeking district licensure.



The *Stewardship in many Languages* scholarship was offered to students from 55 countries during the Third Wave youth conference in Bangkok, Thailand, January 3-8, 2012—one of the biggest international representations in the history of the conference. The NYI conference, designed to inspire and equip the next generation of church leaders, hosted nearly 200 participants representing the six Nazarene regions: Africa, Asia-Pacific, Eurasia, Mesoamerica, South Africa, USA/Canada.

Four winners were selected at chance during the final service of the conference. We congratulate the scholarship winners: Adriana Valadez, student of the Ministry Basic Course for Licensure (ETASEN) in Mexico; Aubrey Tavares, student of Spanish and Intercultural Studies from MidAmerica Nazarene University; Jamie Grubert, student of Urban Ministry from Southern Nazarene University, and Kenneth Phiri, student of Youth Ministry from Africa Nazarene University.

The answers we received reflected a theology that is not only transcendent, but transformational. Answers reflected that stewardship is a holistic life style that honors God and allows us to use of what He has given us in the service of others. For our future church leaders, stewardship is more than just a reactive response to what God has given us; it is a pro-active lifestyle that allows God to use our gifts and talents to bless and reach others, in order to fulfill His mission.

May the Lord bless our emerging leader generation and continue to form them into holy stewards of His love and grace!

Thank you for reading!

*The Stewardship Ministries Team,
Mark, Deanna, and Tabita*