

(dot) Stewardship – January 2009 Edition

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A CHURCH OF MANY STRANDS

I fondly remember the days of working on the farm and the accompanying lessons. One such lesson occurred at corn-picking time. Erase the image you have of giant, air conditioned combines, automated grain transfer augers and semi-trucks. Replace those images with a one-row, pull-type corn picker, a flat bed wagon and a wide aluminum scoop shovel. The concept was to shovel the ear corn off the wagon and into the elevator at such a rate as to have the wagon empty and moved before the tractor came out of the field with the next 100 bushels of corn.

You can imagine my excitement when we upgraded to a gravity bed wagon. That's the kind of wagon that's shaped like a funnel with a gate at the bottom. This eliminated the shovel and transformed the whole unloading process into a very enjoyable game of grain surfing. I now know that swimming in a bin of grain that's forming a seed-tornado as it swirls out the gate is dangerous by any standard. Those were different times. Don't try it now!

During the shoveling experience, as well as other monotonous duties that included cutting firewood, loading hay and pitching the stuff that accumulates on the floor of the feed lot, my dad taught and repeated a valuable lesson. He said that when we work together, we accomplish more. He often reminded me that every ear of corn I shoveled was an ear of corn that he didn't have to shovel.

The Bible says it like this, "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken." (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12)

Our mission is to make Christlike disciples among the nations. That's a big load of corn for one preacher, one congregation, one missionary, one educator or one donor. As a Nazarene, my mission is far bigger than my abilities or resources. But as a Nazarene, I am not alone. Like my dad taught, when we work together, we accomplish more. I am on a team of 4,611 churches across North America and 15,210 across the world. A chord of 15,210 strands is not quickly broken. A denomination of 15,210 churches can make a lot of disciples.

There is no better illustration of the effectiveness of our denomination than the use of pooled finances. Through Faith Promise, Thanksgiving and Easter offerings, you and I put our money together last year and gave about \$48 million to the World Evangelism Fund. Not only is that more than most of us could give alone, it did more than any of us could do alone – a lot more. We are good stewards of our money when we work together.

Today, through the World Evangelism Fund, you and I are teaching the Bible in Brazil, we are planting a church in the Horn of Africa, we are making arrangements for the General Assembly in Orlando, we are administering medicine in Papua New Guinea, we are resourcing a Pastor in West Virginia, we are providing a General Superintendent's leadership in Lenexa, Kan., and, quite literally, we wrote this article. I believe in the Church of the Nazarene. I believe that 15,210 are better than one, because they have a good return for their work.

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Mark E. Lail is the director of Stewardship Ministries for the Church of the Nazarene.

PRAYING THROUGH (FOR) RECESSION

When money and economy are at the top of every news headline, people and churches are affected. As Christians, our response is a call to pray.

I recently read an academic work by an economics professor at Texas State University who concluded that recession increases involvement and giving in evangelical churches. His conclusion was that recession has positive spiritual effects and, consequently, it would be beneficial to pray for a recession.

Well, I'm not ready to pray for disaster, economic or otherwise, simply because there might be positive spiritual consequences. Rather than praying for a recession, we need to pray our churches through recession. The following are tips for praying for your congregation during times of economic challenges.

1. Pray thankfully. If the hope is for a \$5,000 offering and the reality is a \$3,000 offering, then you have 3,000 reasons to be thankful.
2. Expect to learn. The Lord probably has a spiritual lesson that outweighs the current financial crisis. He'll teach if we allow him that opportunity.
3. Believe in miraculous multiplication. The same Lord who turns bites of food into baskets full and who makes good wine out of water can increase the contents of your offering plate.
4. Learn to sacrifice. It is a spiritual discipline that will help us become more like Jesus. In prayer, let the Lord know that while you and your congregation are not thrilled with the idea of sacrificing, you are willing.
5. Ask the Lord to send your people with the gift of giving. I recall once praying like this: "Lord, I know we're supposed to be winning the lost, discipling them and developing them into maturity, but could you just send us a nice family that's already mature, knows how to tithe and willing to serve?" The Lord clearly and immediately answered that prayer.

6. Pray for prosperity. David prayed in Psalm 51:18 “In your good pleasure, make Zion prosper.”
7. Ask the Lord to help you eliminate waste. In every life and church, something slips through the cracks, but the Lord can help you reduce this. The Lord will help us see the areas of waste and eliminate them – from unnecessary bank fees to the copy machine.
8. Acknowledge the Lord as sovereign. We are under the Lord’s provision all the time, everywhere. We should acknowledge it and take comfort in it.
9. Pray for jobs. Ministry to the jobless can be very effective. Seize this opportunity by involving your church in the ministry of praying for jobs, even to the point of asking the Lord to anoint resumes.
10. Keep hope. Money – or the lack of it – can be depressing in hearts, homes and churches. Financial woes are a challenge that will lead to victory. Always keep hope.

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WHERE DOES YOUR CHURCH DOLLAR GO?

Many churches and districts take advantage of the video, “Where Does Your Church Dollar Go?” This video provides an excellent explanation of how money is spent after it is placed in the church offering plate. It is useful for worship services, during the offering, in church board meetings, or adult Sunday School classes. If you have not used this resource, it can be downloaded or streamed from the Nazarene Media Library, at www.nazarenemedialibrary.org.

Thank you for reading!
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