

A STEWARDSHIP NOTE

I would like to share some additional quotes from the book, The Giving Myths: Giving Then Getting the Life You've Always Wanted by Steve McSwain. These quotes are from the chapter on the giving myth—"I Can't Afford to Give".

When money is your preoccupation, you are ego-driven and you can be quite rude--usually without being aware of it. When you define your worth by your wealth, you are a fearful soul when it is threatened. You are, in fact, the kind of person who is looking for life in all the wrong places.

Fear is the mistress of your ego. Surviving and thriving, producing and accumulating are all the work of your ego. A famous actor once confessed, "The fear of death infused me with the desire to live, and to live harder." Ego is the part of you that will drive you to live harder and work harder because ego is totally into you--with all of your accomplishments and material embellishments that signal to the envious eyes of those around you that you have arrived and they have not, at least not to the level that you have.

Ego is the part of you that silently resents those who are successful, gloats over the failures of others, and judges most everyone else as inferior to you. Furthermore, ego believes being a genuine person of faith depends on one's personal performance. Ego cannot accept salvation by grace through faith. The mere idea makes no sense to the ego. In this respect, not much has changed since the days Saint Paul wrote to the Galatians, "Oh foolish Galatians! What magician has cast an evil spell on you? After starting your Christian lives in the Spirit, why are you now trying to become perfect by your own human effort?" (Gal 2: 1-3). The answer to that one is easy. Ego does not want you to experience the freedom that comes from knowing your acceptance to God is not based on you but on Christ. As long as ego succeeds in controlling your beliefs about this, your ego controls you. Your life, under ego's control, is a constant struggle to win God's approval. Until ego is dethroned, you will not experience the life you've always wanted.

For those who invest what they are given in worthwhile kingdom causes and in those who have need, God will find a way to give it back to them. As they keep giving it away, God will keep giving it back. This is the secret to abundant and meaningful living. You will always have what you need as you generously respond to needs God brings to you. If you're wise enough to figure this out and practice it as a lifestyle, you'll soon discover there is no greater happiness than the joy you feel when you flow with the divine principle regarding the time, talents, and treasures of your life.

Fear edges out any benevolence, whether that's a benevolent personality or a generous pocketbook. Fear edges God out, and when you lose faith in God, you are anything but generous. In fact, when you are driven by your worries and fears, the only thing that makes sense to you is to do what you must do to protect yourself and your stuff and to accumulate more stuff while you've got half a chance.

"a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God" (v. 21). What is a rich relationship with God? It's one into which you invest your time, your trust, and, yes, even your treasure. That's why the happiest people in the world are those who live in total trust and dependence on God. You'll never find the life you've really wanted when your trust or confidence is in anything other than God. This is precisely because you'll never have enough to feel safe.

Worry is fear's twin sister. What worries distract you? Food, fashion, fitness, finances, future?

"So don't be afraid, little flock. For it gives your Father great happiness to give you the kingdom. Sell what you have and give to those in need. This will store up treasure for you in heaven. And the purses of heaven have no holes in them. Your treasure will be safe--no thief can steal it and no moth can destroy it. Wherever your treasure is, there your heart and thoughts will also be." (Luke 12: 32-34)

The antidote to fear and its twin sister worry is to give. "So don't be afraid . . . give to those in need." Your ego will question everything about this simple solution to the spiritual problem of your life. It seems so unlikely that the antidote to fear and worry is giving. But that is plainly what Jesus said. As noted earlier in this chapter, our culture has programmed us to believe the antidote to worry and fear is more money, the stuff money can buy, and the illusion of security both might provide. But not according to the greatest teacher who ever lived. He said the antidote to fear and worry is the inner peace that is your reward for the generous practice of giving. This you must learn if you wish to get to that place of knowing--if you wish to find the life you've always wanted. Our infinitely abundant God has an infinitely abundant supply of all things to bring fulfillment and abundance to your life. Furthermore, he is more than willing to give you whatever is good, wholesome, and enriching, and he is willing to give it to you in abundant quantities. In fact, Jesus insisted it gives God great joy to give to you and me. The one condition is that you give it away.

Trusting in God's provision goes hand in hand with giving that provision away. You must believe not only that this infinitely abundant God is more than willing to provide everything you need but also that God anticipates you will take what he supplies and give it away. Of course I do not mean all of it. You must live, too. But I do mean far more than you are currently giving. God gives you the capacity to know and love him and to know what you should give away. This is the miracle of grace and faith, both of which come from him. In return, God wants your love. He wants you to give yourself to him and he wants you to give yourself to others. This is the way to peace--to the life you've always wanted.

"How will I know to whom or to what I should give?"

Follow your heart. Act on the Spirit's prompting and trust your intuitions. If you feel at peace as you begin to act on the prompting of the Holy Spirit, then you will know that you are living in concert with the spirit of generosity. Most surprisingly, you'll discover that you are never without what you need. You will have all the abundance you want but you will not be possessed by that abundance. Nor will you worry about it anymore. You will use things and love people, not the other way around.

Faith in God's provision will overcome any fear of deprivation. Fear enslaves you to stuff. Faith frees you to share. And as you do, you become both happier and more content. You become one of the few who finds the life you've always wanted.

How would you describe your giving? Impulsive? Planned? Spontaneous? Guarded? Like tipping a waiter or waitress after a meal? Are you one of those who cannot bring yourself to give because you're fearful there might not be enough for your needs and those of your family? Or are you actually one of the few who is asking God to give you faith to believe him when he says, "Give and it will be given unto you"? Are you learning to focus less on accumulation and self-preservation? To be less ego-driven, self-absorbed, and primarily interested in making and saving money and, instead, more interested in giving your money away? These are probing questions that will help you get at the heart of your own values and priorities as reflected in your earning and spending patterns and your gifts to charity.

Jesus promised, "And he will give you all you need from day to day if you live for him and make the kingdom of God your primary concern" (Matt 6: 33).

Tom Bowman
Stewardship Committee