

by the Rev. Michael Meier

*Stewardship is about money,
but it is not ONLY about money*

the depth and breadth of
stewardship theology

bonus section

Introduction The breadth and depth of stewardship theology leads us to appeal to one another to discover lives of meaning and purpose, stewardship lives, as we:

- Engage in worship of God and as we honor God's plan
- Gather to encourage and support one another in a living organism, the Body of Christ
- Make a difference in the world through service to people and care of creation
- Teach behaviors which free us from bondage to money
- Teach behaviors which allow us to discover the spiritual value of generosity
- Teach behaviors of giving modeled on the giving of Jesus
- Teach behaviors of giving which trust in the abundance of God

The otherness of God Stewardship theology begins with a basic understanding of the "otherness" of God. We begin by acknowledging that God is, by definition, beyond our comprehension. God is not only beyond our comprehension, but in essence "totally other."

Our foundational awareness of the Holy One occurs when we recognize that we are submerged and overwhelmed in our own nothingness. The Holy One is felt as objective and outside ourselves.

In response, our natural emotion is one of fear. But, in this context it is an emotional response wholly distinct from being afraid. Rather, it is more the experience of awe which overwhelms mind, body and spirit as we realize God's presence.

In Isaiah 6, the prophet experienced God in a manner we try to capture in the words of the hymn "Holy, Holy, Holy." There is an absolute overpoweringness which compels in us a feeling of religious humility. What we experience as a fullness of power is in fact a fullness of being. The great "I Am" fills all in all. There is an urgency, an energy, which pervades this Being and which transcends all other energies known to humankind.

Though sensed, felt and perceived by us, this Wholly Other remains "mysterious," essentially unknowable and unable to be named by us. We are drawn to and fascinated by, but we cannot apprehend or comprehend, this Holy One.

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A creedal understanding of God's nature values the creating, restoring, sanctifying, protecting elements of God's work.

Creator and creature Our faith and reason tell us that the Holy One has brought all things into existence, not out of any necessity, but by choice. We believe that what has been created serves some purpose for God. We understand ourselves as creatures of the Creator.

God's plan revealed Without God's revelation of God's self in history, we would only know God as hidden. God, however, has not chosen to remain hidden. Stewardship theology which begins with a sense of the awesome godliness of God continues with an understanding that God has indeed revealed purposes and visions to humankind.

The account in Exodus of Moses before the burning bush illustrates this. The mysterious and awesome Presence who tells Moses to remove the shoes from his feet because he is standing on holy ground reveals a Name, a history ("I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob") and a visionary purpose ("Go! Tell Pharaoh to let my people go!").

We believe the Bible reveals God's purposes and visions to humankind. God's activity in the Old Testament through the faith community of Israel reveals God as one who is intimately concerned with the well-being of God's creation. God's activity revealed in the New Testament through the life and teaching of Jesus Christ further unfolds God's purposes and visions.

The will of God The testimony of scripture is that it is the will of God to draw all people back to God through faith, itself a gift of God's grace. A Lutheran understanding of salvation holds this work to be central to God's will. At the same time, redemption is not God's only work. A creedal understanding of God's nature and purpose must also value the creating, restoring, sanctifying, protecting elements of God's work.

Oikonomia (The plan of God) The will of God is expressed in the plan, *oikonomia*, of God for the world. *Oikonomia* is a Greek word from the New Testament that comes into our language as "economy." Central to that plan is God's own grace. Though the Old Testament presents God as awesome and hidden, God is particularly revealed in God's gracious choosing and blessing of Abraham and Sarah.

continued

Oikonomia *continued*

We have many examples of the graciousness of God:

- a. Covenant ceremony in Genesis 15
- b. Promise and gift of Isaac and his descendants
- c. Moses and the burning bush
- d. God reveals the Torah (The Law, Commandments) after the delivery from Egypt, not as a condition of grace, but as an extension of grace
- e. The prophets repeatedly call the Israelites away from empty promises back to the lavish goodness of God
- f. The Psalms celebrate God's gift of grace
- g. Promise and fulfillment mark God's continued gift to Israel

Old and New Testaments In the Old Testament the will of God is revealed in the plan of God. This is a plan of grace and invitation, beckoning and welcoming, promise and fulfillment. This plan is not only marked by spiritual abundance, but God also expresses God's plan and will in material abundance.

The plan of God is further unfolded in the New Testament, particularly in the life and teaching of Jesus. Jesus reveals God's grace in his teaching. God's grace is further revealed in the death and resurrection of Jesus, the capstone of God's activity in history.

St. Paul and other writers in the New Testament celebrate the grace of God revealed by the power of the Holy Spirit in the midst of the community of Christians. God's plan for the ages was displayed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and in the community gathered in his name and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

God is the Steward, "*oikonomos*," of creation and history. God's plan (*oikonomia*), that is, God's "stewardship," reveals God's intentions, accomplishments and goals.

The model of Jesus Jesus, in his human life, is the perfect respondent to God, the Steward. The life of Jesus is marked by obedience and faithfulness. Shaped by grace, his life is lived to honor God and to serve humankind. Jesus is the model steward, the one who lives in complete harmony with the plan of God.

Followers of Jesus In the New Testament the followers of Jesus recognize God's plan and recognize Jesus as the centerpiece of that plan. Jesus is the faithful model for a life lived in response to that plan. Both faith and

works are accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit working in the life of the faithful believer.

Since the time of Jesus, faithful Christians have centered their faith on God's plan, as it was revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. They have tried to live lives of obedience and faithfulness, honoring God and serving humankind. They have strived to live in harmony with God's plan, responding to God the Steward with lives of faithful stewardship.

At the same time, these followers of Jesus have had to recognize their own sins and imperfections, their inability to completely fulfill God's plan, and their need for grace.

Worship as the highest form of stewardship The implications of a broad and deep understanding of stewardship lead us to describe our response to God in a variety of ways. The act of worship, adoration of God, is the highest form of stewardship. In the Old Testament, Exodus 20:3, God says "You shall have no other Gods before me." Jesus said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment" (Matthew 22:37-38).

Whenever we talk about stewardship or being a steward after the model of Jesus, we must begin by recognizing that worship of God is the highest form of stewardship. We do not mean a particular ritual or liturgy, we do not mean a particular form of service, we mean a stance, an attitude, a response to God who has revealed God's plan of grace. We mean praise and honor. We mean obedience and faithfulness. We mean a desire to seek the teachings and intentions (the plan) of God.

God's plan revealed in the Word For example, Psalm 119 invites us to know and follow the purposes of God. The writer uses verbs like keep, delight in, treasure, honor and observe in relationship to the plans, purposes and acts of the loving kindness of God. Those plans and purposes and acts of loving kindness include God's law, decrees, ways, precepts, statutes, commandments, ordinances, word, utterances, judgments, works, promises, truth, name, portion, favor, righteous judgments, steadfast love, goodness, faithfulness, mercy, teaching of the mouth, lamp, light, hiding place, shield, hope and salvation. This celebration of God's plan is an example of the highest form of stewardship.

continued

God's plan revealed *continued*

Job 28 is a song of the search for wisdom. God alone knows the place of wisdom. This whole chapter is an example of total attachment to God and God's purposes. This is worship. This is the highest form of stewardship.

The Bible is filled with examples which would draw our eyes away from ourselves and the world around us to an immersion in the worship of God. We follow the example of Jesus and the teaching of the church through the ages when we let worship be central in our lives.

The first and the best One aspect of worship which was emphasized in Bible times was the bringing of the first and the best to the Temple as offerings. There are pages of instruction in the Book of Leviticus which concern the choosing and offering of first and best from field and flock as a sign of trust in and dependence upon God. In Deuteronomy 26: 1-11, instructions are given for the offering of "first fruits" as a statement of faith and an act of thanksgiving. This theme continues into Christian theology when we as believers are encouraged to offer that which is dearest to us as a sign of our willingness to honor God and to have no other "gods" stand in the place of God.

Our worship is not perfect; we are still marred by our mixed motives and our inconstant behavior. Even when we try our best to honor God we recognize that God's grace supplies God's goodness to us, and even our finest worship cannot earn that grace.

Service to others is stewardship If the first commandment is to love God, the second, Matthew 22:39, "...is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself." The model of Jesus is obedience to God and care of God's people. In Luke 4:16-21, we read of Jesus in the synagogue in Nazareth standing to read from the prophet Isaiah and announcing "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." The scripture he read proclaims:

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*

The life of Jesus was marked by his persistent care for and healing of the people who surrounded him.

Deeds of caring In Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus describes the last judgment, where the sheep and the goats are divided. The six deeds of caring service to others described there are part of our response to God. Those six deeds are feeding the hungry, providing drink for the thirsty, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, taking care of the sick and visiting the prisoners. In medieval times these six were joined by a seventh—providing comfort to the bereaved.

Today, these seven acts of mercy provide a template for our activities on behalf of others. We follow the example of Jesus and in obedience to the God whom we worship, we serve the needs of others. If worship of God is the highest form of stewardship, then care of and for the people created in the image of God must be the next most important expression of stewardship. What we do must serve the lives of others or it is not honoring God. It is the plan of God that we should serve the people in our local and global community with the gifts of our selves, our time and our possessions. We are to do this as individuals in our homes, neighborhoods and workplaces. But, we do this especially well when we join with others in the living organism we call the Body of Christ, the Church, where the whole is larger and more effective than the sum of its parts.

Again, we offer the caution that our best service does not earn us God's favor, but rather reflects the favor of God already bestowed upon us.

DEEDS OF CARING

- Feeding the hungry*
- Providing drink for the thirsty*
- Welcoming the stranger*
- Clothing the naked*
- Taking care of the sick*
- Visiting the prisoners*
- Comforting the bereaved*

Self-care and vocational fulfillment, the stewardship of our lives

In biblical times our modern concepts of personal freedom and individuality were virtually unknown. People cared for themselves and fulfilled their callings by being attentive to their assigned roles in the community. The communal fabric was intended to provide direction, supervision and support for the individual's life. Individuals were expected to trust the wisdom of the community and live in obedience to the community's expectations.

Today, in Western culture, we have huge opportunities for personal freedom and individual expression. For many the dictates of the surrounding community have a limited effect on their lives. Many feel free to "do their own thing." If one does not like the disapproval of a community, one can move and find another. In fact, many of us have moved from the neighborhoods where we grew up to neighborhoods which we view as

Self-care and vocational fulfillment *continued*

being more tolerant of our individuality. We change jobs if the culture of our workplace impinges on our lifestyle. We change friendships, join or leave various groups, take up hobbies in pursuit of our individual goals.

Such freedom leaves us with great responsibility. The surrounding culture assumes that choices for healthy care of self and vocational responsibility come largely from within ourselves. How are those choices shaped?

A Christian approach to self-care and vocational fulfillment is marked by obedience to and dependence upon God and God's plan. Knowledge of God and God's plan, however, need not be limited to our individual wisdom. Here again, the living organism of the church, the Body of Christ, is able to provide more than we can supply from within our individual selves. Other people of faith, expressing the intentions of the Holy Spirit, can assist us by providing some level of direction, supervision and support for our individual lives.

The stewardship of our individual lives will be shaped by our understanding of God's plan as revealed through our individual quest and through the collective wisdom of the people of faith.

What does Luther say? Lutheran theology appeals to the gathered community of faith as one of the ways God reveals God's purposes. In the Smalcald Articles (Part III, Article IV), Martin Luther wrote:

"We now want to return to the gospel, which gives guidance and help against sin in more than one way, because God is extravagantly rich in his grace: first, through the spoken word, by which the forgiveness of sins is preached to the whole world (which is the proper function of the gospel); second, through baptism; third, through the holy Sacrament of the Altar; fourth, through the power of the keys and also *through the mutual conversation and consolation of brothers and sisters*. Matthew 18:20 "Where two or three are gathered ..." (emphasis added).

—From *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, Fortress Press, 2000, p. 319.

Finding balance Perhaps the biggest challenge for us in the stewardship of our individual lives is the issue of balance. We need to find balance between work and leisure, responsibility and individuality, achievement and relationship, commitment and freedom, plenty and poverty, spending and saving, planning and trusting, giving and receiving. *continued*

Smalcald Articles

The Smalcald Articles were written by Martin Luther as a summary of the Lutheran position to be submitted to the (1537) papal council.... International and ecclesiastical politics delayed the opening of that council.... Meanwhile, the Lutheran princes (who) had organized a defensive league at Smalcald...met again in that town in February 1537, and received these articles.

Though they decided to use the Augsburg Confession and its Apology as the basis of their presentation at the papal council instead of Luther's Articles, most of the assembled theologians did subscribe to the document and accepted it as their confession.

By 1544, these Articles were accepted in parts of Hesse as a defining confession of the church alongside the Augsburg Confession.

During the 1550s, the Articles were used increasingly as an authoritative confessional document and were included in the Lutheran book of confessions, the Book of Concord in 1580.

The Smalcald Articles began with a confession of trinitarian doctrine, on which both the papal party and the Lutherans publicly agreed. The second section confessed Luther's teaching on what he viewed as the heart of the biblical message: Christ's atoning work and the concept of trust. These were topics on which he saw no hope of agreement because of the Roman position on abuses such as purgatory, pilgrimages, relics and the invocation of saints. The third section focused on doctrinal topics on which Luther hoped the theologians could find common ground.

It is significant that in this portion of the Lutheran Confessions the claim is made that God reveals the gospel through the conversation and consolation of the gathered community of faith. This is why we claim that our understanding of God's plan should be shaped by the collective wisdom of the people of faith, as well as by the preaching of the word, the two sacraments and the power of the keys —The Book of Concord, pp. 295-296

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Stewardship includes care of the whole of Creation The events of the last several decades remind us that we live in a finite universe. This is not news to Christians; we have long believed that God brought all that exists out of nothing. What is news is our deepened awareness that our behaviors impact not only the lives of others of our species, but the whole living world and all its inanimate structures.

The Bible says that the created world is not divine; God is divine. But the Bible has a high view of the intrinsic value of all that God has created. Scripture celebrates the fullness and diversity of what God has created. Three segments of the Bible are particularly useful in reminding us of the majesty of creation: Genesis 1-2, Job 38-39 and Psalm 104.

The celebration of the intrinsic value of creation must lead to behaviors which emphasize the interconnectedness and finitude of all that exists and our responsibility to care for it.

Lives of meaning and purpose Another way to talk about these behaviors is to look at them from the perspective of each individual's quest to live a life of meaning and purpose.

Worship of God fulfills a common human need to have a focus greater and more permanent than simple attention to self. In relationship with God, the worshiper receives assurance that his or her life and behaviors have meaning and purpose.

All that we have said concerning the depth and breadth of stewardship theology underscores the fact that the individual derives meaning and purpose through his/her relationship with God. Further, the life of meaning and purpose is not only accomplished through relationship with God, but also enhanced through the worshiper's interaction with the community of faith, the organism we call the Body of Christ, the church.

In this fellowship the individual life of meaning and purpose is supported and expanded through interaction with other persons of faith. Simply by gathering together to worship God, the individual and communal experience of meaning and purpose is initiated and developed. In that setting all are invited to offer what they have first been given: selves, time and possessions, signs of their relationship with God and with one another. Here is the core of a life of meaning and purpose.

People who are looking for a life of meaning and purpose can find their quest accomplished as they gather in the presence of other people of faith to worship God.

Making a difference The gathered body of believers honors God and encourages each other. They also use their individual and collective gifts of self, time and possessions to make a difference in their local and global community.

People generally want to make a difference. They want to know that their deeds are accomplishing good things. Invited to do small deeds, people often act their way into doing great deeds. Many people have a desire to give back in response to what they have been given. Many are willing to give sacrificially of self, time and possessions if they know that a forest will be saved, a child will be nurtured, a prisoner will be visited or an elderly person will be healed.

Desire to serve, to achieve positive change, to make a difference runs deep in the hearts of most people. In most cases, the challenge for church leaders is to provide simple connections which are transparent in their effectiveness.

Freedom from bondage In many places in this country and in most of the rest of the world, people continue to be in bondage to poverty and all the burdens of ill health, starvation, privation and abuse that it brings. But, in much of the dominant culture in the United States there is today a different kind of bondage. It is a bondage which is not as crippling to the physical body, but probably every bit as crippling to the soul. It is a bondage to wealth and the things money claims to be able to provide. This bondage sometimes takes the form of consumerism and accumulation, but it can also take the form of stinginess, miserliness, fear of loss and even fear of gain!

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Freedom from bondage *continued*

Many seek to sate the emptiness in their lives by buying more consumer goods or by seeking to accumulate more land, more investments or more financial control of an institution. They seek a life of meaning and purpose that is supposed to spring from the acquisition of “more.” It seldom does.

Some hedge themselves with a grasping kind of miserliness motivated by a fear of loss. A life of meaning and purpose is supposed to be achieved if nothing is lost. Often people make little connection between what is needed and what they have in possessions. Thus, someone who would last year have been content with a \$10,000 investment now has seen that increase tenfold to \$100,000 and lives in mortal fear that it will be reduced by even a few dollars. The \$10,000 which was supposed to have supplied \$10,000 worth of meaning and purpose had increased tenfold in value, but has become totally worthless in terms of providing a life of meaning and purpose, hedged as it is by the pervasive fear of loss held in the heart of its possessor.

Strangely, as often as we discover fear of loss we also run into those who fear to gain. Money has such frightening power and carries so many hidden subtexts that they actually fear counting what they have lest they discover themselves to be millionaires. There is little in this lifestyle which is adding to a life of meaning and purpose!

When we invite people to examine their behaviors in reference to money and what money can buy, when we encourage them to explore their life-long experiences with money, when we help them recognize their feelings toward money, they may begin to recognize and re-evaluate their condition of bondage. It is indeed a condition of bondage if it is preventing the development of a life of meaning and purpose.

When people say, “Actually, time is more valuable than money,” they are missing the point that in our culture money is simply “coined time.” These people have little time because their responsibilities (particularly their employment) take too much of their time. Could they gain back that time? Probably, if they didn’t value money so highly. Most people are not in a position to cut their work responsibilities and take a commensurate cut in pay because that would adversely affect the size of their house, the size of their retirement nest egg, or the size of the college tuition they want to provide.

Don't call me a millionaire

A good friend and mentor who was responsible for raising large sums of money for the church told me about an experience he had several years ago. He approached a retired couple who were reputed to have some wealth. He planned to provide financial advice and solicit a gift from them. The couple agreed to meet with him, but they warned him beforehand that they were not wealthy.

One morning my friend sat with the couple around the dining room table in their farmhouse and talked about assets and investments and wise use of what they had accumulated. As the conversation went on, the pair recalled more and more investments – a small piece of land here, an investment in a grain elevator there, a loan due to them in a third place – each of which my friend duly noted on his yellow legal pad.

Initially, the couple had admitted to wealth of nearly a half million dollars. Now, as the morning wore on and the sums were added, the totals passed \$700,000, \$800,000 and finally even \$900,000. Suddenly, the lady of the house slammed down her notebook, pushed back her chair and marched off to the kitchen.

There was strained silence at the dining room table. My friend and the man of the house made small talk while the sounds of cups and saucers and the aroma of brewing coffee emanated from the kitchen. When she returned with sweet rolls and coffee, the husband gently asked his wife if she was troubled by something. She replied, "Indeed I am. I don't like this at all. If we keep on like this, the next thing you know is that we're going to be millionaires! And, we're not that kind of people!"

—Michael Meier

We are not suggesting a simple solution to any of the various forms of bondage to wealth. We are suggesting that providing a context where believers can stand back some distance from their wealth, or their pursuit of (or avoidance of) wealth, might indeed be a first step toward helping them build a life of meaning and purpose.

Stewardship teaching offers the possibility of providing a perspective which is larger than that provided by advertisements or financial pages.

Providing a context where believers can stand back from their wealth might be a first step toward helping them build a life of meaning and purpose.

Generosity is its own reward There is a spiritual value in a life of generosity. It should not surprise any believer that there are spiritual rewards which are received by those who have learned to practice generosity. After all, God is by definition, the Great Giver. Why shouldn't those who practice growth in generous giving be drawn to a deeper understanding of and love for God? Their actions of generosity give them deep internal experiences which help them appreciate the plan of God in ways they had never before known.

To qualify as generosity, the giving must be of that which one values most. This could be a special ability, it could be treasured time, but in our money culture it is most often money or possessions. Giving away a significant amount of that which is dearest to one's heart and life is an act of faith – faith in God, faith in the abundance of God, faith in God's plan. It is a bold step away from the fear of loss and the fear of loss of control.

Tithing is a particularly useful way to practice generosity. Here we are defining tithing as giving one-tenth of one's income. It is not a small amount. It requires an act of faith. It is a significant action.

To change our lives we need to act our way into thinking, not try to think our way into acting. Tithing is action. It is a life-changing behavior. What usually follows the life-changing behavior are life-changing attitudes or perspectives. This is true because of the increased necessity for trust in God, God's abundance and God's plan, but also because this practice actually gives us a deeper understanding of the nature of God, the Generous One.

The tithe is not the only possibility. People may choose to grow in giving through small steps, giving 1 per cent more each year, for example. Unfortunately, the small step approach is often like choosing to wade slowly into a cold river: it may be such a miserable experience that one never actually jumps in to swim and discover that the water is fine. Ten per cent is a significant amount, but it is not the ceiling. Many generous people have found deeper and deeper blessings within their own hearts as they have increased their giving. There are few, if any, disgruntled tithers.

While monies may be given to many good causes that honor God, there is a special value in tithing to the local congregation. Your congregation is an organism, a microcosm of the Body of Christ. It is in this setting of faith and fellowship that you give and receive support for your life of meaning and purpose.

*“As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the **treasure** of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.”* (emphasis added) —1 Timothy 6:17-19

We are so rich in the present age that we not only have food, clothing, shelter, health care, education and recreation, we even have savings accounts, real estate and pension plans. We are among the 1 percent in the world who have such things. We are the wealthiest of the wealthy. We are not enjoined to feel guilty about these riches which are described as having been given by God “for our enjoyment.” But, we are invited to be generous, rich in good works, storing up for ourselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future. Of such is a life of meaning and purpose.

Again, the model of Jesus St. Paul was engaged in raising money to help the church in Jerusalem. In 2 Corinthians 8, he writes about the generosity of the people in Macedonia and he invites the Corinthians to do even better. He appeals to their pride and their tradition of excelling in every endeavor. He invites them to “excel also in this generous undertaking” (verse 7). He then goes on to say that he is not commanding them to be generous, but rather, he is appealing to them to model their lives on the example of Jesus.

In verse 9 he says, “For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.” He concludes this part of his appeal in verse 24 when he says, “Therefore openly before the churches, show them the proof of your love and of our reason for boasting about you.”

St. Paul’s basic argument is that the Corinthians ought to generously contribute their money because in so doing they will follow the example of Jesus who generously gave his life. Sometimes we hear

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Again the model of Jesus *continued*

people refer to “sacrificial” giving. This is an example. Jesus sacrificed his life for the salvation of all humankind. St. Paul says that the Corinthians can at least sacrifice their money to follow the example of Jesus.

As we search for practices which help people live lives of meaning and purpose, let us not overlook this appeal to the sacrificial act of Jesus. Granted, this language is not currently in favor in the church, but it is part of our heritage, part of the scripture of our faith. What would be wrong with inviting someone to give generously in response to the model and example of Jesus?

Trusting in the promises of God’s blessings Many of us tend to be uncomfortable promising that God will bless their faithfulness in ministry, their faithfulness in giving and generosity. Look again at the words from St. Paul from the section dealing with the collection for the saints in Jerusalem. In 2 Corinthians 9, he continues his appeal to the Corinthians. He asks them to give generously because, he says, God promises to provide them “with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work” (verses 8ff).

Perhaps we have been so “turned off” by preachers of a “prosperity gospel” that we can’t imagine telling people that God indeed promises to bless their generosity with God’s continued abundance. But St. Paul claims that this is indeed what God is up to. Are we only able to affirm God’s mighty acts as long as they are internal, invisible and intangible?

Certainly, the context makes it clear that the gifts of abundance will continue to be given so that they can continue to be given away, but the promise is clear that the God of abundance intends to provide enough of everything so that you may share abundantly in every good work.

Notice the emphasis on sharing. The whole context is one of Christian community, the organism we call the Body of Christ, the congregation of believers. Should it surprise us that the God of generosity has a plan which renews the generous giving of those who worship God and serve God’s people?

A life of meaning and purpose is a life which is a conduit of the abundance of God. ●

Jesus sacrificed his life for the salvation of all humankind. We can at least sacrifice our money to follow the example of Jesus.

inside: Bonus Section on the theology of stewardship.

Learn how we can discover lives of meaning and purpose as we:

Engage in worship of God as we honor God's plan

Gather to encourage and support one another in a living organism
the Body of Christ

Make a difference in the world through service to people and care
of creation

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