
Dialogue

Volume 11 Issue 2 *Strength for the church's journey into wholeness in Christ* May 2010

The Subject: Simplicity

Why should we talk about money? Our culture continues to tell us that we shouldn't. Yet, we keep hearing those same tired phrases in the media and just about everywhere else—buy that, I *need* this, just put it on my card, etc.

Money can be a sensitive subject for many—some have it, some wish they had it and some people just don't.

Many of us are burdened with thousands in debt and student loans. It is hard for us to even imagine how we can ever be set free from this debt that is weighing us down.

We come from different financial backgrounds and know that relating to one another on this topic can be challenging.

We know the conversation can be tough, but one we know it is one conversation worth having. We care about the subject and we also know that God will show up in our discussion as we ponder what money means and how it relates to us as Christians.

So, welcome to the Simplicity issue. We start out with a column by Rod White on Budgeter's Remorse. In it, he explores "The Test" that has been a part of our public meetings for the past month; using and increasing our resources to follow what we think God is calling us to do next.

We'll also hear from Prayerhead as he/she encourages us to find our own "Prayer Closet."

Karen Von Winbush provides us with a thoughtful review of a classic. Emily Kephart writes about how she is working on aligning her lifestyle with her values. Matt Gerig provides us with the intriguing dance of simplicity and complexity. Nathan Swanson offers us a narrative about living in an intentional community. And lastly, Dave Valentine shares about his relationship with regular giver.

Let's keep the dialogue going...Enjoy!

Budgeter's Remorse

By Rod White

I am not sure how we came up with the name "budgeter's remorse" for our feelings. As soon as we put it out there we had "title remorse" because the idea offended some people with its association with "buyer's remorse." Buyer's remorse has to do with making a high-value purchase of something that may not be necessary (you feel guilty) or buying something that is just plain big, like a house (and you are afraid its too big for you, or afraid you paid too much, or afraid you are doomed to finding termites, etc.), or ending up with something you



got pressured into with clever sales tactics that you didn't really want (you're ashamed to own a complete set of Bobby Flay Cookware).

We didn't make the buyer's remorse associations. Budgeter's remorse just sounded good – especially the remorse part. We felt convicted about not taking people seriously enough. Instead of expecting greatness, we avoided talking too much about money; we evaded the little, conflictive conversations we could imagine, and we opted for just getting by with what was adequate. In March, we decided we'd budgeted too little income for the church's Common Fund. We kept discovering new partners who had not been invited into the circle of people who really care about what we are doing and want to fund it. We realized that

many people had not even become aware that they are important to our health.

I think we experienced the same kind of remorse Paul expresses in Galatians. It is not a guilt-ridden, fear-ridden, shame-ridden remorse, but the sad wonder of someone who is pondering the love of God and the love of brothers and sisters in Christ. Here he is feeling it in his letter to them:

"As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you. Even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself. What has happened to all your joy? I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me. Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?" Galatians 4:13-16

This piece of scripture doesn't speak to the subject of budgeting; but it does speak to the remorse in budgeter's remorse. The subject for the Galatians is about being driven to rely on the works of the law to be acceptable to God, namely circumcision. This has put them on the outs with Paul, who was so dear to them when he was with them. Now Paul is back in his letter with some new truth-telling.

Our feelings about on our Common Fund are mostly the same kind of sad wonder Paul displays. We had an idea: our budget. Some intervening time and thinking has made our idea seem more up in the air than expected. Now we are back with more truth telling. We think we potentially have more money to share. But much more important, we think we have more partnership to experience. We don't mean sit-in-the-same room partnership; we mean, just like in the letter to the Galatians, welcoming each other like angels of God partnership—tearing out our eyes

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kind of partnership—being filled with the Spirit of God partnership.

As a result of our remorse we concocted what we called “the test.” We have had some title remorse over that, too. As soon as some people heard about the test, they thought they were being tested by the pastors to see if they got an “A” for giving! So maybe “the test” was not such a good idea, either. Because what we meant was testing like testing out the ice to see if it is thick enough to stand on – if we commit to big dreams will we fall through the thin ice of our financial resources? How thick is our mutual care for our life and mission? We need to know. We meant more like testing the cake to see if it is done – if we try to do what we think God is calling us to do will the church not be ready and ooze around like lukewarm batter? Is our sense of our capacity half-baked? We need to find out. It isn’t 2005! The network is a new animal and it needs to be named and used appropriately. It needs wise tending. We think that means it needs conscious, active partners.

Let’s get back to the lines from Galatians. They are really familiar and personal aren’t they? They are passionate. Paul writes like their common work is a life and death matter. When he talks of sharing, he is not just talking mere money, he is talking body parts! His remorse over their lack of partnership is palpable. We love that. We want to be a people that resembles that. We want the whole network—that big, multicongregational, cell-multiplying body stretching over the whole region, eventually, to have the flavor of that kind of passion.

Obviously, if we end up with a culture in which people don’t even share their part of the Common Fund, we are not going to be that kind of people. Testing out our passion there is one place to look for our hearts.

What’s more, in just a few lines to the Galatians, Paul shows how God’s vision for humanity has gripped him. He came to them even though he was sick. He is back at them fighting against forces that could steal the truth they share in Christ. He has shared his life for the cause and he thought they were partners, matching him with equal fervor. We love that drama. It is the ongoing struggle for the suffering love of Jesus to take root in the world. We want to be a people who resembles that. That’s why we named three things we thought

everyone already wanted to do as examples of what we could do if we had more sharing: fully supply those who plant the next congregation, fight consumer debt with an audacious scheme and help the poor victims in Haiti. In the cause of Jesus, it is common sense that our combined resources make a bigger impact than our personal resources. It is common Circle of Hope sense that people want to make a difference. So let’s all share.

We’re testing out the church to see who we are now. The pastors have a feeling that we are more capable than we think. But we want to test that out. We need to see if we are ready to partner together, with passion, in the direction we’ve already mapped, and in the opportunities our new capabilities unleash. By the end of May, we may have learned a few things.

Take it back to the closet

By Prayerhead

Let’s take it back to the closet.

It is probably good to always be available for prayer. Our communion with God does not stop just because we don’t have our heads bowed and eyes closed all day—as if just body posture meant prayer. Sometimes the apostle Paul’s notion of praying without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5) can actually be abused to keep our prayer lives shallow. Here are some ideas for how to keep your prayer life rich soil for God’s fruit to grow, by going to your prayer closet.

Praying without ceasing can be misunderstood as a call more like “nothingness always” or “intentionality never.” We can be deluded into thinking that making deliberate time and effort to spend time with God is not useful or important.

One thing your soul can use while moving your prayer life towards never ceasing is frequent visits to your prayer closets. Getting tuned in at the start and end of each day might be a good start of trying it out. The discipline will be good

for you. Seeing God move will become easier. Considering what the Holy Spirit is saying through the Scriptures will become more normal.

You may want to have a special prayer space. It may not be an actual closet, you may have a whole room. It may not be in your house. You may want to have a few items that you pull out when it’s time to turn your coffee table into your prayer closet.

Perhaps you begin by lighting a candle to remind you that similarly to a cab driver you are “on duty.” You may want to have some sort of icon—an art piece that reminds you of how much God loves you—as part of your prayer closet. A bible will come in handy as well.

Don’t be fooled by prayer without ceasing as some sort of excuse not to get in regular quality time with God. To pray without ceasing, you are going to need to have frequent check-in times. See if you can build in some meaningful times in a special time and special place, sequester yourself to be with the Lord so the rest of the day you’re tuned in and sensitive to where the Spirit may be leading.

Dialogue

WHY? *This quarterly journal is a gift to everyone who wishes to be a part of the ongoing dialogue we share in Christ that forms us and deepens us as a real church. Whether you just arrived or have been with us from the beginning, we want you to be part of the conversation and an informed member of the team. We hope you will work with us to build a safe place to experience and share the love of Jesus Christ. Dialogue is a crucial part of that.*

If you would like to respond to any of the articles printed, that would be great. We have never turned a response away — but we reserve the right to do so.

Why I don't care if I'm "poor" or I don't aspire to great wealth

By Emily Kephart

I recognize that I write this from a position of privilege. I don't care if I'm "poor" because in my own experience "poor" has never dropped below the level of having my basic needs met, and therein lies the distinction. I recognize that there are many in my city and around the world who cannot say this, and for them this is a different conversation. But for myself, and most of you who will read this, we know security and provision; their faces are sometimes so familiar we don't recognize them anymore.

Acquiring wealth began as an attempt to meet one's needs and provide some security for the future. Now, wealth is seen as limitless and has morphed into a pursuit of joy, which we confuse for happiness. There is no end to the pursuit of provision, security, and happiness; because in the end happiness is what we have hoped to secure with our wealth, once provision and security have been met. The means to these ends are almost always over-work, slavery to the pursuit of wealth, and/or exploitation of the people and creation around us.

I once had a conversation with a friend about why she chose to move from the big, bustling New York City, to the smaller, grittier Philadelphia. She explained that while she lived with friends in NYC, had a job and apartment that she liked, and a booming social life, she realized that she was filling her life with things she did not value. There are many reasons to make such a move, and New York is not an inherently bad city, nor is Philadelphia an inherently good one (sorry guys). What struck me about her decision was the intentionality and awareness of filling her life with things she values.

The pursuit of material wealth comes down to priorities and values. As one who strives to follow Christ in my life, I find no example for the pursuit of material

wealth in the continuing gospel of redemption. Our joy, the assurances of provision and hope in a love that is bigger than us, comes from Christ. Our joy cannot be bought. At the same time, the act of pursuing wealth is not life-giving nor outwardly focused. Our examples from Christ are those of caring for our neighbors and loving those around us, of building communities to meet our needs, social, emotional, economic.

What has all of this meant for my life? Aligning my lifestyle with my values is a continual process. In the difficult times when my jobs don't bring in as much money as I'd like to remain "comfortable" I need this reminder. At times when my expenses have been low and my pay relatively high, it is a challenge to keep an outward focus, to use and share my resources with others. Living in community, a community designed to create a shared safety net and that invites transparency, is one way that I work to soak my life in these values. The wealth of my life comes from the relationships around me, from cultivating a joy in simple things that do not require weekly upgrades to keep me satisfied. These things may not be wrong in and of themselves, but I do not confuse them for the source of my joy.

Admittedly, giving and redistribution are difficult, complicated disciplines; but they are required to keep our attention on the source of our joy. There are still excesses that I desire; I still like expensive coffee, international travel, outdoor gear, and to have an ever-increasing security-bubble savings account. But in any given moment, were I to examine these pursuits, I would be hard-pressed to find Jesus in them.

Simplicity and Complexity

By Matt Gerig

Simplicity and complexity have always been difficult concepts for me to functionally merge practically or intellectually. I frequently swing my reactive life-pendulum towards a corrective pursuit of one or the other, rarely reaching a place where I am comfortable with some sense of balance on the matter. Simplicity often seems deceptively complex, and complexity has an allure for many of us, a siren song that assures us that rest (and answers) await in pursuit of the complicated secret knowledge. The problem is that even that characterization of simplicity and complexity begs for further clarification (simplicity), which is perhaps best achieved through an in-depth investigation on the matter (complication).

There is a classically held doctrine called 'divine simplicity' which illustrates certain aspects of what I think is interesting about this problem. Divine simplicity, particularly in the tradition of Thomas Aquinas (See *Summa Theologicae* Part I Question 3- it's worth a read!), maintains that God exists as a simple being rather than a compound being. The doctrine maintains that God is not a sum of any parts, nor is he a clump of characteristics- rather, he simply IS. He is not merely the best possible being; he is the ultimate end of the notion of the verb 'to be.' God does not manifest love because love is on the goodness checklist that he needs to fulfill to maintain godhood, he loves because he IS.

It is a technically marvelous argument, though not without its flaws. I am not necessarily concerned with its flaws for this current purpose, but I am sure that you can imagine what difficulties might arise from this characterization of God, and perhaps spend some time yourself thinking about the matter. (See Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature*, 1980 for further reading) What I am interested in is Aquinas' general reasoning concerning simplicity, which holds in

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part that we would perceive infinite simplicity as infinite complexity.

I believe that the relationship between the act of perception and the idea of perfection combined with these ideas that we have of simplicity and complexity can lead us to a greater (maybe even simpler!) understanding of our faith. In Matthew's gospel, during the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus states "*The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light that is darkness, how great is the darkness!*" (6:22-23 NASB)

Contextually, this may have caught you by surprise at one time or another. It is seemingly *non sequitur*, as Jesus just was speaking about the appropriate way to fast and store your treasure, but I think that it actually fits with the spirit of the oration in a very distinctive way. Christ's talk is largely concerned with shifting perception. We are told that the people that do not *seem* blessed actually are. We are told to love our enemies (what about our nemeses?) and pray for those that persecute us. There is continual appeal that things are actually the opposite of what our perception might lead us believe. To hint where I am going with this, I would point out that our eyeballs are the primary perceptive gateways for most of us.

You have surely heard the phrase 'the eyes are the windows to the soul.' Perhaps you have interpreted that to mean that by looking at or into someone's eyes you are able to yourself perceive something about the other person's soul. So, for instance, when I see suspicious, beady eyes furtively glancing hither and thither, I am able to deduce that this being has inadvertently allowed me a glance into his or her suspicious, beady soul. Perhaps. But I think that it makes more sense to think of it conversely and consider your sensory organs as perceptive fenestrations.

The translation that I quoted above uses the word 'clear,' but it is often helpful to delve into the root of terms used (and thereby hopefully tie this all together as well!). The same root is also used, among others, as perfect, sincerity (2 Cor 1:12, James 1:5), aaaaaand... simplicity (2 Cor 11:3). The King James translation offers 'if thine eye be *single*.' This notion of singularity ties back into what I was referencing earlier with all of that talk about

the simplicity of God. There is that oft-referenced second notion of child-like simplicity, and there is also the idea of perfect simplicity in regard to the nature of God (whether or not it applies ontologically to God the notion persists.)

Consider as well the biological sense of an actual 'simple eye.' The most basic of eyes allow for perception of light and dark, and nothing else. This may seem to tie in nicely to what Christ said about light and dark, but I don't think it is quite as easily analogized as that. He does not seem to be referring to the matter of being able to *identify* light and dark, but rather the influence that our actual method of reception has upon the intelligible perception itself. I don't think he says that if it is light the 'bad' eye will not sense the light; he says that the light will be darkness. If light is perceived as darkness, I ask with him, how great indeed is the darkness? There are plenty of insightful and plenty of inappropriate analogies that can be made in this biological regard that could be considered at length, and I will not indulge.

The conclusion of this exploration will hopefully help lend lucidity to the rest of what I have been trying to say. I often complicate simplicity, as I said in the first paragraph. This leads to frequent consternation and sometimes subsequent swinging of the aforementioned pendulum away from even seeking simplicity at all. What if that simplicity- the healthy, clear, pure, single eye, is akin in nature to the idea of divine simplicity? It is so simple (in that singularity way that I keep referencing) that we (I) *perceive* it as unattainable infinite complexity, wherein lies my personal difficulty with the practicality of those two things merging with one another in my life. Perhaps this is the realm in which many seemingly paradoxical problems reside, particularly those having to do with stasis and movement, contentment and aspiration, sanctification and perfection, justice and grace, etc. There is much more to consider in this passage, but I hope that this gives some food for thought and conversation.

A Book in Review:

Freedom of Simplicity: Finding Harmony in a Complex World by Richard J. Foster

Reviewed by
Karen von Winbush

Whatever the case may be, may we be a body that, by the grace of God, pursues this perceptive purity and simplicity no matter the complication. Over twenty-five years ago, Richard J. Foster published the first addition of "Freedom of Simplicity: Finding Harmony in a Complex World." Mr. Foster is a well known and prolific writer. He is known to most Christians and non Christians alike, for his significant books such as "Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth", "Prayer" and most recently "Life with God: Reading the Bible for Spiritual Transformation.", published in 2008.

However, it is "Freedom of Simplicity" which has been republished at the right time in our culture. This book, sets forth as its basic thesis and premise, the value of the spiritual discipline of simplicity and the spiritual grace and growth that comes from living harmoniously in the world, and in a fashion which honors God and keeps His grace and love at the center of every aspect of our life.

Since its initial publication, the United States finds itself in the middle of a serious recession, with world wide market implications. People are engulfed in a sense of spiritual uncertainty. If you read a newspaper or listen to news radio or watch television, it is clear more now than when the book was initial published, there is a greater need to read, absorb and act on the precepts set forth within the chapters of "Freedom of Simplicity."

Whether you read this book at the time of its initial printing or since the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary printing, "Freedom of Simplicity" provides rich ideas for practicing on a

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day to day basis, one of, if not the most valuable spiritual discipline – simplicity – which will empower the reader with the spiritual tools needed to balance all aspects of their lives. Tools which the reader can use to work through and perhaps, survive current economic challenges, spiritual stagnation and a faltering growth of the soul and one's relationship with God, individuals in their lives, their communities and the corporate world in which they operated in day in and day out.

As Christians, we all seek to live lives of integrity and in God's grace. Indeed, "Freedom of Simplicity" illustrates a means by which those hurdles which so often are set before us, and easily burden our lives, can be defeated. As cited by the author, "[t]he Christian grace of simplicity can usher us into the Center of un-hurried peace and power." (p.5)

The book is divided into two major sections, Part I entitled "The Foundation" and Part II entitled "The Practice". Within Part I, "Foundations" the chapters breakdown the development and growth of the spiritual discipline of simplicity through a review of biblical history. Mr. Foster critiques the Old and New Testaments, the acts of the Desert Fathers and Mothers and significant Christian writers such as Martin Luther, Julian of Norwich, Saint Francis of Assisi, George Fox, John Woodman, William Penn, John Calvin and John Wolsey and other scholars, all in the context of the spiritual discipline of simplicity. Citing examples from the lives and writings of these learned scholars, the author illustrates how their acts and views of simple living, with God at the core of every actions undertaken in their lives, strengthen their lives and their faith.

Part II, of the book, "The Practice", Mr. Foster breaks the chapters down into three main sections setting forth guidelines of practicing simplicity in one's life – those being Inward Simplicity; Outward Simplicity and Corporate Simplicity. Mr. Foster demonstrates with great theological sophistication, the method in which these disciplines may be applied. The command from Saint Paul from Romans 12:2, "[d]o not be conformed to this world", Mr. Foster fleshes out by stating "God has so arranged human life that we are dependent upon one another to come into all that he desires of us. We need each others help in order to know how to love God. We need each others help in

order to know how to love our neighbor." (p. 174)

If "Freedom of Simplicity" has any weaknesses, is that in some sections of Part II can be confusing and and repetitive, as best illustrated by Chapter 10, entitled "Corporate Simplicity: The World." However, this does not hinder the benefits and strength of the overall premise of Mr. Foster's book.

In its essence, "The Freedom of Simplicity" is a book which demonstrate that authentic belief and life can be obtained through the simple unreserved obedience to God in every aspect of life can be obtained. If you are seeking a book to steady your life through what seems like stormy times, then "Freedom of Simplicity" is a book which is believed will provide that comfort.

Where did all the Ice Cream Go?

By Nathan Swanson

Two years ago, come September, I moved into 439 South 43rd Street to help form The Crooked House Intentional Christian Community with my good friends Kris Eden, Chris Puchalsky and his girls Alice and Hazel. Yes, I was the non-Chris/Kris or the bunch. Thankfully, Zack Jackson moved in December so I wasn't the only non-Kris/Chris. In the beginning one of the biggest frustrations I had with the house was how quickly the ice cream disappeared. Now this may not be a big deal, but as a Midwesterner who was used to eating a bowl of ice cream every night before he went to bed, it was shocking to see a whole half gallon gone in a day or two. One might say why did I let everyone eat my ice cream in the first place? I could have put my name on it. Or locked up in a lock box and then stuck it in the freezer. Or better yet, I could have gotten a small freezer for my room and had all the ice cream to myself. As helpful all of these solutions might be, they are not in the spirit of community.

Part of the reason we formed the Crooked House Community was to share life together, including resources. I was both excited and anxious when we sat down last summer to work out the

details of how we would function as a community. We decided to share all food and food cost. We decided to do this by pooling our receipts at the end of the month and dividing the total cost equally amongst the members. I live on a tight budget and was worried about spending more money than I had budgeted for groceries. But in the end my desire to be in the community won out over worries about not having little control over how much money was spent on food. After almost two years none of my worries have played out. I actually spend less money on groceries than I did when I lived by myself.

We have chosen to share in other ways too. We each contribute to the mortgage on our house, and share the cost of utilities. We share our time together each week with weekly house dinners, and morning prayers. We also pool resources to host The Crooked Christmas party and other events. We share in taking care of the Crooked Garden; a garden we built in our neighbor's dilapidated backyard. Each month we work together sharing our skills and muscle by fixing up our house. I have enjoyed seeing our house transform as we have refinished floors, painted walls, and sewed drapes.

Early in our community's life, we chose to share our financial information. We shared how much debt we had, what our expenses were each month, and how much money we made. It felt scary, yet liberating, to share this information with my Crooked House brothers. We also dreamed of ways we could possibly share our recourses in the future. Some day could we consolidate debt? Purchase property together? Possibly help others in meaningful ways?

In June we are going to have a Crooked House retreat. Part of that retreat will be to evaluate how we have shared so far, and what ways we would like to expand our sharing. I am excited to see the outcome of the retreat and how we choose to grow closer in the next stage of our community's life. So what is the outcome for me after two years of living with this new openness and sharing? I save a little each month on groceries, I feel not alone but accepted and loved in this community. And finally, I don't eat as much ice cream, which is a good thing. Instead of eating ice cream each night by myself in my room watching TV, I eat ice cream every so often at a house dinner around a table full of people I love.

Why I Tithe

By Dave Valentine

Tithing and I have a complicated relationship. If you are even aware that there is such a concept and many people would expect you to comply, then I would suspect that it is complicated for some of you as well. For as long as I can remember I have had the understanding that you give the first ten percent to God and trust that he will meet your needs. That first came from my mother, who didn't really tithe to a local congregation but rather gave a significant amount of money to a Christian station called Family Radio. This came partly from the amount of bitterness towards the church for the level of cynical behavior she's seen over her many years as a church organist. I don't really remember much about being asked to participate in giving when I earned money as a kid but the concept surely sunk in. My mother was really disorganized with money, but she always seemed to have enough. I had this sense that despite her lack of organization and generosity God kept her flush.

When I graduated college I had started to really delve into life as a Christian and having lead a pretty raucous life during school I ended up on the more rule based, conservative side of things, mostly so I could get my "life right". I felt like I needed the structure and framework, especially since I was learning to live a different way and most of my old friends were close by and easily accessible. This lead to Bill Gothard seminars (a familiar name for some), and becoming a part of churches that were Bible believing, Bible teaching, and Bible etc. Much of this was really good for me, and probably appealed to my conservative tendencies. It also meant that coming out of school and heading into the workforce I pretty much started off from the beginning being firmly committed to tithing 10% on my gross income. Gross, not net, and I was very particular about that. It was all Gods so why am I giving the government or my 401k more than I'm giving God. In fact, I shouldn't have a bill higher than my tithe. That was the kind of teaching I got in my early adult years and I was pretty comfortable in it. I could hold onto the scriptural principles and though I'm not sure I

did much of it out of love I was very committed.

As time went on and I got married and had kids my financial situation started to change. I started to make more money and the tithe became a relatively significant sum. On top of that my wife really had a heart for us to do more. I'm glad that I found my way to my original patterns because at that point I started to look more longingly at the tithe. I wondered how other people around us were affording some of the things they were doing and I would say "well, they probably don't tithe, that's x amount per month and that could go pretty far towards covering...". I would think "man, how much more do we need to do, aren't we already going above and beyond compared to others we know". The thought would come of "hey, we have this debt we could pay-off if we used the tithe money. God doesn't want us to be in debt, right?" The impact of the amount became more of a discussion point for me as things like house repairs, savings goals, and desires for clothes and travel became more prominent.

While I can't claim to have been perfect throughout the years I have been pretty consistent. Taking a step back and looking at that for this article gives me a sense of pride and accomplishment that I don't think I've taken in before. God has blessed me career-wise I have been able to use that to bless whatever local congregation I was a part of. There are certainly numerous ways to contribute to the life of your church but while outreach strategies or musical styles may shift one constant is the need to share financial resources for all of the things God is trying to do through us. I believe tithing kept my wife and me from making even worse financial decisions than we might have otherwise. It placed a hedge around us that despite our best efforts to circumvent, ultimately we had limitations that always pointed us back towards Jesus and faith in God's provision. This was especially important as our family income crossed the six-figure barrier, and as I associated at work with people who had more wealth and the lure of the trappings became stronger.

Tithing also lead me (as the law is wont to) to the place where I'm at now where I'm trying to get my heart around the

idea of doing more than the 10%. I have the baseline. For the most part I've organized my life around it. But the needs you see are always greater than that baseline level of sharing. And the biblical witness seems to call us to more. There's indication in the Old Testament that the people actually gave much more than 10% once you add in all of the other instructions they received, and Jesus certainly asked the people around him for a level of life commitment that outstrips any 10% mark, and some of the early examples of how believers lived that we witness in Acts shows a tremendous commitment to sharing. Working with the idea that there's more that God might be calling me to in terms of sharing keeps me in that faith and trust position.

So, I don't know if you tithe or not. If you don't then you should get started. It's a basic kind of mark that can help you organize and orient your life towards God and sharing with God's people. If you're coming to it fresh and eager that's always a bonus, and I think things will happen and God will show faithfulness that will surprise and encourage you. If you're coming to it from jaded/Christian/baggage world then I hope that love can begin to move you from that space. Not sure what shape or form the love comes in but that can be a hard place to overcome. Whatever it takes you and your resources are needed for the journey and we're the lesser for it without you. However you get there, don't just stay with the law but let it instruct you and hopefully you'll move beyond it to a place where your relationship with God informs how you answer that call to leave all you have and follow Jesus.

Readers, please respond!

Your responses may just be printed in the next Dialogue!
We would love to hear what's on your heart.

Please email responses to:
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