



Preacher's Pen by Gene McCoy

A lagging indicator of a sluggish economy is the decline in charitable giving. According to a study conducted by philanthropy.com, 93% of nonprofit charities have felt the effects of the recession. Robert Evans, managing director of a consulting group that advises nonprofits on fund-raising, says charitable donations are a lagging indicator of the economy because people pay their bills before they make charitable donations.

(Source: Daniel Gross, "The Coming Charity Crisis — How the struggling economy is hurting donations," Newsweek, June 12, 2008)

It seems, however, that a leading indicator of a sluggish economy is church contributions. People in churches tend to discount or discontinue their church giving at the first suggestion or hint that a recession is looming. This is an enigma. An irony, except it isn't humorous that people of faith would be so quick to display fear.

A failing economy is an ideal climate for faith to develop and grow. When the Bible addresses financial stewardship it is in the context of increasing one's faith and not about raising funds.

Biblical principles governing the Christian's giving are valid in every economy, empowering one to practice good stewardship even in a bad economic climate. The basis for this is the principle of first fruits, which is taught in Deuteronomy 26:1-11.

Simply stated, this is giving to God before we pay our bills. He is certainly worthy of our first and our best! Giving God the first of the fruit of our labor expresses faith in His promises that He will provide everything we need. It also acknowledges that He owns all that we possess; that we are merely managers of His resources as He entrusts them to our care. To withhold from God until we have paid everyone else or to hoard against unknown eventualities is an expression of fear and not faith. It expresses our distrust of God to keep His promises.

Many Christians are like the farmer who had never flown in an airplane. For his 75th birthday, his nephew, a pilot, offered to take him up for an aerial view of his farm. After the flight and upon exiting the airplane, the nephew asked his uncle if he had gotten scared during the flight. His uncle replied, "No. But I never did put my full weight down."

The proof of our trust in God is measured, in large part, by how much we are willing to "put our full weight down" when it comes to giving. The principle of first fruits urges us to trust God's promises and provision.

This practice of faith causes us to give like there is a tomorrow — a temporal tomorrow and an eternal tomorrow. God has promised to provide everything we need when we put Him first (Matt. 6:25-33). But we must give like there is a tomorrow by postponing gratification.

Giving to God first may mean that you eat out less and prepare food at home more. Don't purchase processed food, which is more expensive. Making these modifications in your diet will also result in better health and fewer medical bills.

Giving to God first may also reduce the amount you spend on entertainment and leisure items.

Putting God first in your finances may also mean buying clothes off of the bargain rack. Instead of buying new brand name clothes for children, shop

the consignment and thrift shops, as well as yard sales. Doing so also teaches your children valuable stewardship principles, frugality and contentment.

There are plenty of places for most Christians to find money with which they may obey God, Who challenges us to prove Him by bringing the full tithe into the storehouse (Mal. 3:10). If only we would put God first in our finances.

If you are not now setting aside the first 10% of your gross income (the common understanding of tithing, and a good place to begin), we challenge you to take God at His word and obey Him. You will soon have a testimony to relate that will strengthen the faith of other Christians.

Consider yourself a financier of others' eternal tomorrows and give like there is a tomorrow in eternity. There are many lost people who need to hear the message of salvation. The Lord's earthly enterprise is to be financed by His people to whom He has entrusted His vast resources.

We must put our full weight down by displaying trust in and obedience to the Lord. This necessarily involves our continuing maturity in the practice of giving to God the first of the fruit of our labor.

If you want to pursue this level of spiritual maturity, please consult with one of the Elders, who will instruct and encourage you.

