

LAST SUNDAY MOTHER SUSAN PROMISED A YOUNG PERSON WITH CHILDREN WOULD GIVE THE HOMILY...SO HERE I AM.

ON REFLECTION LIFE SEEMS TO BE AN UNFOLDING OF RANDOM HAPPENINGS. BUT IS IT REALLY. . . OR DO THE RANDOM HAPPENINGS OCCUR BECAUSE OF SOMETHING THAT YOU HAVE CHOSEN TO DO?

TODAY'S GOSPEL TELLS OF CHOICES EACH PERSON HAS MADE AND WHAT HAPPENED BECAUSE OF THE CHOICES.

LAST WEDNESDAY EVENING MOTHER SUSAN CALLED TO ASK IF BETTE OR I WOULD GIVE A SERMON ON GIVING. MY RESPONSE WAS A FIRM, "NO". HOWEVER UPON AWAKENING THE FOLLOWING MORNING, AS I WAS ABOUT TO START MORNING PRAYER AT THE COMPUTER, THE "HOUND OF HEAVEN" WHISPERED, "DO IT...I HAVE YOUR BACK". OK, SO LEAD ME. WHERE DO I START?

GOOGLE STEWARDSHIP CAME TO MIND. HERE MANY INSPIRATIONAL IDEAS WERE FOUND. THE "HOUND'S MESSAGE, GOOGLE'S RESULTS, AND GIVING IN OUR LIVES WERE THEN DISCUSSED WITH BETTE OVER OUR MORNING COFFEE...AND SO HERE I AM.

MY STORY BEGINS WHEN, AT THE AGE OF 9, MY FATHER REMARRIED. MOTHER HAD DIED IN CHILDBIRTH WHEN I WAS ABOUT 2. HE MARRIED MY LOVING MOTHER HAZEL WHO HAD RAISED 2 CHILDREN AND HER HUSBAND HAD DIED OF A HEART ATTACK. WE LIVED IN THE POOR SECTION OF A SMALL TOWN ON THE WRONG SIDE OF THE RAILROAD TRACKS. MOTHER HAZEL SHOWED HER LOVE THROUGH STRUCTURE AND RESPONSIBILITY. SHE FIRMLY BELIEVED IN CHORES. AFTER SCHOOL IT WAS MY JOB TO HAUL OUT THE STINKY SLOP BUCKET OF DISHWATER WITH POTATO PEELS AND OTHER FOOD SCRAPS TO DUMP IN THE DITCH BEHIND THE outhouse. WE HAD NO SEWERS.

WHILE DOING THIS ON ONE FINE FALL AFTERNOON, A MAN WITH A DEFORMED ARM APPROACHED ASKING IF I WOULD LIKE TO HAVE A NEWSPAPER ROUTE AFTER SCHOOL. WELL, OF COURSE, I WOULD...NO MORE SLOP BUCKET FOR ME. THAT COULD NOW BE SISTER'S JOB. WRONG...I GOT TO DO BOTH. THE PAPER ROUTE LED TO ADDITIONAL JOBS AND MONEY FROM MOWING LAWNS, SCOOPING SNOW, AND ALMOST ANYTHING TO MAKE MONEY BECAUSE I WAS POOR.

MOTHER HAZEL TAUGHT A LIFE LESSON IN SIMPLE ECONOMICS. NAMELY:
FIRST: THE FIRST 10 CENTS OF EVERY DOLLAR WENT TO THE SUNDAY SCHOOL BOX.

SECOND: SAVINGS! YOU MUST SAVE MONEY. IT IS THE ONLY WAY TO NOT BE POOR. SINCE SHE ONLY ACHIEVED 8TH GRADE AND DAD 11TH GRADE, MY THOUGHT BECAME

COLLEGE AS A SAVING'S GOAL. THIS WOULD BECOME A BETTER CHOICE TO NOT GROW UP POOR.

THIRD, SOME MONEY CAN BE SPENT ON ENTERTAINMENT-- CANDY AND MOVIES, AND LATER TO BUY CLOTHES AND GROCERIES.

SHE STRESSED THE IMPORTANCE THAT YOU CAN WALK TALL EVEN IF YOU ARE POOR AS LONG AS YOU ARE CLEAN AND AS LONG AS YOUR JEANS HAD BEEN PROPERLY MENDED. HOWEVER, BEING THE ODD KID IN SCHOOL WITH PATCHED BIB OVERALLS AND WORK BOOTS MADE IT HARD TO THINK THAT WALKING TALL WAS MORE IMPORTANT THAN BEING POOR.

AFTER COLLEGE THE THOUGHT OF POVERTY STILL OCCURRED. YES, SAVINGS OCCURRED, BUT THE THOUGHT OF POVERTY STILL WAS VERY PRESENT.

THE FEAR OF POVERTY- OF NOT HAVING ENOUGH MONEY IN THESE TROUBLING ECONOMIC TIMES OCCURS STILL . . HAPPENS EVERY DAY. JUST READ THE PAPER OR LISTEN TO THE NEWS. HOW DO YOU OVERCOME THIS FEAR? FOR ME THE THOUGHT OF FOOD HELPS PUT THIS FEAR IN PERSPECTIVE..... WILL I HAVE ENOUGH TO EAT TODAY? IS THE QUESTION TO QUELL THE FEAR. THEN I THINK ABOUT THE ABUNDANCE OF FOOD AND LIFE THAT I HAVE AS OPPOSED TO THOSE LIVING IN DARFUR, IRAQ, AFGHANISTAN AND MANY OTHER PLACES.

BUT WHAT REALLY CHANGED THE WAY OF "POVERTY THINKING" CAME FROM A CHAPTER OF A BOOK: WINNING THROUGH INTEGRITY. MY WIFE AND I READ THIS BOOK OVER 20 YEARS AGO. THE AUTHOR PRESENTS OVERWHELMING STUDIES AND REASONS TO TRY TITHING, THE CHIEF REASON BEING THAT MANY SURVEYS HAD SHOWN THAT TITHERS DID NOT HAVE REAL MONEY PROBLEMS. THIS WAS FOUND TO BE AN INTRIGUING CONCEPT TO ME. . . SOMEONE WHOSE THOUGHTS OF POVERTY WERE ALWAYS AHEAD OF THOUGHTS OF ABUNDANCE.

IT DID NOT SEEM POSSIBLE FOR ME TO GIVE AWAY 10% OF MY INCOME AND NOT HAVE MONEY PROBLEMS. THE AUTHOR SAID TO TRY AN EXPERIMENT FOR AT LEAST A YEAR. THE FIRST OBSTACLE IS SELF CONTROL OVER "POVERTY THINKING". I...AS DO MANY OTHERS. . . HAVE DIFFICULTY WITH SELF CONTROL. SO THE FOLLOWING OUTLINE WAS OFFERED TO SIMPLIFY AND OVERCOME THIS HURDLE TO SUCCESS:

1. SET-UP A SAVINGS ACCOUNT IN A DIFFERENT BANK THAN YOU USE FOR YOUR PERSONAL BANKING. THIS IS YOUR TITHE ACCOUNT.
2. INTO THIS ACCOUNT PLACE 10% OF YOUR INCOME. WRITE OUT WHAT WILL OR WILL NOT BE CONSIDERED AS INCOME SO THAT YOU WILL BE CLEAR ON THE COMMITMENT.

3. MAKE A REASONABLE PLEDGE TO THE CHURCH TO ENABLE THEM TO FORM THEIR BUDGET AND TO ENABLE THEM TO MAKE THEIR PLANS FOR THE COMING YEAR.
4. ON DEC 15TH MAKE A CASH WITHDRAWAL OF YOUR TITHE ACCOUNT TO DISTRIBUTE IT.

THESE THE BASIC PRINCIPLES STARTED OUR EXPERIMENT OF TITHING. WE MADE THE COMMITMENT. ON DECEMBER 15TH WE MADE THE WITHDRAWAL. THE MONEY WAS LAID OUT ON THE BED. THE EXPERIMENT WAS EXPLAINED TO THE CHILDREN. AS PARENTS, IT WAS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR AN EDUCATIONAL MOMENT AND IT REALLY HAS BEEN. ONE OF THE MEMORABLE MOMENTS OF THIS PROCESS HAPPENED WHEN OUR DAUGHTER, WHO WAS DOING AN INTERNSHIP IN WASHINGTON, D.C., TOLD OF A ROOMMATE, ERIN, WHO WAS IN A DESPERATE SITUATION. SHE WAS FROM OREGON. SOME YEARS PRIOR SHE HAD FOUND HER FATHER WHO HAD COMMITTED SUICIDE. HER MOTHER HAD REMARRIED. HER STEP-FATHER WAS AN ABUSIVE ALCOHOLIC. ERIN WAS ALMOST OUT OF MONEY, WAS ABOUT TO GRADUATE, AND HAD NO JOB LINED UP. SHE WANTED TO STAY AND WORK IN WASHINGTON, D.C. RATHER THAN GO BACK TO THE SITUATION AT HOME. OUR TITHE FUND WAS ABLE TO SUPPORT HER FOR SEVERAL MONTHS WITHOUT HER KNOWLEDGE AS TO WHO HER BENEFACTORS WERE. ERIN WAS ABLE FIND A JOB, AND LATER BECOME A WIFE AND MOTHER.

THIS EXPERIMENT AND COMMITMENT HAPPENED TO US AND OUR CHILDREN OVER 20 YEARS AGO. SINCE THEN WE HAVE HAD PROBLEMS WITH ADVERSE ECONOMIC TIMES, BUT IN SPITE OF THESE ADVERSITIES WE HAVE BEEN ABLE TO TITHE AND STILL ENJOY A VERY FULL AND ABUNDANT LIFE. IT HAS BEEN A JOURNEY OF SERENDIPITOUS HAPPENINGS BUT ONE STILL WONDERS: IS IT BECAUSE OF THE CHOICE WE MADE TO TITHE? TITHING HAS BLESSED US IN WAYS BEYOND OUR IMAGINATION.

SEVERAL PASSAGES FROM THE BOOK: (WINNING THROUGH INTEGRITY.)

“IN DECIDING HOW MUCH OF YOUR SECOND BANK ACCOUNT WILL GO TO YOUR CHURCH AND HOW MUCH TO OTHER CHARITIES, YOU ARE URGED TO GIVE GENEROUSLY TO THE CHURCH OF YOUR CHOICE. IF YOU LOVE YOUR CHURCH, YOU WILL BE GENEROUS. IT HAS BEEN SAID THAT YOU CAN GIVE WITHOUT LOVING, BUT YOU CAN’T LOVE WITHOUT GIVING.”

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF TRYING THIS TITHING EXPERIMENT YOU MAY ASK. IT WILL HELP YOU CREATE FINANCIAL DISCIPLINE FOR YOURSELF, YOUR FAMILY AND YOUR CHILDREN. IT WILL GIVE YOU A JOY THAT WILL POSITIVELY FLOW INTO YOUR LIFE. DURING THE YEAR YOU SHOULD BEGIN TO NOTICE THAT PEOPLE WILL LOOK AT YOU IN A DIFFERENT MANNER. THEY WILL SEE YOU AS SOMEONE WITH AN OBLIGATION TO PART WITH A PART OF YOUR ABUNDANCE TO IMPROVE THE LIFE OF THEIR COMMUNITY, TOWN OR CITY.

SO THE QUESTION IS: IS YOUR LIFE MADE UP OF RANDOM HAPPENINGS OR ARE RANDOM HAPPENINGS CAUSED BY THE INTENTIONAL HAPPENINGS THAT YOU HAVE CHOSEN?

AS REPORTED BY LUKE, JESUS STATED A FUNDAMENTAL TRUTH OF TITHING: "GIVE, AND IT WILL BE GIVEN TO YOU; GOOD MEASURE, PRESSED DOWN, SHAKEN TOGETHER, RUNNING OVER, WILL BE PUT INTO YOUR LAP. FOR THE MEASURE YOU GIVE WILL BE THE MEASURE YOU GET BACK."

EVANGELIST BILLY GRAHAM, IN HIS DAILY NEWSPAPER COLUMN, HAS OFTEN SAID ESSENTIALLY THE SAME THING. SEVERAL TIMES HE HAS SAID IN EFFECT, "I DARE YOU TO TRY TO OUT GIVE GOD."

THAT THEN IS THE CHALLENGE!