



If you don't already subscribe to *Christianity Today*, I encourage you to do so, either in print or electronically. I've subscribed for decades, and I don't believe I've ever read an issue from which I didn't file away at least one article for future reference (hence the seven file cabinets in my "living room").

It was from CT that I got the information last year that the most effective single thing westerners can do to help the developing world is to help to provide clean water, as we do through our Wells Project. And the cover article this month has the title, "*Want to Change the World? Sponsor a Child.*"

The article summarizes the research economist Bruce Wydick has supervised globally with more than 10,000 children in six countries through **Compassion International** (the only child-sponsoring organization that would work with him, since most feared negative outcomes). The research is published in the current issue of the *Journal of Political Economy*, and Bruce has presented his results at UC-Berkeley, UC-Davis, The World Bank, Georgia Tech, the University of Southern California, Cornell, and the University of Washington, among others.

Wydick discovered that sponsorship through Compassion International makes children 27-40 percent more likely to complete secondary school and 50-80 percent more likely to complete a university education. As adults, persons sponsored as children are 14-18 percent more likely to secure a salaried job and 35 percent more likely to obtain a white-collar job. There is some evidence that sponsorship also benefits the unsponsored younger siblings of sponsored children.



Wydick wrote that "Along with providing some basic resources that allow children to progress farther in school, the child-development approach advocated by Compassion appears to get under the hood of human beings to instill aspirations, character formation, and spiritual direction. In short, it trains people to be givers instead of receivers."

The point of all this is that every one of us who lives in these United States, rich or poor by U.S. standards, is among the wealthiest persons who have ever lived on this planet. And those of us who live above the median income of Howard County, Maryland are truly among the most wealthy.

This means, on the one hand, that we generally live very comfortable lives. On the other hand, it means that we have the wonderful, glorious, exciting opportunity of stewarding the resources God has lent to us to make a huge difference in life on Planet Earth, such as through sponsoring children ☺.

Before we get to that, though, the very first test of faithful stewardship is our bringing the tithe of our personal income "into God's storehouse," so that the work of God's Kingdom may go forward here in Oakland Mills through CBF. And a related test of faithful stewardship is that we as a congregation need to be giving at least a tithe (10%) of our annual receipts to strengthen Kingdom causes from which we receive no direct benefit. We'll keep moving toward that goal year by year. (The church in which I grew up invested nearly 50% of their receipts in such causes.)

The tithe is the minimum, not the maximum, measure of faithful stewardship. If you're not tithing your income, the fact of the matter is that you're enjoying a higher standard of living than God intends for you to have, and there will be an accounting for such stewardship (Malachi 3:8).

At the same time, I recognize that seasons of life do come in which failure to tithe represents real hardship rather than misplaced priorities. There were some years while I was in graduate school in which Jill and I had five paying jobs between us (four were part-time), and yet our situation was one of either tithing or feeding our children. Yet even then, I kept track of how much we were in arrears on our tithe, and we fulfilled all of those obligations when times got better.

Wise stewards recognize that part of the beauty of tithing is that it is a key element of God's protection for us against the dangers of materialism, but better than that, the practice of tithing allows us to participate significantly in "pushing back the Darkness" so that God's Kingdom really *will* come "on earth as it is in heaven."

And there's more! Scripture also speaks of "freewill offerings" over and above the tithe that we contribute to Kingdom causes just because we can (Deuteronomy 12:6, 11; Nehemiah 10:37, 13:5)! It is through such "over-and-above freewill offerings" that we give to the Well Project, sponsor children through Compassion International, and do many other similar things.

Sometimes we make such gifts through special mission offerings such as those we receive for the Mid-Maryland Baptist Association, the Annie Armstrong and Lottie Moon annual offerings for missions, the CBF Global Mission Offering, and the Baptist World Alliance. Generous giving to these offerings is both worthy and necessary if Baptist work around the world is to advance.

At the same time, many other opportunities are available to us. Jill and I were blessed to help support a medical missionary in Kenya for several years, and we currently support mission work to orphan boys in the mountains of Guatemala and mission work that supports orphans and widows in Zimbabwe.

Here's what Paul wrote about such glad stewarding: "*Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. . . . You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.*"

"This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!" (2 Corinthians 9:6-8, 11-15).

Stewardship is not a "dirty word." Stewardship of time, talents and treasure is how God's Kingdom comes! Let's get on with it!

Dave



Postscripts:

1. We welcome **Brenda Murray**, who chose to become a member of CBF last Sunday after worshiping with us for twenty-five years. *Hurray!*
2. And we express Hearty Thanks to **Sam Odulana** for his service as one of our Deacons for about that same period. Sam rotates off the Active Deacons this summer. *Thanks, Sam!*

Do all the good you can,
by all the means you can,
in all the ways you can,
in all the places you can,
at all the times you can,
to all the people you can,
as long as you can.

- John Wesley -