

Chronicles of Diversity



Your leadership weekly

Deep Investing

8 January 2003; Volume 5, Issue 2

Since the first of the year I have read, or heard, from three different and distinct sources an analogy that compares some aspect of God with the depth of the ocean, and most of our understanding of same, as just checking out the shallows and tide pools. These exhortations come in conjunction with my search for a ministry ship that can investigate the natural deep, from the surface to some significant depth, and ply the surface in a number of different ministry adventures.

While this is a long story, and I will save you most of the details, how many times have you heard, or used the following: “Give your live (heart) to Jesus, and he will change your life.”

For me personally, I suppose the number approaches the countless. But I don’t think I have ever heard, at least directly, a statement similar to: “Invest your life in God, and you will reap rewards, beyond the depth of your understanding, in this world and the world to come.”

Two completely different paradigms. One essentially passive, the other active and consuming. Think of those contrasts, as we continue.

“Give to Jesus!” First you give your heart, then your life, then your financial resources and you will be blessed. The implication being of course, that the blessings will flow immediately and without significant cost. If they don’t, then you are doing something wrong. That limitation is of course all within your control.

In the eternal sense this only has a benefit of a natural form of fertilizer, without fertilizer crops will not grow, but fertilizer is applied to soil, and from the soil it is absorbed into the living plant. Just like in the television ad, Miracle-Gro produces fantastic fruits and vegetables. Turning from secular TV to one of the Christian vendors, and you will see the same gardening genre.

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As we really begin a new year, is this planting and harvesting concept really all there is? I think not. What we are seeing is an application of the shallows paradigm to an agrarian setting. This brings us to another all too familiar giving passage in John 4:

Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work. Do you not say, "There are still four months and then comes the harvest"? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together.

Even in this limited context, there is something implied that is much deeper than getting out your checkbook, but as a rule, we have no concept of the depth that derives from the first reference from God to seasonal harvest in Genesis 8:22:

*"While the earth remains,
Seedtime and harvest,
Cold and heat,
Winter and summer,
And day and night
Shall not cease."*

It is only natural to say that we plant the seeds and we harvest the results. We however, in our shallowness assume the fatality of the seasons, which they are not.

Before we move on from the John 4 passage, this application is in the bigger context still part of the living water story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman which we looked at on December 18th. The depth of God is sufficiently expressed in the Bible, but many times by our cutting and pasting into our particular need, we end up with stocks of grain and miss the grandeur and wonder of the fields.

I began the first work day in 2003 by searching the web for a site that might be able to help in raising funds for buying and running a ship. I quickly got depressed! The reason for my depression was not because of anything wrong with the site I was looking at, in fact it was quite the opposite. It simply stated in many unemotional ways that the church today, does not give. (Period) There was a corollary thought that flowed through many of the pages, that religious people have been conditioned by the world to look at monetary expenditures beyond the daily need as investments.

As I have ruminated on this since that time, I have come to the conclusion that this is perhaps a real gift from God we have not used at all. As I told a friend last night, If I put \$10,000 in Microsoft stock, or Starbucks, or some other company, if I don't like the company or the return I am receiving, I can take out my profits, or my losses. And even if I still like my investments, if I need the money for some reason, good or bad, I can still liquidate part or all my investment in the enterprise.

If you give ten bucks, ten grand, or ten mill to a ministry, it is gone baby. God bless you brother, or sister for your stingy, or generous gift. I'm not saying that it is wasted in any sense, for in most cases, it is so needed it is instantly applied to some worthwhile application. What I am saying is once your personal decision is made to contribute your gift, that gift loses, the unique blessing of your eternal personality to the communion of saints. Your dollars don't carry your personality, they generally are just part of a pool of funds.

Now I have heard on many occasions that the church is not a business. Duh! If any business ran as most churches run, they would be quickly out of business. But what we are really talking about is not the enterprise, for both are the same enterprise of mankind. What we are talking about is the concept of the return on equity, in business school terminology. All business enterprises have some sort of personal or corporate equity. Churches and ministries really have no equity. They may have few or considerable assets, tangible or intangible, but they have no equity. Why?

Basically, organization structure. At least in the temporal earthy sense. But as we have learned, if the existence of the temporal shallows is subservient to the depth of the ocean, then churches and ministries are really the only bastions of eternal equity or wealth. However, looking at the Christian religious enterprise in the best light of common grace, modern evangelicalism is a taker, not a giver.

The reason evangelicalism has no money is that they are just another game, in the temporal pool of asset management. An investment with only an eternal reward. Not because God set it up that way, because we operate that way. Oh, bless me Lord.

How do we begin to look at eternal assets as a more desirable asset than temporal wealth? First we need a paradigm shift from the seashore to the ocean depth. From seeds and harvest, to the depth of wonder of the growth process itself. The wonder of mankind is that he is formed not only out of the dust of the ground, but also the breath of God. Similar, yet unique from the other animals, and yet made of the same substance.

Ask anyone that you come in contact with, "What is the greatest problem you have with evangelical Christianity?" The vast majority of the time the answer that you will hear is "All they want is your money!"

There are symptomatic contextual problems much greater than shearing the sheep and trimming the goats, But since that is the most apparent, perhaps that is where we need to begin. In the pools of stagnant filthy lucre, mammon, ill gotten gain.

Every human being, whether sinner, or redeemed sinner, will one day be made accountable for the stewardship of their worldly assets. Can one truly be a good steward if you just plausibly give it away into the control of another. That answer came true last year for investors in Enron, WorldCom and other equity high flying dreams. But is the passive giving in most church interests any better?

It is well known that the Apostle Paul was an entrepreneurial tent maker. But it is also clear from his epistles that he had no problem receiving financial gifts especially if it meant a blessing to others in need (charity).

"When William Tyndale translated *aiskhron kerdos*, "shameful gain" (Titus 1:11), as filthy lucre in his edition of the Bible, he was tarring the word lucre for the rest of its existence." (American Heritage Dictionary)

Titus, along with First and Second Timothy contain much of Paul's understanding of church management. In this passage in Titus he is dealing directly with the problem of false teachers, and their ability to build ministries for their own glorification. Indirectly however, he is much more describing a need for accountability, financially sure, but more importantly doctrinally. Doctrinally sound churches and ministries are good investments, now and eternally. Human based religious enterprises are not. But like no other investment in this world, good ministry requires your personal commitment, not just your involvement. In other words, you, your investments, are more important than your money. (See parallel passages to John 4 above in Matthew 9:37,38; Luke 10:2)

But before we get lost in these waves of a tossing sea, I would like to bring us back to the amazing process by which God moves us from the timid shallows into an understanding that comes from His depth of attributes. There, all we can really describe are metaphors like oceans and mountains, knowing that they are at best just poor human word pictures.

Most of the time these gains in understanding of God's awesomeness beyond our comprehension, come when events which we first believe are positive, turn out to be life changing negatives, and then when those negatives are again changed into positive blessings to ourselves and others.

This point has again hit me hard this last week, and since it will one day relate to the testimony and the life of another, I would like to close out this week with this short narration.

As I have shared at times over the past months, a couple of members of the Washington Huskies women's basketball team attend our church. The attitude of Godliness and humility that they both express, has given me, and probably many more of their friends and acquaintances, the hope that all is not lost, in this rapidly decaying world.

As last year wound down, in the brief few moments before the new year began, the heart of the youngest member of this dynamic duo, stopped. On this creation side of eternity we probably will never know fully the reason(s) for that heart failure, it has been described as Long Q-T Syndrome. However, for the child of God there is no such thing as a coincidence, and He only allows those things to occur in our lives that will one day bring Him glory.

Kayla was revived in this new year with a new life that has changed dramatically. A future that I believe would have led to two and a half more seasons as one of the best Husky women's basketball players of all time, ended for lack of a heart beat. Kayla will never be able to compete at that level again, at least in basketball or so they say. But if I were a betting person, I would not bet against her, or specifically of her deepening understanding of God and His wonderful ability to restore and to bless our investments in Him.

I know that I am prejudice, but I believe sincerely that basketball is the one game that prepares us most for life after that game has ended. Basketball as it should be played is specifically a mind game, while remaining quite physical, in which being close doesn't count at all. In that respect sometimes you can win the game, while losing on the score board. Win or lose you can leave it all on the court with your team mates. Observing Kayla in a few games, even at her young age, she was one of the best at that complete commitment I have ever observed.

As she moves on into what the news reports describe as a normal life. Her basketball experiences, both past and future, will pay their rewards, not only to her but to those she continues to bless with her life.

Pray, especially for Kayla and her friend Loree, as well as the rest of the family of Husky women's basketball. May this apparent set back this season, help them all to understand that basketball is just a game, a game that can teach individual and team discipline like no other. Those attributes can help you, with the right attitude and the grace of God, to be a better person, and a blessing to the family of man. This, in turn, leads you beyond the shallows of yourself and the world, into the depth of God's awesome wonder. May this blessing become even more apparent now in Kayla's life, and yours.