

January 16, 2010 Florida Hospital Seventh-day Adventist Church
Luke 16:10-13 Valuing the Valuable

This week we have all been shocked and pained by the tragedy in Haiti. Here we sit in relative calm. Not much has changed for most of us and just 883 miles south, about a 100 miles closer to us than Chicago, all of life has changed forever for a whole nation of people.

Just last evening we were headed to a meeting and a bill board caught my eye. It was a billboard advertising the opportunity to help the people of Haiti over Christmas. It featured a couple of smiling citizens of Haiti as it called for help. No idea of the help that would be needed

Here was a nation already economically devastated, with desperate, seemingly insurmountable difficulties and now this.

This small nation is densely populated approximately 700 people per square mile. For comparison our state has just under 300 people per square mile and as a nation 79 people per square mile.

It is a nation of children and youth. 50% of the 10 million population is under 18. 2 % of the adult population is infected with AIDS and the nation is profoundly poor.

Gross Domestic Product is a measure of the total market value of goods and services produced by workers and capital within a nation for a period of time, usually 1 year. And in 2008 the GDP per capita in Haiti was \$1300 while here in the US ours was \$47,500.

So here's this catastrophe in Haiti with an estimated 50-100,000 or more people dead and literally millions homeless and beyond the governments of the world, beyond major organizations plans, what do we do? What do I do? How can we help?

It has been a while ago now that I wrote a piece for our blog about our first line of defense.

I hope that as news of Haiti began to break I hope that our first response was to pray.

To pray for rescue for the trapped

To pray for comfort for the bereaved

To pray for relief of suffering

To pray for a sense of hope in the middle of tragedy

To pray for safety, peace, and calm in the middle of the storm.

It is critical for our own spiritual development as disciples, followers of Jesus that we practice over and over turning to him as our first line of defense. And while it is our first line of defense, the first thing we can do, it certainly isn't the last.

In the little book of first John 3:16-20 We know what real love is because Christ gave up his life for us. And so we also ought to give up our lives for our Christian brothers and sisters. But if anyone has enough money to live well, and sees a brother or sister in need and refuses to help—how can God's love be in that person?

Dear children, let us stop just saying we love each other; let us really show it by our actions. It is by our actions that we know we are living in the truth..."

It has been inspiring that in the middle of this tragedy groups of mothers have taken to the street not to loot but pray and to sing to the Lord. To praise him and to call out to him in their distress.

Within our denomination there are 1000 churches about 330,000 members in the area. While information getting out of the country is still sketchy we do know that two of the largest Seventh-day Adventist Churches, near the presidential palace were destroyed. Those two facilities were home to five congregations!

While our Seventh-day Adventist university in Haiti has sustained serious damage, the lawns and hospital campuses are being used by many as a safe place to sleep.

How can we help? What is our response? This isn't a question that only Jesus' followers are asking. Around the globe from many other

nations, across our nation it is in our face on the news and the topic of the day, and people want to help.

I read about an email chain with twitter and texting that in just a matter of hours had raised \$8 million. Like you, I've heard figures that the people of our country have already raised something like \$35 million to help the people of Haiti.

By all comparisons nation to nation we are wealthy and Haiti is poor and our answer to their crisis is money! Maybe we've taken very seriously Solomon's writing in Ecclesiastes 10:19 where it says: "A feast is made for laughter, and wine makes life merry, but money is the answer for everything."

Right now the people of Haiti are suffering. They can so identify with Paul's words to the Romans where he writes about the very stark reality that we live in world of suffering. Even though redeemed by Jesus Christ we still live in war zone, a disaster zone. Paul writes: "All creation anticipates the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay. For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. And even we Christians, although we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, also groan to be released from pain and suffering." Romans 8:21-23a

Part of the lure of solving problems, or believing we can solve problems by throwing money at them is that people, and sometimes that can include us, begin to sucked into the idea that we can be like God.

From the fall of humanity into sin we have been able to be lured there by promises of being like God.

Money tempts us away from dependence on God?

It can make us lust after wanting to be like God in ability but not character.

Money, wealth isn't bad. Please don't hear in these words of mine a villainousation of money. Sure the love of money is the root of all evil, but not money. Money can do good or evil.

But the lure of wealth, at least some of the risks of wealth is that it may make a person more God-like in their own eyes than is reality. What do I mean? (Tiger Woods) God's abilities without God's character

Money tempts us to believe we can manage life ourselves.

It tempts to self-care!

It tempts to independence!

It tempts to us to indulgence of doing what I want when I want.

It tempts to abuse of the power that accompanies wealth.

With wealth may come the illusion that we are in control.

Right now EVERYONE wants to help. A week ago Haiti wasn't on our personal radar screen. On Monday this week, the day before the quake that devastated the country in a way that has caught the focus of the world Haiti was in trouble.

Education drop out rate

HIV/AIDS

Tuberculosis

Poverty—not just poor but devastating and hopeless poverty

Insufficient national infrastructure

Life in shacks for many.

And while our focus wasn't there the need was huge.

Just before Christmas some of our youth were working in Guatemala at a malnutrition feeding center and building a home for family. Sitting here right now in this place are even fellow members in economic crisis, health crisis, family crisis. Our whole world has not been devastated by an earthquake but the suffering and pain of this sinful world are real and present.

In giving to help in this crisis what can we learn about what it means to be a wise giver, a good and faithful steward.

First I think we must learn or remember, move to the front of our minds the reality that everything we have is ours only to manage. Jesus said that there is an impossibility and that is to be a slave to two masters simultaneously. We can't be God's slave and money's slave at the same time.

Jesus words in the sermon delivered on the mountain where he said, "No one can serve two masters." The original words would be better translated, "No one can be a slave to two owners." A slave owned nothing. In the truest sense, there might be some time when the slave wasn't being given an order, but even in that moment he had to be ready because his time, his life, his possessions weren't his own.

It is interesting that Jesus would choose God and money. But there is something about the way we humans are wired—we will seek to slave ourselves to something or someone.

The very first undergirding principle of being a good steward of managing our dollars with good sense is that they aren't ours!! We have just been given the privilege of managing the resources in our care: health, time, talent and money.

Second, good stewards don't just give in times of crisis.

Millions of Christians and non-Christians alike are giving money to help in this time of crisis and I don't want to depreciate any willingness to help in this time of great need in Haiti. What we can learn is that good and faithful stewards don't wait for a crisis to be philanthropic.

Needs are constant.

There is a constant need for tithe dollars to support denominational workers

There is a constant need for local church budget to support ministry to our community, our children, to support all the non-pastoral staff

There is a constant need to care for the hungry and hopeless

And regular faithful systematic support, some percentage giving from each payperiod's check changes the world.

Right now there is good giving and not so good giving going on for Haiti.

A Good Reason to Give is because God has convicted you. You have what you and your family need and out of a heart of love you don't just want to pray for and wish well but out of obedience to God you want to give love in a concrete way monetarily. That's a good reason to give.

A Good Reason to Give is that you can do it with a grateful heart and a spirit of joy. You recognize that you aren't just a cheerful giver but the very act of giving makes you cheerful.

A Good Reason to Give would be if you have the spiritual gift of giving. We are all called as Christians to be givers but the Holy Spirit gifts some in the Body of Christ with a gift for giving. And if that is you it will be harder for you not to give than to give!

There are also some bad reasons to give.

A bad reason to give is when we give to get. Maybe we give to God trying to negotiate a blessing. We return our tithe because we seek a blessing. Or we say in our minds if not outloud—look God I'll give you an offering but then you'll owe me.

Paul makes it clear that's just not possible. In Romans 11:35 he says, "Who could ever give God so much that he would owe us something or have to pay it back?"

A bad reason to help with the need in Haiti would be because we believe it will open some door of opportunity for us and in our heart know that we aren't giving to meet a need but to get one met.

A bad reason to give is out of fear or compulsion. We are not sinners in the hands of an angry God. God isn't out to get us. That if we don't turn in our tithe, or aren't supportive some aspect of God's work, then he will punish us.

Can you imagine giving someone you love a gift because you are fearful of what they would do to you if you didn't? If that's your reality there's something wrong with the love relationship.

Gifts of benevolence are benevolent acts of love toward another who is loved.

The third bad reason to give is to impress others. Jesus was familiar with the giving to impress problem. There were those who would blow trumpets and announce their giving. It seems for some that everyone knowing they are giving is more important even than helping the cause.

Jesus taught that when you give to someone, don't even let your right hand know what your left hand is doing. Give your gifts in secret is his counsel. When that is our habit it can squish bad motives of giving to impress.

And finally a bad reason to give is to try and control. You know those strings attached gifts. It is really seeking God's power without his character.

We've all seen people try and control families, and churches, and organizations with their gifts. This giving to control is very much like giving to get.

Crisis, some big need, can be helpful to awaken a spirit of giving. Right now everyone wants to help. But what will be needed 3 months from now will still be enormous but by then some new catastrophe or big news story will eclipse the need and then who will help.

I believe God has divinely inspired a kind of giving that can change us and change the world. It is regular systematic benevolence. It may not be huge but its consistency enlarges and sustains ministry.

Our daughter Whitney in her early high school days was introduced to Compassion International. Compassion recruits people to "sponsor" a child in some developing country. I think when we started it was \$28 a month now its \$35 or \$37. She talked us into sponsorship and we began to send our monthly support for a little boy named Sutin somewhere in Thailand. Today I don't give it much thought. But in preparation for today I figured it up over the years now we've invested some \$5000 in sponsoring Sutin.

If they had come and asked me will you give \$5k I'd have said no way. But faithful consistent systematic giving adds up and changes the world.

I wish we had a systematic long term giving plan to help Haiti but we don't yet. There are probably 1000's of kids who will need a Compassion International sponsor. There are churches to rebuild. And homes to create, and the list is endless.

But while we don't have a systematic plan to give you we want to provide an opportunity to help. Our bulletin to day features information about ADRA. Some of the facts and figures have been changed since that went to press, but still ADRA is working with other international relief agencies and is taking in an inflatable hospital that can see a 1000 patients a day. It is providing access to safe drinking water. It is extending care in that country where it has had a presence for 30 years. So as you leave today if you'd like to manage some of the resources God has placed with you to manage for him by giving an offering to help ADRA help Haiti just put it in the plate at the door. If you use an envelop mark it Haiti.