



December 1998

Holiday Times! Actually our holiday should be year-round, but especially so as our society turns its thoughts to those events that made our lives worth living. The Holy Child should be born anew in our hearts every morning as we set out to live with new purpose and plan every day. His love and joy should become ours as we set out to love our portion of the world even as God does.

That's the other side to the cross! We kneel down and claim death to self for the same reason a surgeon's knife declares death to a malignant growth—so that life can spring forth as it was meant to. God made us to be a blessing, a fountain of life in a dying world. As we arise and take hold of that destiny we enter into our own *promised land*, for we're living as our Lord intended us to live.

I've been thinking about some of these things in relation to this being *Faith Harvest* season. Somehow, it doesn't feel like an accident these two got together. Our whole life represents a budget and investment that can either be compounded through careful management or squandered. It feels good to keep an eye on God and especially Jesus Christ to see how He carried His destiny.

Christ's life was purpose driven. He knew Who He was and what He had to do. Yet, though He was God He came to serve and work very hard. I see times when He prayed all night because of the importance of the decisions He was facing. I see days when He set plans for a certain direction yet allowed them to be set aside by the response and hunger of the crowds surrounding Him. I want to be like Jesus.

For me, tithing and giving come naturally. My heart has been so full of gratefulness it's hard not to give and I found I had to be careful what I carried into the house of God because I just wanted to give it whether God was prompting or not. Sometimes I have a hard time encouraging others to tithe and give, for I see the hard times and lack in their lives, but thinking back to the hard times I've known, I always tithed.

First, God's workings in my life are cheap at any price! The gratitude I felt when Christ entered my life has never left me. When God asked for a tenth, I wanted Him to have it. Second, our God is Lord of the hard times too. If there's anyone I want in my corner when I'm having trouble, it's Him.

Sometimes it would be hard to tithe on a gift, such as when my mother gave me a specific amount designated for 'a new pair of shoes' or some such. I believe I always found enough elsewhere to make a tithe, however. After all, it was only ten percent, and I had a lot more than I did before, didn't I?

The Faith Harvest concept takes gratefulness to a higher level. Now we're giving, not what we owe, but of what we own. It's a chance to return some of the love God's shown us through material things. And we're pledging, not always on what we have, but on what we'd like to try believing God for in the coming year. Not everything will work, in terms of hitting the target we set. But, isn't it exciting to try?

I find there's an impartation in my life because of what happens during these times. To be able to have a part in giving \$100,000 to Dennis Balcomb's ministry in Hong Kong was exciting. No muss, no fuss, just 'let's do it', and the money was already in the bank to spend. If I can be part of it just that easy, what can I do on my own in a smaller way? Will those same principles work for me? Of course they will.

This truth should be life changing. God's blessed us with amazing riches, not all of which are in cash. We can hoard it and worry, squander it and sorrow, exploit it to our own hurt or lay it down at Christ's feet and find out what it was given to us for in the first place.

If we can only get into the mentality that sees God as our source. Everything that comes into our hand is a sacred trust. We could come to the level of seeking God, not to bail us out of crises, but for direction in what to do with the things He's already given us.

This should be an especial challenge for TORCH people, for it's so easy for singles to feel sorry for themselves as they get older and feel like life or ultimately God has cheated them along the way. But while God is by no means fair, He's

absolutely just. Fairness would demand everyone start the game with the same number of marbles, have identical opportunities, and not face any different problems than the man next to him.

God's justice is much more wonderful and complicated. God makes one man rich, another poor. Sometimes grace is shown in lifting the poor man out of his situation, at other times that poverty is a necessary part of His dealings. How much of our present position is providence? How much is good or bad stewardship? Only God could tell.

Be that as it may, the trend and tendency of a man or woman actively seeking and obeying God is to grow and develop in all areas, including financial. In most cases, it's a good measure of our faith and obedience to see what we've made and how we made it—because that's important too. The issue is not totally whether we got there, but did we follow the rules of the journey?

We can't call it God's blessing if we cheated in some way, can we? I'm through calling it the blessing of God when a Christian lands a good paying job that keeps him or her out of the house of God or begins to erode his or her family. It is a very sad thing when an unbeliever points to a crooked business deal and asks whether that man is really a Christian.

We need to keep our integrity as we seek new levels of the blessing of God. Temptation is always based on getting by the wrong means what God wants to give us in His own way and timing.

The man who's like Jesus will be a giver. He'll be able to give of his time and money and interest and affection and prayer and wisdom. Such a man will not only win the lost but he'll know why one meaning of the word blessed is *happy*. I want to be like that.

Events

For such a full month we scheduled our activities a little on the light side. December is time for Christmas programs, a little extra family time, and a bit of time and money needed to remember our loved ones.

In keeping with that we're dropping the SNAC gatherings back to two. The first will just be a hot chocolate night at G-'s place on the sixth. Since we have a nice, safe children's program for the service we shouldn't have any problems with a long altar call or anything like that. If you feel like it, bring something that will go good with hot chocolate. It is rumored that Gary is thinking about making another lemon pie or two, but this far ahead even he doesn't know if there is any truth to it.

On the fifth we are thinking about attending a performance of Handel's Messiah, but as of our printing deadline right now we're not sure we can get tickets or whatever it takes this late in the season, so call if you are interested. Keep an eye on the church bulletin too, for we're looking into a few things that are hard to schedule this far ahead.

On the 19th we plan to do some caroling at Crestview convalescent center, followed by a Christmas get together. Crestview is at 30th and Vermont off of Bertha Blvd. Our party's still in the planning stage, but one thing we hope to do is a gift exchange. Bring something wrapped, in the \$5-\$10 range and we'll draw lots and see who gets to keep what. We'll try to get final details into the church bulletin by that week.

Last but not least, G- and E- are planning to do an open house on the First of January (Happy New Year!) E- plans on cooking a turkey, but some of the trimmings may depend on who wants to come and what they may want to bring. So give us a call and we'll get it all together. Movies are always a possibility, as is pinochle, but the main thought is fellowship.

Looks like that's about it. Let's remember to keep one another lifted up in prayer.

Have a great month!

GAH

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