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A Stewards View of the Economic Crisis

On a local talk-radio station, the talk-show host was saying the financial problems we are facing are the result of the greed of the big shots on Wall Street, coupled with the inept bank, government, and security regulators who allowed the system to get out of control and fail. Perhaps there were individuals and groups who were seeking an unrealistic gain at the expense of others and used illegitimate means to gain what they wanted. Perhaps that is exactly what happened, but from my seat it is hard to know exactly the cause of this national embarrassment and suffering. As Christians we do know that the basic nature of human beings is to sin. We live in a fallen world and there will always be human sinfulness, so realistically we should expect that greed will be a constant temptation. It has been said that greed will entice the rich to oppress the poor, friends and business partners to lie to one another, and investors to take unreasonable risks. All of these have been present in this current Economic crisis. The other thing we can be sure of is there will be a wave of finger-pointing going on in the halls of Congress, news-media outlets and in watering holes across this nation for a long time to come.

But I ask myself: What have I to offer others in this mess? I am a leader of the stewardship ministry in my church. What, if anything, should I do or say to the people I know in my church? Because of my position, I believe I have the responsibility to give biblically-sound, good counsel.

Let's begin by acknowledging that this financial mess did not catch the Sovereign God of all creation by surprise. Scripture tells us that God is the creator, sustainer and owner of all things, everything. Furthermore, He has not relinquished control of any thing, so that the pain and suffering coming through these on-going financial crises is allowed by a loving God, with good purpose. We, as disciples of Jesus Christ, should consider the condition of our economy as a test of our values. The Bible values honest labor and dedicated workers. The Bible warns against dishonest business practices and we must be watchful. Today on the radio I heard Ron Blue say that any time people can "collateralize greed", we have a dangerous and dishonest practice...and, in part that is what happened. Lies and insider information are a form of theft.

I liked what another CSN member, Dick Tower, of Willow Creek Association, said when quoted this week in "ChristianityToday". Dick said, "This is a time that can bring us back to the sensibility of what's important." He went on, "We have, for some time, needed something that would grab our attention and say, 'Hey, this can't go on forever. We can't spend more than we're making.'"

Here are a few ideas of how we can be helpful in our comments:

1. Remember that God loves us and is working for our good. Live in the truth of Romans 8:28-29. Use the example of Joseph and the way God allowed some very tough stuff to come upon this future patriarch. He was testing and maturing Joseph for the day that his faith would carry all of Egypt to safety. Here is our example of a man who, during the time of plenty and affluence, was wise enough to save up for the lean times that were coming. Make no mistake, most in our country are still living in an affluent time. Joseph was a man who trusted God to save and sustain him and, repeatedly, was rewarded for his faithfulness. Joseph had reasons to become embittered and hostile to God's choices, but with an obedient and willing spirit, he embraced the future and was blessed.
2. Perfect love casts out fear. This is a fearful time. Many around you are gripped and scared by the unknown. The 60-year-old whose retirement is now in question, the 40-year-old who wonders if there will be funds for a college education for his kids. For the 20-year-old this is really scary because most talk-show hosts and T.V. commentators say this is the generation that will carry the financial burden for a lifetime. The apostle Paul said that where sin abounds, God's grace abounds all the more. In another place, he teaches that fear comes from Satan and behind every fear, there is a lie. During times like this we are to read God's Word and trust in the truth of the scripture. Use God's truth to kill the lies that the world is constantly feeding our people.
3. Pray for Christ's wisdom for our leaders, our church, our families and ourselves.
4. Give, be the model of a generous giver. We know what happens when we freely give; there is a joy and peace that comes upon the soul. Share your 'giving story' to encourage others to be a blessing. We know that when we give to God's work, it frees us from the bondage of holding on to what He gives us to steward. Be a channel of blessing to those who need the model and the gift.
5. Follow Christian stewardship principles. Encourage and teach others to do the same. As stewardship leaders, we have access to needed resources to make this happen. Now is the time to help show your church God's plan for their lives.
6. Financially, encourage our members to think long term and to see this as a time to get their financial house in order. It is a time to be proactive and not reactive. For our friends with liquidity, it can be seen as a time of unusual opportunity.
7. This is our time to witness to others. Without anger, bitterness, but with joy... expectation and Christ-like love, tell others about the greatest story ever told the story of the Gospel and, that through a relationship with Jesus Christ, we can handle anything this world can throw at us.

Fellow CSN members, this is a wake-up call to all of us. Now is the time to act! In the days ahead, our God has given us a time to be change agents in our congregations. Take this opportunity and make the most of it to introduce pastors, elders, deacons, leaders, men,

women, boys and girls to the marvelous worldview of a Christian Steward...the Lord has opened the door!