

Immerse Day 73 :: May 12

Well there's a new promo for a Giving Campaign.

"You must set aside 10% of all your crops, wine, olive oil, and meat, bring it to the Temple... and eat it there! Or, if that's too inconvenient, sell it all, bring the money to the Temple, use it to buy a feast for yourself and your family, and have a party!"

Today what would that look like? "Set aside 10% of your income, then use it to throw a party at church!" We have 100 giving units, give or take, 100 family units who give to church, so that means 2 parties a week at church, parties worth 1/10 of any family's annual income! Now that's a party! So why have we never used this BIBLICAL technique at church?

"Because we have bills to pay, staff to support, ministries to accomplish, jobs to do..." Huh. So the first sounds like Thanksgiving-on-steroids and the second sounds like corporate America. I think I like the first one better. How about you? And no, as a pastor I'm not concerned about my own welfare (where is my paycheck if all of our tithes go toward parties?) And I'm not concerned about our outreach to the lost, the last, the least, and the littlest either. Why? Because they are taken care of in this system, too. These feasts only go on for 2 of the 3 years. On the 3rd year, the whole amount goes to the Levites, those who care for the temple, today's church staff. So I only get paid every third year? Sure, if that third year is 1/10 of the income from our entire congregation, to be spread over a 3-year spending period. Huh.

And the poor? Even after this tithe, God blesses us more than enough to care for the poor and outcasts. In fact, "there should be no poor among you," God says through Moses. Ideally, the bible says, if we were all as generous and loving as obedient Christians are supposed to be, there would be enough for everyone. And demographic studies today show just this. There is enough of most everything for everyone; we don't need to stockpile our food, our stuff, our money – we need to trust God to provide us with more than enough every year so we can support not only our own family but the poor as well. We need to give, loan, and love freely instead of with an eye toward our own bottom line. "Do not be mean-spirited and refuse someone a loan because the year for canceling debts is close at hand. If they pray about it, you're guilty of sin." Yikes.

But realistically, "there will always be some in the land who are poor." We won't give this generously, or live this frugally. We'll think of those who truly give sacrificially as SuperChristians, not run of the mill, everyday Christ followers like us. Therefore, God says (not me), "I have to give you these commands to share freely with the poor and others in need."

My friend Al was one frugal fellow. He was well known throughout both our church and the community for his penny-pinching. If there was a way to save even a few cents, Al did it and required it of his family, too. At his funeral, his family joked about this. But they also shared the reason Al was such a miser about spending money. "Every penny Al saved, he gave to others in need. Saving a few cents today means giving a few cents (and a bit more) to someone for whom a few cents could make a huge difference." Al never hurt for anything, though you never thought of them as rich. He had enough, and the rest was for others.

To rephrase this whole section of Deuteronomy, "Be Al."