



THE GOOD STEWARD

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Theology in the Trenches - Something Must Look Remotely Familiar by Kathleen Kjolhaug

In a world where often times little is recognizable, we hang on for dear life to anything remotely familiar. Take the word recession, for example. It is a widely familiar term to many but as of late, it is becoming more well-known to those who have not felt the pangs of it before the present state of the economy hit. An edge of panic is notable in many voices when discussing it but I have this feeling that those who are just a bit older, have been preparing for this on a daily basis. I have a feeling that when we talk recession, they have talked budget. I have a feeling that when we talk spending, they have talked savings plans. I have a feeling that when we have said "yes" to new outfits, "yes" to vacations world wide, "yes" to purchasing fast foods, and "yes" to the latest technological updates, they have already cut a few corners by saying "no."

Recently, there appears to be a few new "hip" buzz words rising to the surface. I hear them on news networks and I hear them on talk shows...words that must sound remotely familiar and a gift to the ears of those who have passed through this sort of thing before. Words such as cutting back, not spending, homemade meals, spending time at home with the family, board games, and renting a movie instead of going to the theatre were several strands of advice that sounded practical. To many this has already been a reality in how they have chosen to live. However, to a new generation, these words are sort of the "in thing." An enlightening moment for one younger woman came last week when I heard her talking on TV. She was being interviewed and revealed to the nation that she has come to the realization that her things did not define who she was, now that she could no longer afford them. Now that she could no longer afford not only her things but the name brands attached to each of her things, she was taking a good look at her life. She has truly been able to see her self worth in spite of not having the prideful paraphernalia to go along with it.

Grandpa's terminology might not sound quite so fancy. His words would ring just as true but perhaps put more bluntly. "Pull yourself up by your bootstraps and get moving." Another statement often heard by grandpa would be, "Dig a little deeper into your pockets and pull out something worthwhile!" Or, "If you don't have it, don't spend it!"

Grandpa's wisdom was tried and true. Grandpa's wisdom was short and to the point. Grandpa's wisdom was not a fad but a way of life. It reflected his diet. It wasn't something you went on; it was just a smart way of eating in a way that didn't bring too much extra to the plate. No extras beside the basics. There simply wasn't money or time for it. But now, if grandpa were alive, he'd probably be on Oprah or could have canned his advice and sold it on e-bay.

An interesting concept on managing money and preparing for all that we need is the concept of tithing. Giving ten percent of your earnings to others seems to be the boot strap advice from above. He even challenges us to test Him in this way to see if He will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it. See for yourselves in the book of Malachi 3:6-18. There's a load of advice in there. Maybe some might liken it to American Idol's "America Gives Back" or Oprah's "Big Give." They seem to have the Biblical concepts in line but may not give credit to the source from which it originated. I, for one, need to begin anew by taking Grandpa's wisdom and dig a little deeper into my pockets in order to give back that which is already His. That way any recession vocabulary will not only sound familiar but will be greeted head on, knowing that we are defined by Him, not the state of the economy. Amen.



EXCESS BAGGAGE and How to Unload it!

In the last century, a tourist from America paid a visit to a renowned Polish rabbi, Hofetz Chaim. He was astonished to see that the rabbi's home was only a simple room filled with books, plus a table and a bench.

"Rabbi," asked the tourist, "where is your furniture?" "Where is yours?" replied Hofetz Chaim. "Mine?" asked the puzzled American. "But, I'm only a visitor here. I'm only passing through." "So am I," said the rabbi.

Experienced travelers learn how much baggage is just enough. They take what they need and leave behind the non-essentials that would only be a burden. To move freely, they travel light. Visitor, traveler, pilgrim – whatever word we use – each one of us is only "passing through."

How we go through life depends a lot on what each of us decides is essential in the things we own, the attachments we form, the ideas that shape our lives.

More and more people say they'd like to make changes in the way they live. Louis Harris commented that we may be coming to the point "where accumulation of physical possessions and steadily increasing consumption would no longer be as central to people's concerns... This would mark a striking turn-about in the country's thinking."

But any major change in the way we live is going to require decisions by millions of individuals, in their personal and public lives, in

answer to the question: "How do I want to travel?"

On a personal level, questions like these may be helpful to anyone who is serious about finding out what to hold onto and what to let go:

- ❖ What possessions do I have that cause more trouble and worry than they're worth?
- ❖ Do I weigh myself down by longing for more than I need or can afford?
- ❖ Do I waste valuable time and energy on things that don't really matter?
- ❖ Does the desire for "bigger, better, more" crowd out the values of intimacy, communication and the giving of affection?
- ❖ Do I feel good about my work, the persons in my life, myself?
- ❖ If I had only three months to live, what would I let go of and what would I hold onto?

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The children were lined up in the cafeteria of a Catholic elementary school for lunch. At the head of the table was a large pile of apples. The principal wrote a note, and posted it on the apple tray: "Take only ONE. God is watching."

Moving further along the lunch line, at the other end of the table was a large pile of chocolate chip cookies. A child had written a note, "Take all you want. God is watching the apples. ☺ Have a great summer! Jean LaJesse – jlajesse@crookston.org