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HARVEST TIME is rooted in the Biblical vision of economic justice which calls us to harvest God's abundant creation in such a way that everyone has enough.

Through a variety of avenues, Harvest Time supports Christians of unusual wealth as they move into deeper freedom so that their personal resources become instruments of God's love and justice.

Harvest Time is partnered with over 25 grassroots ministries in political and economic "war zones" in Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo, Iraq, and Washington, DC. Wealthy Christians in the Harvest Time network are invited to invest their lives and resources in these partnerships. Harvest Time's primary mission, however, is to encourage wealthy Christians to freely and joyfully respond with their lives and money according to the leading of God's Spirit—within or beyond Harvest Time's own efforts to stand in economic solidarity with the poorest of the poor.

Exploring the Difference Between Philanthropy and Discipleship

Rosemary Feerick, Don McClanen, & Bryan Sirchio

For slightly over five years now, Harvest Time staff and friends have been meeting, conversing, praying, writing, and living our way into what we hope is a deeper understanding of biblical truth regarding economic justice and equality. We have done our best to read and process the work of theologians and biblical scholars who are regarded as experts on scripture and economics. We have conducted in-depth interviews with a few wealthy Christians God has blessed us to know. We have listened deeply to the perspectives and insights of our Christian brothers and sisters who are among the most materially destitute in the western hemisphere. In short, we have been crying out to God for some clarity and fresh understanding as to why the gap between the rich and the poor in this world is widening, why this gap often exists within and among Christian organizations and structures, and why Christian individuals and communities seem to be so consistently missing the mark when it comes to getting to the heart of the problem regarding wealth distribution and biblical justice.

There is some kind of profound and fundamental disconnect going on in Christian circles when it comes to money and biblical truth with regard

to wealth, poverty, and the just use and distribution of resources. This is certainly no new insight. But what we feel has been given to us as a ministry is a somewhat new way of framing the core issue. Specifically, the basic problem has something to do with the difference between philanthropy and discipleship. This is a tension we have been working with ever since Harvest Time came into being. We feel it is now time to try to share some of what we have learned about the differences between discipleship and philanthropy, and to invite others to enter more deeply into this conversation with us.

Moving From Philanthropy to Discipleship

As we begin this conversation, we want to be clear that we are in no way trying to put down philanthropists or philanthropic giving in general. The desire to share a portion of one's wealth, however large or small, is a wonderful thing. The world needs philanthropists. We are aware also of some exciting new developments among certain circles of philanthropists to connect spirituality and justice with philanthropic giving. We applaud these developments and stand in solidarity with these efforts. And yet, there are specific questions and mandates and challenges which

Nurturing a new breed of rich rulers not turning away sadly (Mark 10:22), but turning to Jesus with rejoicing and hilarious generosity.

lay a claim to the lives and resources of biblically based Christians which philanthropists are not necessarily called to hear, let alone implement.

At The Heart of the Matter – Relationship with Jesus Christ

Christian discipleship is first and foremost about accepting the invitation of Jesus to “follow me.” It is an individual’s response – with his or her whole life – to an encounter with Jesus Christ. An intimate relationship with the risen Christ is at the heart of the matter. Without that ongoing relationship, discipleship, especially among the wealthy, is impossible. As Mark’s Gospel puts it, “It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of God... For human beings it is impossible, but not for God.” (Mark 10:25, 27). Wealthy Christians who desire to follow Jesus, therefore, must be thoroughly rooted in their relationship with God. This relationship needs to be watered and nurtured by spiritual disciplines such as prayer, silence, retreat, and in-depth relationship with other believers. It also needs to be informed by scripture so that Christians understand who Jesus of Nazareth was, what his life was all about, why he was killed, and the power of the resurrection.

Moving From Charity to Justice for the Poor

When we pay close attention to Jesus’ life and to the whole of scripture, we find that following Jesus means making the concerns

of the poor our own. Most Christians have little difficulty accepting that discipleship involves concern for the poor expressed in works of mercy or charity. But wealthy Christians easily overlook the fact that in addition to responding to the symptoms of injustice (such as hunger, thirst, exclusion from society), Jesus challenged the causes of injustice, including unjust economic structures and human greed which result in wealth accumulation in the hands of a few (cf. John 2:13-16; Luke 16:19-31). Indeed, Jesus’ reading from Isaiah in Luke 4 at the beginning of his public ministry, recalls the Jubilee Year (Leviticus 25) – the biblical economic practice of canceling debts and returning property to its original owners every fiftieth year.

Those who follow Jesus, in other words, are called to follow his example of pursuing justice for the poor and most vulnerable members of society. This is what Vatican II and subsequent liberation theologians were highlighting when they declared that scripture calls Christians to embrace a “preferential option for the poor.” This does not mean that God loves the poor more than the wealthy. It means that God wants all persons to live with dignity and justice, and to enjoy the fullness of God’s creation. When extreme economic inequality exists, and especially when this inequality is the result of unjust human-made systems and human made conditions of scarcity, the needs of the poor make a claim on the abundance to which wealthy Christian brothers and sisters have access. As Paul writes, “As a matter of equality, your surplus at the present time should supply

their needs, so that their surplus may also supply your needs, that there may be equality. As it is written: ‘Whoever had much did not have more, and whoever had little did not have less.’” (2 Corinthians 8:13-15). One of our friends in Haiti put it this way:

“We Christians do not give our wealth to others, we share it, because we realize that as Christians we do not own anything – all that we have was given to us by God, and all that has been entrusted to us actually belongs to God. So we don’t give anything – we share on God’s behalf.”

This means that wealthy persons who are called to discipleship must go beyond traditional notions of tithing (10% for example) and share extravagantly and perhaps even sacrificially so that those in desperate need can simply have enough to live with dignity and hope. This means that the sharing of a wealthy disciple is not guided simply by what the individual likes or feels good about supporting. It is guided by the pressing needs of others which lay claim to our abundance.

The Centrality of Call

Of course the “pressing needs of others” are so great and widespread in this broken world that no Christian individual or community can possibly respond to them all. This is why the notion of “call” is central. Disciples of Jesus are called to prayerfully discern, as individuals and communities, what smaller piece of God’s dream for the world we have been specifically called by God to help carry with our lives and our resources. Focusing on the freedom

and joy of discerning and responding to call is what keeps disciples from becoming overwhelmed or burned out, and enables us to enjoy the amazing adventure of passionately giving our lives, resources, and best and most focused energy to the specific work to which we have been called.

When disciples are focused on discerning and responding to the call of Jesus, then we realize that there is no “one size fits all” response to Christ when it comes to how we share our material wealth. This frees us from unhealthy forms of guilt. We are not all called to do the same thing. We are called to use our unique God-given gifts and personalities and abilities to bring new ministries into being, or to support existing programs in new ways. As Paul writes, “There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service, but the same Lord; there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit.” (1Corinthians 12: 4-7).

Discipleship is first and foremost about relationship with Jesus, and response to God’s call – not a program. Embracing this truth frees us to accept the possibility that while some disciples may be called to divest themselves of their wealth, others may genuinely be called to live with ongoing access to unusual material wealth, as long as this wealth is placed at the service of the Gospel. In the early church, for example, there were those who were wealthy but whose homes became

the meeting place of the early church and who shared with those in need (cf. Philemon 1:2; Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-34). In our own time, there are Christians who are called to oversee (steward) foundations through which their resources are faithfully redistributed according to God’s call. There are also disciples who are called to the market place, and who do business according to biblical principles, and who use the wealth generated by their enterprises to fund works which support the needs of the poor and the most vulnerable. There are many questions to be asked by Christians in business regarding how profits are made and whether or not the systems and parameters of the markets in which they participate are just.¹ Disciples who are called to live out their ministry in the market place are called to wrestle faithfully with these questions.

A Journey to the Cross

Those who accept Jesus’ invitation to discipleship find that following Jesus leads to the cross. As Jesus said, “If the world hates you, realize that it hated me first.” (John 15:18). As Theologian Doug Meeks put it during his recent keynote address at a retreat on “Money, Faith, and Possessions” at the Montreat Conference Center in Montreat, North Carolina;

“If we want to understand one of the main reasons why Jesus wound up on the cross, we need only to follow the money.”

In other words, disciples are called in one way or another to clash with the powers of oppres-

sion and injustice in the context of an ongoing relationship with the God whose grace is present in the midst of horror and pain. Some of these “clashes” are dramatic and obvious and costly. Oscar Romero, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Martin Luther King, Jr. come to mind. Other manifestations of the cross may be more subtle, less visible, but still quite painful – such as the loss of a relationship, or being regarded as less viable or trustworthy in a given area of endeavor. Christians who truly long to follow Jesus when it comes to the intersection of faith and money are called to ask questions and make choices which may cause us to lose income, prestige, potential positions and promotions, to become less popular or unwelcome in certain circles, to be regarded with suspicion or disdain among family members and loved ones, or to lose access to the wealth they once considered to be their own.

Disciples are also called to journey into the shadow within. Since wealth accumulation and misuse are often ways of avoiding feelings of inadequacy, restlessness, or loneliness, disciples need to be willing to feel and process their own internal pain as a way of uprooting addictive patterns that stem from an inability to love the parts of ourselves we prefer to deny.

Having said all this, we want to be clear that we do not believe that disciples are called to choose suffering for the sake of suffering. Disciples are called to choose life and love (Deuteronomy 30:19). But the reality is that doing so in a world that is not fundamentally rooted in God’s love leads to

¹See for instance, the US Catholic Bishops’ Pastoral Letter, [Economic Justice For All](#) (Washington, DC: National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1986) and/or Jubilee Economics Ministry’s pamphlet, “Portfolio Profits” available at www.jubilee4justice.org

clashes with that which is not life and often involves pain. The good news is that disciples are given the courage to touch and be touched by the suffering which comes as a result of boldly choosing love and biblical justice in a sinful world. This courage comes to us through our own direct experience of God's presence, and through the grace given in Christian community.

Questions Disciples Ask

One of the basic problems, as we see it, is that many Christians do not recognize a difference between philanthropic giving and the biblical concept of "stewardship." Theologian Doug Meeks articulated this brilliantly during his address at Montreat, North Carolina;

"...The way stewardship is practiced in most of our 'old line' churches in North America often has little to do with the Bible. It stems primarily from the most influential American theologian, Andrew Carnegie. Carnegie taught us that the process of producing wealth is determined by inexorable natural laws such as the laws of 'tooth and fang' and the survival of the fittest. These laws determine the acquisition of wealth and fully justify the discrepancy of wealth between rich and poor. Property extraction, production, and markets operate according to fixed natural laws. The Christian religion, Carnegie maintained, becomes pertinent only after production has run its course, money has been made, and money has been reinvested. Only then can Christianity enter the scene to help us successfully

figure out how to disperse our surplus money prudentially.

Carnegie even provided the rules for distributing surplus money; it should be given only to the deserving poor, and only to those who will support the system under which the wealth was produced in the first place. In other words, Carnegie said that Christian faith has to do with charity, and charity does not extend to the questions of economics. Thus we have the basic understanding of stewardship in most old line and many new churches in North America—the voluntary giving of leftover money and time. Our stewardship programs usually take place... when people are fairly certain about how their stock portfolio has done for the year, and then we try to raise a small portion of our leftover money. The Stewardship Commission of the National Council of Churches (which no longer exists) studied this carefully, and said that during the 20th century, average giving among mainline Protestants in North America was 1.7%... So... if we use American philanthropy in the Church we can usually get, although it's becoming more difficult, about 1.7%. This is a lot of money, and it's nothing to sneeze at. But American philanthropy is not biblical stewardship."

As stated previously, we have no desire to in any way diminish the importance of philanthropic giving. But there are questions which disciples are called to ask and respond to which philanthropists do not necessarily choose to raise. Some of these questions include the following;

- What does the Bible say about sharing, money, and justice for the poor?
- How much is left over after I've done my giving?
- How much is enough? How much do I really need to keep for myself and my family?
- Do my children really need the money I want to give them? Do others need it more?
- What am I addicted to (spending, shopping, success, luxury, power, control)? Do these addictions truly satisfy me?
- Where does my money come from? How do I benefit from systems that oppress others?
- What kind of seeds are my investments sowing in the world?
- How can I use my wealth and my position to work for justice for the most vulnerable?
- What is the spirit in which I give? Do I give as God gives or according to my culture's values?
- Am I open to receiving? What do others have that I need?

Why We Walk Away Sad

It should be said of course that many of us who consider ourselves to be Christians do not ask questions such as those just listed either, and this is where the "disconnect" alluded to earlier is

so striking. In many ways the entire point of this article is that most Christian individuals and communities approach the money we have access to more as philanthropists (if that) than as disciples. And so we must ask ourselves why this is the case. Or to pose the question in another way, why do Christians, and especially wealthy Christians, so often walk away from Jesus' invitation to become his disciples, especially when it comes to how we use money in conjunction with our faith? We certainly do not claim to have all the answers, but the following 10 responses have emerged as we have worked with this question:

- **We don't trust God.** We don't really believe in God, or that God will "secure us." We trust our safety nets more than God.
- **Incomplete/poor biblical interpretation skills. We don't know what the bible says about money. We don't know who Jesus is.** Somehow we are able to read the Bible without taking seriously the overwhelming literature on economics and justice for the poor. We believe in Christ, but our understanding of who Jesus was and why he was a threat to the political and religious establishment is weak.
- **Lack of spiritual community.** We don't know other Christians who are trying to get real about discipleship.
- **Lack of spiritual disciplines.** Daily prayer, journaling, regular retreats, and Sabbath

are essential. We can want to do it, but without a commitment to spiritual disciplines – forget it.

- **We think it's about feeling good.** People misunderstand Christianity to be about feeling good. We don't have a spirituality that holds fast to God in the midst of suffering. When things get tough, we return to familiar patterns of behavior that feel safe.
- **We are overly focused on "me."** We all obviously need to do our work in terms of coming to a healthy self-image and healthy sense of being loved. But for Christians, this is about loving ourselves for God's sake – not about ego worship. We love ourselves so that we can then be offered to the world as the unique gift that each of us is.
- **Our sense of community is too narrow.** We are overly focused on "my family" or "my friends" or "my country" to the extent that we fail to see ourselves as connected to the "world community" and human family and household of God.
- **Lack of proximity to the poor.** In order for "the poor" to be a part of who we feel connected to, we need to be in relationship with people who are poor. In other words, "the poor" need to move from being "them" to being "us," and from being "the poor" to "my friends/brothers/sisters."
- **The power of the culture.** The dominant values of our

culture are seductive, addictive, and everywhere we look. From a Christian perspective much of what we are bombarded with is antithetical to biblical truth, but we take it in like the air we breathe without questioning whether what the culture says will bring security and satisfaction actually does.

- **We are too much in our heads.** Knowing what God is calling us to does not mean we are free to actually do it. The journey needs to involve our hearts, our bodies, and our senses of humor.

Extravagant Love

So far, the purpose of this article has been to be as clear as we can about the challenge of discipleship, as far as we understand it. We have tried to highlight some of what we understand to be the key marks of discipleship, and how these marks differ from traditional notions of philanthropic giving. We hope this has been helpful, and that it will provoke responses and generate discussion in wider circles. It is not our desire to somehow declare ourselves to be "the teachers" regarding this complex area of discipleship. More than anything, we want to deepen and focus the discussion about what it means for persons with access to exceptional wealth to truly be disciples of Jesus.

We are aware that some of what we have just written may leave our readers feeling angry, overwhelmed, or condemned. At this point, we want to pause and recall the verse in the story of the rich ruler that is easily over-

looked: “Jesus, looking at him, loved him. . .” (Mark 10:21). One of the primary gifts we believe God has given this ministry – in addition to this question about the difference between philanthropy and discipleship – is a very deep sense of the context in which this conversation needs to take place, namely, in an atmosphere of extravagant love. We are aware that when we get into the conversation about wealth, many of us end up sounding a lot more like Judas in John 12 – who criticizes Mary of Bethany’s extravagant gift to Jesus – than like Jesus.

We want to be clear, therefore, that our intention is not to condemn or judge our wealthy Christian friends. Instead, we hope to enter into conversation and relationship with other wealthy Christians who are trying to get real about what it means to follow Jesus. We are aware that the journey is “messy” and that it stirs up powerful emotions. We hope you feel free to share those responses with us, trusting that we want you to be who and where you really are. No one lives out their discipleship perfectly. Behind Jesus, we are all sinners in need of God’s grace. Indeed, shortly after Jesus’ encounter with the rich ruler, two of his closest friends ask him to settle an argument rooted in their lust for power (Mark 10:35-45). That said, we believe that the grace of God is received most powerfully when we let ourselves be known and loved as we really are. Our experience at Harvest Time has been that people become freer at the point of their wealth when they realize that the loving gaze of Christ is offered whether or not

they “do the right thing” with their money.

Examples of Wealthy Disciples: Tom White and Millard Fuller

One of the most powerful ways we recognize that loving gaze is through the eyes of our friends. Harvest Time is called, among other things, to try to help wealthy Christians find and encourage each other to follow Jesus with greater enthusiasm. As scholar and activist Ched Myers taught at a workshop recently, “The first duty of discipleship is to encourage one another.” And so we’d like to end this article by sharing the encouraging and inspiring examples of a couple of rather well known disciples who have recently entered into a friendship of mutual encouragement through Harvest Time’s network. These two individuals have spent their lives trying to embody the principles of discipleship which we have articulated in this article. They have deliberately chosen to be disciples of Jesus Christ rather than Christian philanthropists.

Both Tom White and Millard Fuller would be the first to caution us against somehow lifting them up as heroes or prototypes of what a Christian disciple “should be,” and we also understand the limits and in some ways the danger of using the lives of well known and “successful” individuals as the “model” for discipleship. So please understand that we are not attempting to do this. We simply want to put some flesh on the concepts we have been underscoring, and show how a couple of wealthy guys have tried to live out their discipleship in the

so-called “real world.” Tom White (copies of an in-depth interview conducted by Harvest Time staff with Tom White are available upon request), made his multi-millions by running a construction company in Boston. His spiritual journey deepened profoundly in early adulthood, primarily through the influence of some Jesuit priests with whom he went on a series of spiritual retreats. Eventually, Tom became good friends with a young doctor named Paul Farmer, and learned of Paul’s medical work among the poorest of the poor in rural Haiti. After visiting Haiti and getting to know Paul, Tom’s eyes were opened in a whole new way to the suffering of the poor, and he began to study and personally understand the biblical “option for the poor.” While Tom has given away large sums of money to many different charities and ministries, Tom experienced a sense of call to see that the vast majority of the wealth he had access to would be focused on underwriting Paul’s work in Haiti. The development of this work is now documented in a new book called *Mountains Beyond Mountains* about Paul Farmer’s life written by Pulitzer Prize winning author Tracey Kidder. We highly recommend this book. In it, you will learn how God used Tom White and the wealth he stewarded to establish a state of the art medical facility for some of the world’s poorest persons, and how this work enabled Dr. Farmer to make some breakthrough discoveries about how to treat TB and AIDS among the poor. Dr. Farmer’s insights have now led to work in Peru, Russia and Africa, and God only knows how significantly this brilliant doctor’s work will wind

up changing the notion of what kind of health care is possible to offer to the poorest of the poor throughout the world. But our point in sharing this aspect of Tom's story with you is this – Dr. Farmer's work would not have been possible unless Tom White became a disciple of Jesus and therefore free to give away millions and millions of dollars to where it was needed most. Tom, who is now 84 years old, has given away close to 80 million dollars in response to the suffering of the poor. In the spirit of the Widow's Mite (Luke 21:1-4), we realize that it is not how much one gives away that God is most concerned with – it is how much one has kept that somehow seems to catch the attention of Jesus. Tom's goal has been to divest himself of most of the wealth he has had access to in response to Jesus' call, and to hold onto only a relatively small portion which he has felt called to maintain to take care of his immediate family members if he passes away before they do. If you had a chance to meet Tom, you would get a deep sense of the joy, the spirit of adventure, the sense of humor, and the twinkle in his eye which is all a delightful part of his glad response to Jesus' invitation to discipleship. As Tom wrote in a brief letter to Harvest Time director Don McClanen in which he thanked Don for introducing him to Millard Fuller,

“Millard and I had a great time talking about some of the things we have been involved with and also in comparing notes on motivation. Our motivation was exactly the same – just using the gifts that we were given, namely, a gift of compassion and a knack



Tom White (left) and Millard Fuller (right) meeting together in Boston, Massachusetts, June 2004.

for successfully running a large business. Jesus was and is our model and our example. The bottom line was that we were both extremely fortunate, that we loved what we did, and that we would do it the same way all over again. I really can't remember anytime when I immediately liked and enjoyed someone so quickly. Millard has a great sense of humor, he is full of energy, and a delightful person to be with...he could be one of the very few people whom I consider my heroes.”

Most of you are probably familiar with Millard Fuller and the organization he founded, Habitat For Humanity. But you may not know the story behind this organization. To sum it up concisely, Millard was a very successful and wealthy businessman at an early age. His entrepreneurial skills emerged during college, and developed into a multi-million dollar

mail order business. He had diversified wealth and had amassed quite a fortune when he finally “heard” Jesus' invitation to become a disciple. In response, Millard and his wife, Linda, chose almost immediately to give their entire fortune away, and to seek God's guidance and call upon their lives. After studying with and learning from Clarence Jordan at Koinonia Farms in Americus, Georgia, Millard felt called by God to give his entire life and all his abilities to establishing a new way of providing shelter for the poor. Habitat For Humanity came into being, and has expanded throughout the world as a result, providing affordable housing in a dignified way for hundreds of thousands of families. Again, the point is not for us to be impressed by the success and scope of the work. The point is that Millard represents another example of a disciple who, in re-

response to Jesus' invitation to become a disciple, gave his life first, and all of his gifts and talents and resources to the service of the poor for the sake of the Gospel. Anyone who has ever met Millard or heard him speak quickly senses the joy, adventure, passion, and enthusiasm which characterizes his glad response to Jesus. As Millard wrote also in a letter of thanks to Don McClanen for introducing him to Tom White:

"Let me tell you again that it was just fantastic to meet Tom White. He is absolutely one of the greatest human beings in our country today. Thanks again for making that meeting possible... the work you are doing ...is so very important."

What a joy it is to be able to encourage each other, to help disciples find each other, build each other up, and be reminded that even among the wealthiest of the wealthy God's Spirit is issuing new invitations, changing hearts, sounding new calls, and building bridges between the resources of the wealthy and the needs of the poor. We hope and pray that this article is an encouragement to you, and that you hear our invitation to join us in this conversation, and that together, we can help each other step more deeply into the adventure of Christian discipleship.



If you would like to continue this conversation, request a brochure, or be included in future mailings, please feel free to contact Rose, Don, or Bryan.

UPCOMING EVENTS

"Hungering for God in an Affluent Culture"

Oct. 29—31, 2004

Retreat at Wellspring,
Germantown, MD

With Arthur Simon, founder of
Bread for the World.

Co-sponsored by Harvest Time
and Ministry of Money.

Contact Harvest Time for details.



"Creating Community Along the Narrow Path"

November 19-21, 2004

Wellspring, Germantown MD

February 11-13, 2005

Location to be determined.

These gatherings are opportunities for persons of exceptional wealth to get to know each other and Harvest Time staff in order to nurture a growing network of support and spiritual companionship as we strive to become more faithful disciples. Gatherings revolve around honest sharing about where we are with Jesus and money in an atmosphere of compassion and love. They also incorporate times of prayer, Scripture reading, silence, and music.

Some questions we focus on include:

- Where are you with God at this point in your money journey?
- Which of Jesus' economic challenges are stirring in your heart?
- How do you long to respond to Jesus and to the suffering of the world with your wealth?
- What is keeping you from responding more deeply?
- How have you experienced God's extravagant love?

For more information, please contact Rose Feerick at 408-264-3039.



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"The one who had gathered a large amount did not have too much, and the one who had gathered a small amount did not have too little. They so gathered that everyone had enough to eat." Exodus 16:18