

Trinity Tidings
Finance Committee Article
April, 2017

Self-sufficient. Really? Part 1 of 2

Greetings Trinity Members and Friends,

The Finance Committee is contributing a brief series (2 parts) about handling our finances in accordance with biblical direction. There is an abundance of scriptural witness about finances in the Bible. But, we are zeroing in on what it really means to be financially “self-sufficient” in our faith walk with Christ.

I know I have a tendency to box myself in to the culture in which I was raised. As I go about my daily routine, driving to work, pumping out a product so I can continue to receive a paycheck, paying bills, picking up the kids at school, zooming off to a meeting or extracurricular activity, etc., I forget about those that do not have this luxury in our country and in the rest of the world – those that do not have a car, a job, a paycheck, who still face mounting bills, whose children are hungry. I recently ran across an article written by Scott Dannemiller and published on the website [www.tosavealife.com](http://tosavealife.com) (<http://tosavealife.com/relationships/the-one-thing-christians-should-stop-saying/>) that spoke volumes to me and I would like to share it with you.

“The One Thing Christians Should Stop Saying

Let’s retire this phrase immediately, and say what we really mean to say instead.

I was on the phone with a good friend the other day. After covering important topics, like disparaging each other’s mothers and retelling semi-factual tales from our college days, our conversation turned to the mundane. ‘So, how’s work going?’ he asked. For those of you who don’t know, I make money by teaching leadership skills and helping people learn to get along in corporate America. My wife says it’s all a clever disguise so I can get up in front of large groups and tell stories. I plead the fifth.

I answered my buddy’s question with, ‘Definitely feeling blessed. Last year was the best year yet for my business. And it looks like this year will be just as busy.’ The words rolled off my tongue without a second thought. Like reciting the Pledge of Allegiance or placing my usual lunch order at McDonald’s. But it was a lie.

Now, before you start taking up a collection for the ‘Feed the Dannemillers’ fund, allow me to explain. Based on last year’s quest to go twelve months without buying anything, you may have the impression that our family is subsisting on Ramen noodles and free chips and salsa at the local Mexican restaurant. Not to worry, we are not in dire straits. Last year was the best year yet for my business. But that is not a blessing. I’ve noticed a trend among Christians, myself included, and it troubles me. Our rote response to material windfalls is to call ourselves blessed. Like the ‘amen’ at the end of a prayer.

'This new car is such a blessing.'

'Finally closed on the house. Feeling blessed.'

'Just got back from a mission trip. Realizing how blessed we are here in this country.'

On the surface, the phrase seems harmless. Faithful even. Why wouldn't I want to give God the glory for everything I have? Isn't that the right thing to do? No.

As I reflected on my 'feeling blessed' comment, two thoughts came to mind. I realize I'm splitting hairs here, creating an argument over semantics. But bear with me, because I believe it is critically important. It's one of those things we can't see because it's so culturally engrained that it has become normal. But it has to stop. And here's why. First, when I say that my material fortune is the result of God's blessing, it reduces The Almighty to some sort of sky-bound, wish-granting fairy who spends his days randomly bestowing cars and cash upon his followers. I can't help but draw parallels to how I handed out M&M's to my own kids when they followed my directions and chose to poop in the toilet rather than in their pants. Sure, God wants us to continually seek His will, and it's for our own good. But positive reinforcement? God is not a behavioral psychologist.

Second, and more importantly, calling myself blessed because of material good fortune is just plain wrong. For starters, it can be offensive to the hundreds of millions of Christians in the world who live on less than \$1 per day. You read that right. Hundreds of millions who receive a single-digit dollar 'blessing' per day. During our year in Guatemala, Gabby and I witnessed firsthand the damage done by the theology of prosperity, where faithful people scraping by to feed their families were simply told they must not be faithful enough. If they were, God would pull them out of their nightmare. Just try harder, and God will show favor. The problem? Nowhere in scripture are we promised worldly ease in return for our pledge of faith. In fact, the most devout saints from the Bible usually died penniless, receiving a one-way ticket to prison or death by torture. I'll take door number three, please.

If we're looking for the definition of blessing, Jesus spells it out clearly (Matthew 5: 1-12).

1 Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to Him,

2 And He began to teach them, saying:

3 Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

5 Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they will be filled.

7 Blessed are the merciful, for they shall be shown mercy.

8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the sons of God.

10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.

12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

I have a sneaking suspicion verses 12a 12b and 12c were omitted from the text. That's where the disciples responded by saying: 12a Waitest thou for one second, Lord. What about 'blessed art thou comfortable,' or 12b 'blessed art thou which havest good jobs, a modest house in the suburbs, and a yearly vacation to the Florida Gulf Coast?' 12c And Jesus said unto them, 'Apologies, my brothers, but those did not maketh the cut.'

So there it is. Written in red. Plain as day. Even still, we ignore it all when we hijack the word 'blessed' to make it fit neatly into our modern American ideals, creating a cosmic lottery where every sincere prayer buys us another scratch-off ticket. In the process, we stand the risk of alienating those we are hoping to bring to the faith. And we have to stop playing that game. The truth is, I have no idea why I was born where I was or why I have the opportunity I have. It's beyond comprehension. But I certainly don't believe God has chosen me above others because of the veracity of my prayers or the depth of my faith. Still, if I take advantage of the opportunities set before me, a comfortable lifemay come my way. It's not guaranteed. But if it does happen, I don't believe Jesus will call me blessed. He will call me 'burdened.' He will ask,

'What will you do with it?'
'Will you use it for yourself?'
'Will you use it to help?'
'Will you hold it close for comfort?'
'Will you share it?'

So many hard choices. So few easy answers. So my prayer today is that I understand my true blessing. It's not my house. Or my job. Or my standard of living. No. My blessing is this. I know a God who gives hope to the hopeless. I know a God who loves the unlovable. I know a God who comforts the sorrowful. And I know a God who has planted this same power within me. Within all of us. And for this blessing, may our response always be,

'Use me.'

Since I had this conversation, my new response is simply, 'I'm grateful.' Would love to hear your thoughts."

Stay tuned to next month's newsletter for Part 2 where we'll talk about 2 Corinthians 9:6-8 and continue our topic of being financially "self-sufficient" in Christ.

In Christ,
Mary Pace