



# Current Thoughts

*From Dwight's Corner*

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## Symptoms of Spiritual Health

Worries about a war with Iraq and the stumbling economy compete for top billing. In many churches, finances are the most pressing concern. Unfortunately, this concern over finances often displaces the legitimate focus of the church, which is mission and ministry-not financial survival. Furthermore, I am persuaded that the financial state of a church is not so much a reflection of the economy as it is a symptom of spiritual health.

Because God is a God of fruitfulness, God does not call us to tasks that lead us down the frustrating path of futility. When God calls a church to mission and ministry, God has already identified the resources (including but not limited to the finances) needed to be fruitful. Churches that faithfully and persistently seek out and invest resources in God-given mission and ministry always find they have enough resources.

No doubt, some will challenge that idea. But there are two important parts of it that cannot be ignored. First, it is God's call to mission and ministry-not our ideas and desires. Churches always need to be about learning what work God is inviting us to share in. Too often we decide what it is that we want to do, and then demand that God bless it. Especially when resources are strained, churches need to prayerfully ask: "Are we doing what God wants us to do?" Churches that are not engaged in God's mission and ministry will never have enough resources.

Second, the idea has a human side. While God has identified resources as part the call, we must discover and invest those resources. Passively waiting for "God to provide" (so we can ultimately blame it on God) is not submissive spirituality, it is faithless avoidance. It is faithless because we really do not believe that God is the source of everything we have, and therefore has first claim on it. It is faithless because we choose not discover what resources God has set among us. It is faithless we will not risk investing those resources in God's Kingdom.

Church budgets are not about money-raising or institutional survival. Church budgets are public declarations of how we partner with God through our financial resources. Church budgets are statements of priorities we have discerned in God's call to mission and ministry for us in this time and place. Church budgets are pictures of our faithfulness.

Neither are stewardship programs about "making the budget." Stewardship programs are about discerning God's call to mission and ministry. Stewardship programs are about discovering the resources that God has given. Stewardship programs are about developing faithfulness by investing my resources (time, talent, and treasure) in God's business.

What is the evidence of spiritual health in your church?

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