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HAPPY NOTES *at home*

for the Vineyard Church family



Crisis = Danger + Opportunity

by Happy Leman

Introduction

The news of the past few weeks has been dominated by the bailout of Wall Street, banking firms, and the economic crisis facing this nation. Yu-Yu Lee, our international pastor, told me the Chinese character for "crisis" is "danger + opportunity."

危機 危机

Over the past few weeks, politicians have focused on the danger portion of the crisis. It has created a wave of fear and anxiety across our country. What is going to happen to our retirement savings? Are our bank accounts safe? What about those of us who are nearing retirement, or are retired? Many people are asking "Will we be able to pay our bills or sell our homes? Will we be able to find work?" The basic message is that if we don't bail out Wall Street, the sky will fall.

A Different View

Consider with me how the Chinese character for crisis is danger plus opportunity. As Christians, Jesus Christ is the anchor for our soul, not the economy. Our lives are built on something more solid than the American economy. Thus, we are always looking for the opportunity to represent that Kingdom, even during economic crisis.

Today I see at least 4 opportunities that stand before us.

An Opportunity for the Gospel

Anytime our self-sufficiency, well-laid plans, and great dreams are disrupted, cracks begin showing in our armor. That is when people begin looking beyond themselves and their own resources. This crisis is an absolutely perfect opportunity for the promotion of the gospel of Jesus Christ. After all, most of us cry for help only when our own resources fail.

An Opportunity for the Church

If the bottom drops out, we Americans are going to need help keeping our heads above water. When you're healthy, happy, and prospering, you can go it alone. But when times are tough - you get cancer, go through a divorce, or lose your job - you realize your absolute need to be connected to other people.

The one institution that has been here through everything for the last 2,000 years is the Church of Jesus Christ. The church has stood through wars, depressions, earthquakes, fires, plagues, invasions, and persecutions. Jesus said in **Matthew 16:18 "On this rock, I will build my church and the gates of hell will not overcome it."**

This economic crisis is an opportunity for the church to say to this country "We do not have to go through this alone. We can go through this together. We are here for you and we are not going anywhere."

An Opportunity for Reevaluating Our Own Priorities

This crisis provides an opportunity for self-reflection. We each have a time now to be honest about ourselves and honest with God. What do we really value in our heart of hearts? Here's a way to test that: When you feel nervous financially, when your income goes down or you fear it might go down, what is the first thing you cut out of your budget?

Do you cut your lifestyle? Do you cut back on eating out and getting daily lattes at Starbucks? Do you cut out cable TV, an upcoming vacation, or even buying that new winter coat? Or is giving to the church the first thing that you cut back on?

Let me speak honestly. As a pastor here at the Vineyard, I've seen our income fall 15-20% over the last 3 months. (My pastor friends around this community and throughout the nation are seeing roughly the same thing.) When I see this, I think to myself "You know we still have a lot of work to do discipling the people here at this Vineyard church." Thus, during the crisis, I encourage all of us to say "I will cut my budget elsewhere, but I will not cut back on my giving to the Lord - He is my source and my solution."

If you have cut back on your giving in recent months, I encourage you during this crisis to step up to the plate and declare what you believe. If you aren't or haven't given recently, this is an opportunity to evaluate your self and ask "What do I really believe about Jesus, the promotion of the gospel, and my church?" Since Jesus is first in our lives, we as a Vineyard family ALL need to shoulder the burden by giving of our financial resources. That will make the load bearable.

I trust our Vineyard family will say, "We will cut our lifestyle but we will not cut our giving to the Lord."

An Opportunity for Reexamining the Purpose of Life

It may be that \$700 billion is the cost of the pill we need to swallow to pep up our economy. But I would suggest we will be right back where we are or even worse unless we Americans pay attention to God's wisdom regarding the purpose for life. God's wisdom is seen clearly in **Matthew 6:31-33**, **"So don't worry about these things, saying, 'What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?' These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need."**

If we continue to believe as a country that the purpose of life is to accumulate as many possessions as we possibly can, then \$700 billion is not nearly enough to bail us out. No, it's time to return to our number one purpose: to pursue Jesus Christ with our whole body, soul, mind and spirit. He alone is the apple of our eye.

Some Actions We are Taking

Our new fiscal year started September 1. Since September 1, we are approximately \$100,000 behind budget (\$540,000). As a result we are taking some major steps to address the issue.

1. We are instituting a 9:00-9:15 prayer meeting in CenterStage open to anyone. Other prayer times are also available (call the office at 384-3070).
2. We are instituting an immediate church-wide spending freeze and cost reduction program.
3. We are taking a critical look at staffing and other budget issues.

Our goal is to maintain our giving to the poor, church planting, and missions work at the same proportion that we have been doing all along. We believe God wants us to keep and continue this focus.

If anyone has any specific insights, we would love to hear them. In the meantime, keep praying, keep giving, and keep your eyes open for opportunities to share the gospel.

*Happy Notes at Home are a monthly reflection of community life at The Vineyard Church
and are produced by Happy Leman.*