

MESSENGER STUDYGUIDE

Food for thought, questions for discussion, and activities to help individuals, classes, and small groups use Messenger as a focus for study and reflection.

March 2006

Food for Thought: An Overview of the Issue

The March cover story by Donald B. Kraybill and Kathryn Eisenbise asks “**Do Brethren Have Anything to Say to a Postmodern World?**” (pp. 8-11)

“**Learning the Delicate Dance of Stewardship**” by Roy E. Bronkema (pp. 12-13) also offers a list of resources for Christian stewardship.

In the **Bible study**, Chris Bowman reviews “2 Chronicles: Another Way of Looking” (pp. 18-19).

Activities: Connecting with the Content

Read Isaiah 40:6-8. **Research** what is meant by “postmodern.” Look up the word in a variety of places, including a recently published dictionary, a college or high school philosophy textbook, and the internet. **Compare** definitions or understandings of “postmodern” with that given by Kraybill and Eisenbise on pp. 8-11.

Read Matthew 25:14-30. **Assess the value** of your income and material assets by getting your net income from last year’s tax return, then adding the value of your major properties such as house, land, furniture, car, large appliances, etc. Now add to that number the amount of savings in your bank account and the value of any mutual funds, bonds, life insurance policies, pension accounts, etc. **Now assess the value** of what you give to the church by adding up your total giving of monetary donations last year, then adding in the value of the time that you gave last year as a volunteer for the church (figure out what an hour of your time is worth in terms of your pay or what someone in a comparable type of employment earns). Now add to that total the monetary value of other gifts you give to your congregation over the course of a year, such as potluck dishes, cards or flowers for the sick, materials for Sunday school classes, etc. Using these two totals, **figure the percentage** of your material assets that you give to the church in both time, money, and other gifts. Does this percentage surprise you? Why or why not? Does it mirror God’s generosity to you?

Read 2 Chronicles 1:10-12. **As a prayer discipline** this month, before going to sleep each night think about what kind of guidance you would like to ask from God for the next day. For example, as you anticipate the tasks of the next 24 hours, would you ask for wisdom, as Solomon did, or for more love, compassion for others, courage, endurance, patience, forbearance, grace, hope?

Questions for Discussion

1. Outline the differences between “modern” and “postmodern” society, as described by Kraybill and Eisenbise. What are the five “key contested questions,” according to the authors? Where do you stand personally on each of these contested questions?

2. Discuss the symbolic contrasts between the eras. What symbols to the authors lift up as emblematic of the shift from modern to postmodern (bottom of p. 9 to the top of p. 10)? In your own daily life, which of these symbolic objects have more meaning?

3. How is the Church of the Brethren aptly fitted for the postmodern world? Discuss the authors' answers on pp. 10-11, and then come up with answers of your own. Are there parts of the Church of the Brethren that are still more fitted to the modern world? If so, list these aspects of the church. Discuss how such aspects may move into the postmodern era, or what aspects may be lost in the move to a postmodern society.

4. Read Matthew 25:14-30 aloud. Take some time to discuss the story from the point of view of each person involved: the master, and each of the servants. With which character do you most identify? Why?

5. How is stewardship a “delicate dance,” as described by Bronkema? Why does the author claim that stewardship is about more than money?

6. What are the “bottom line principles” of Christian stewardship, according to Bronkema? How does your congregation encourage, or not encourage, its members to understand and fulfill these principles? How do you understand and fulfill these principles in your own life? For example, what gifts have you, and your congregation, been given by God? What return does God ask on those gifts? How does good stewardship please God and give us joy?

7. Why does Bowman assert that 2 Chronicles is an “alternate look at history”? For what other historical books of the Bible does 2 Chronicles serve as an alternative? What different perspective does 2 Chronicles offer?

8. What are the major events of 2 Chronicles? Read some of the passages from this book, that describe these events. How are these events reflections on history “after exile” for the Hebrew people? You may want to focus particularly on the stories of Hezekiah and Josiah reuniting the people and restoring worship in the temple (chapters 30 and 34-35).

9. Read aloud the key verses from 2 Chronicles listed at the bottom of p. 19. Make each of these a prayer, pausing in between each verse for a time of silence and reflection on how the verse speaks to your own life.

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