



May 2005

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.

Dancing Across The Economic Divide

About a month ago, I took my sons to see a children's choir from Africa at a church here in Silicon Valley. The performance began with African children running down the aisles and up onto the altar while singing songs of joy and hope. My sons responded instinctively as many other children did by running into the aisles and joining the dance. I was deeply moved as I watched children connecting across culture and economic lines through music.

Then they did the collection.

They set it up by showing a video which alternated photographs of children in Africa with horrifying statistics about the realities of AIDS and hunger. After the film, a series of people got up to pray and to talk about the good works happening through the sponsoring organization. They urged us to put money in the collection baskets. They suggested that some of us might even consider becoming partners for \$25 a month. I have no doubt that they raised a lot of money that night.

After that, the music continued.

I had a hard time entering into the second half of the performance. Something about the collection troubled me. I did not like the fact that in a Christian church no one dis-

played any familiarity with Jesus' economic challenges and what Saint Paul calls "the fair balance between our surplus and their current need." (2 Corinthians 8:14) I did not like the fact that no one had challenged our lifestyles. I know that if they had, I probably would have gotten defensive. But to stand in the face of such need and to ask for pocket change from some of the wealthiest people on the planet *in the name of Jesus* felt deeply offensive to me.

This newsletter is about asking the hard questions that they did not ask that night. It is about letting ourselves be bothered by the fact that people are hungry. It is about finding a way to rethink that word so many of us resist, "sacrifice." And it's about the good news of what happens when we say yes to Jesus and join the dance.

The questions that this newsletter raises are hard ones for those of who have wealth. While some of us are genuinely led and able to "give it all away" just like that, for most of us, the issues are complicated and the call is not clear. So how do we let the pressing needs of our brothers and sisters make a claim on us? How do we do that in a way that is free, just, and joyful?

There is no one answer to these questions. But in the Harvest Time

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

network there are many Christians who are wrestling with them authentically and faithfully. We would like to share with you three essays written by Harvest Time friends who are doing so in very different ways.

The first essay was written by John Engle, a long time friend of Harvest Time who has spent much of his adult life in Haiti. His essay challenges us to let the hunger of our brothers and sisters in Haiti make a claim on our lifestyles. In the second essay, Nancy Thurston shares her reflections on how giving sacrificially is helping her to step more deeply into community and God's abundance. The final essay is a playful meditation on Luke 12, written by a wealthy woman who found the freedom she needed to let go of one of her "storehouses" by writing herself into the story of the rich fool.

Though we realize that these essays raise some hard questions, we hope you can hear them as an expression of the "love that does not equivocate," as Ched Myers says. We deeply believe that responding to the pressing needs of our brothers and sisters is the path to joy. So we hope that reading these essays will challenge you to take whatever next step is right for you. And we hope they will inspire you to do so in the spirit of the dance.

"THEY JUST DON'T KNOW ANYONE WHO'S HUNGRY"
JOHN ENGLE

My wife and I were running errands in Hershey, Pennsylvania, where we're now living. It's been a year since we left Haiti – where Merline had lived her entire life and I'd spent ten of the last fourteen years. Given the radical shift in cultures, it's not surprising that we're frequently asked, "How's



John Engle at an Open Space meeting.

the adjustment going?"

As we drive toward the downtown area, I enjoy the beautiful landscape: the crisp blue sky behind rolling snow-covered farmland with Hotel Hershey sitting majestically atop a hill that overlooks our little town. Taking all this in each morning provides an inspirational charge that parallels the morning coffee buzz.

"I talked with Colette today," Merline says. I feel a sudden heaviness. It's always heavy when we talk about Colette, as it is when we discuss any of the dozen other close friends or family in Haiti with whom we're in touch weekly via telephone or e-mail.

"She's not too well. She's frequently hungry. She told me how she misses me. She remembers how I would always make sure she'd have a pate (small inexpensive pastry) every morning."

"Is she still with the same boyfriend?" I ask, hoping Colette has left the man who has been beating her.

"Yes. He pays her schooling. She feels like she doesn't have a choice."

Colette is 23 and hasn't given

up on trying to advance her education. But like two thirds of Port-au-Prince, she is unemployed – and no school is free in Haiti. She's way behind in school – in the equivalent of 7th grade. But in a country where only one of every four children completes primary school, you could say she's one of the lucky ones.

Colette ran away from home when she was 14, fleeing persistent hunger and a stepfather who was abusing her physically and sexually. She soon fell into a situation all too common for a young woman fending for herself in a big city: Two teen-age brothers invited her to stay with them, and she became a virtual sex slave to them. But she had a place to live and food to eat. Few things are considered worse in Haiti than being homeless where you are vulnerable to criminals and – worse – to evil spirits lurking in the night.

"I need to send her another check," Merline says.

"Yeah, that would be good." The \$50 we send Colette from time to time is not insignificant to us, given our limited income and expenses that have tripled since leaving Haiti. But I know it will be a life-saver for her.

A horn honks. "Look, there's Jim and Deb!" We enthusiastically return waves to friends in the car across the intersection from us. The light turns and we pull out. How can we not notice their SUV, a model that sells for about \$60,000? We can't get over the money many Americans spend on cars and other luxuries ranging from children's birthdays, to a night out, to clothes...

Merline's words sum up exactly what I'm thinking: "They're

good people. They just don't know anyone who's hungry."

Our poor Haitian neighbors, friends, and family in Haiti scrutinize Merline's and my visible expenditures. Sometimes I feel judged by this – but more often, I am grateful. Knowledge of this helps to steer our money decisions. I know some folks feel judged by me, especially when I write articles like this. But we "haves" cannot escape the judgment history will assign us for living amid unprecedented wealth while the vast majority of the world's population lives in squalor.

If Merline and I lose our regular contact with people like Colette, we know we'll be completely swept away by the American materialistic-consumer driven culture. And I believe we'll also lose a part of our humanity. How can we accept this folly of trying to find meaning by accumulating more and more things – terribly expensive things – while billions suffer the daily violence of poverty?

The currents of our materialistic culture are swift and strong. As we who have more than we need struggle against this tide, it's the Colette's of the world who can help us discover more deeply what it means to be human.

MINDFUL SACRIFICE EXPERIMENT NANCY THURSTON

I am a member of the Beloved Community, the first small group gathered together by Harvest Time to explore radical discipleship around wealth. Thirteen of us meet two times a year to experiment, challenge and play along this journey. At the heart of our exploration is a desire to hold

together extravagant love and Jesus' call to the rich young ruler. Together, we are learning to know ourselves as Beloved and to step into the love and extravagance of Jesus. From that grounding, we explore ways to let go of our fears and addictions and allow money to flow freely in the world.

We have engaged in several experiments designed to push the edges of our comfort zone around "our" money. These experiments are designed to illuminate and shift those areas where fear compels us, sometimes despite our deepest desire, to hold onto the majority of our wealth and power. They raise questions that are at the core of our journeys, such as, "How much is enough?" and "Who deserves what?" Each time we find a place of greater freedom around "our" money, everything shifts. We find more peace and clarity inwardly and we take one more step towards letting money flow freer and more equitably throughout the global family.

In this community, we are also given the difficult gift of listening to experiences that are different from ours. Not everyone in this group is financially wealthy. Some are there because they helped to hold and form the Harvest Time vision in the early days of the ministry. In this context, I am learning to listen as others speak about their experiences living with less money while I also listen to what comes up in me around having more money.

At our last gathering, Sharon Elizabeth, one of our members, issued a prophetic invitation:

"I believe if we want to truly live into radical discipleship, particularly around money issues, an ongoing examination of our "more than enough" (given our



Howard and Nancy Thurston.

global economic reality) is essential. Our Christian faith has always been built on a foundation that links extravagant love with compassion (i.e. love that "suffers with") "for the least of them." For me to truly live into the practice of "compassionate" love, I believe the reality of personal and corporate sacrifice is not only inevitable, it is essential.

I shared with you, that realistically, I would need to give up something within my budgeted income in order to have money for me to come to the Beloved Community gatherings. I could let you pay for me and would truly be very grateful. However, when we keep a division between the "givers" and the "receivers" rather than acting out of a deeper community we are living within the "world's" ways, and not the Gospel alternative.

So today I'm inviting you to join me in an intentional experiment where mutual sacrifice/mindfulness in the area of daily lifestyle choices would allow us to raise these needed funds together. Only then will we truly be acting as a community living into God's economy of "shared" abundance-

a radical paradigm where faith and grace truly become our most valuable resources.”

Sharon’s invitation stirred up many things inside of me: paralysis, panic and, in some mysterious way, a glimpse of deep hope. I knew that in order to address the more radical alternative at the heart of Sharon’s invitation, I would have to begin by facing personal issues connected to my economic class.

For instance, Sharon’s invitation makes me aware that much of my generosity with individuals has been dancing around the charitable edge. I want to use my money to allow others who can’t afford it to participate fully along side of me. I receive a variety of body work, such as massage, and I like to pay for others to receive body work too. I like to do things with friends that I can afford but they can’t, so I am thrilled to be able to pay. That feels like good stewardship to me. But I am beginning to hear that money flowing primarily in one direction does not address the deeper issues of faith and community.

On the other side of the coin, I need to face my reluctance to receive financially. For instance, I am uncomfortable when I know that my visit will stretch someone’s food budget. I don’t want anyone to have to sacrifice financially for me, since I don’t have any apparent way to financially sacrifice for anyone.

Sharon often speaks of her experience of giving sacrificially as one way she steps out of the comforts of the cultural boundaries and leaps – betting her life that she will be caught in the arms of God. I know that her savings for retirement is much, much smaller than mine and yet she freely

gives. I often feel threatened and confused when she speaks of the importance of sacrificial giving as I can’t even imagine what that would mean for me. Living as far as I do from the vulnerable edge financially, I get paralyzed when I hear a challenge to “give sacrificially.”

This paralysis is compounded by knowing that most of the world’s resources and privilege are held in the hands of a very few people – like me, for instance.

Sharon’s invitation was an opportunity to join her in something that she does every day. But it is more than that. It is an invitation to join middle and low-income people (i.e. most of the world) by voluntarily taking on one small piece of the discipline/sacrifice that they struggle with daily. But it is more than that. It is an invitation into a “community living into God’s economy of ‘shared’ abundance.”

Through this sacrifice and discipline I will finally have an opportunity to experience God’s presence when I have “less.” It helps me to see that my life won’t wither if I begin to live closer to the edge financially. That can begin to free me from the conscious and unconscious fears that I don’t have enough and must protect my money.

There is an important distinction to be made between freely chosen sacrifice and the unhealthy types of sacrifice that many of us have been submitted to during our lifetimes. I have sacrificed in very unhealthy ways, trying to be a good Christian woman. In these times I have ignored myself and too often violated my deepest intuition. By contrast, Sharon’s invitation requires a chosen sacrifice where what looks like loss

results in gain for all.

Experimenting with a self-imposed, sacrificial limit on one area of my spending (as one who doesn’t have natural limits) is an opportunity to experience the Gospel promise of abundance for all. My husband Howard’s and my biggest step in this direction unfolded in a surprising way. If someone had told me five years ago that we would give away almost 75% of our household possessions and move into a home 1/3 the size of our house it would have sounded like a painful sacrifice. But we did so and today we live surrounded by beauty and more than enough. Following the call to buy this condo, a call that made no sense at the time, was the beginning of many exciting new ventures. That which years ago would have sounded like loss actually brought abundance beyond our imagining.

But I still struggle with the rest of my wealth.

Yesterday Howard and I met over breakfast at Katie O’Brien’s, a pub where we go for deep financial discussions. We wanted to become clear about our response to Sharon’s invitation. A surprising thing happened. We found ourselves talking about how serious we had become as we each begin new work adventures. We realized that we need to find disciplines for daily play and relaxation. As we talked, our disciplines became clear: reading funny fiction to each other at night, doing a simple embodied play (from a walk to a dance), and turning off the computer before dinner. It felt strange to establish disciplines for play - especially since we were supposed to be establishing places where we were willing to sacrifice.

But once we found a way to bring play and rest back into our lives we were excited to explore Sharon's invitation to sacrifice. We decided to eat out (just the two of us) 4 times a month, two of which needed to be scheduled at least a day in advance (our downfall is last minute eating out). We decided to set a specific figure for each of us for tea, coffee or lunches out. I will use frequent flyer miles to "buy" my tickets to Washington, DC and Atlanta. I have always given away my miles because I prefer the flexibility and the use of direct flights that are so rarely available with frequent flyer reservations. This time I will use the miles myself and donate the cost of the ticket to the Beloved Community fund. And wildest of all, we are considering not getting a car when our daughter takes ours with her back to college in the fall. We live near wonderful public transportation options and we want to see how our life could be enriched by living car-less. If we do it, will we donate away all of the savings that goes with not having a car? Honestly, we aren't sure yet. But we are considering it.

These are just the first steps on this adventure. What other places of freedom and abundance can I find by taking on chosen limits? Where am I willing to have less of something physical/material for a deeper connection to our own community and to the global family? If I listen deeply for the next step of experimentation with living nearer an economic edge, will my sacrifice be transformed into something that is life-giving? Sharon's invitation takes me another step along this road.

With fear, excitement and prayer, I accept Sharon's invitation.

THE RICH FOOL: MEDITATION ON LUKE 12: 16-21 ANONYMOUS*

There was a rich woman whose land produced a bountiful harvest. Well not exactly. The land used to produce a bountiful harvest, but then the town it was located in became a summer resort so the family cut up the farm and gave the pieces to the children as their inheritance. Eventually, the land was given to an already rich woman and her siblings. By that time it no longer produced an actual harvest, but was worth a lot of cash – on paper anyway.

The rich woman asked herself, "What shall I do with my storehouse? Shall I sell it to my siblings and give the money to the poor? Shall I hold onto it so that I can continue to be a voice in family decision making? Shall I give it to my children? Shall I decide later?" And she said, "This is what I shall do. I will wait until I have the time and energy to deal with all the nuances of this issue in depth." But God said to her, "You fool, this night your life will be demanded of you; and the things you have not taken care of, to whom will they belong? Thus will it be for the one who holds onto treasure stored up for herself, but is not rich in what matters to God."

As it turns out, the woman was rich in the things that matter to God. She liked to think she was, anyway. So when she got to heaven she had a little talking to with God's son. "Look, Jesus, you got the wrong chick. I'm with you on this one. I know that I'm slow when it comes to reaching clarity about money issues, and I get overwhelmed sometimes, but the truth is the land is yours and I know it. So cut the

guilt trip and give me my life back." Amused by her chutzpah, God did.

The next day the rich woman awoke feeling renewed and refreshed. The excitement of her near death experience inspired her to take action. She called the family lawyer and asked him what her options were. He suggested group e-mail – less emotion, fewer misspoken words. So she wrote her siblings and asked if anyone wanted to buy her out. A sister and brother in law did, so she sold it to them and took off with a wad of cash. After taking \$150 off the top for a couple of massages, she promptly gave the money to an organization she trusted to share with people who were hungry. That night she went out dancing to celebrate the harvest.

Her parents, siblings, ex-husband, and some friends all thought she was out of her mind. They brought her referrals to psychiatrists and financial advisors. She didn't pay too much attention to that. Instead, she kept her ears tuned to the delightful man from Palestine, who kept singing her that John Denver tune, "Follow me where I go, what I do and who I know."

When people asked her why did it, her answer was simple. I kept hearing, "I was hungry and you fed me and I knew that's what the land is for."



**This text was submitted anonymously by a person in the Harvest Time network.*

HARVEST TIME PARTNERSHIPS

Harvest Time is partnered with over 25 organizations which serve the material, emotional, and spiritual needs of the poorest of the poor in Washington, DC, Haiti, and Bosnia. Harvest Time friends are invited and encouraged to participate in these partnerships in the following ways:

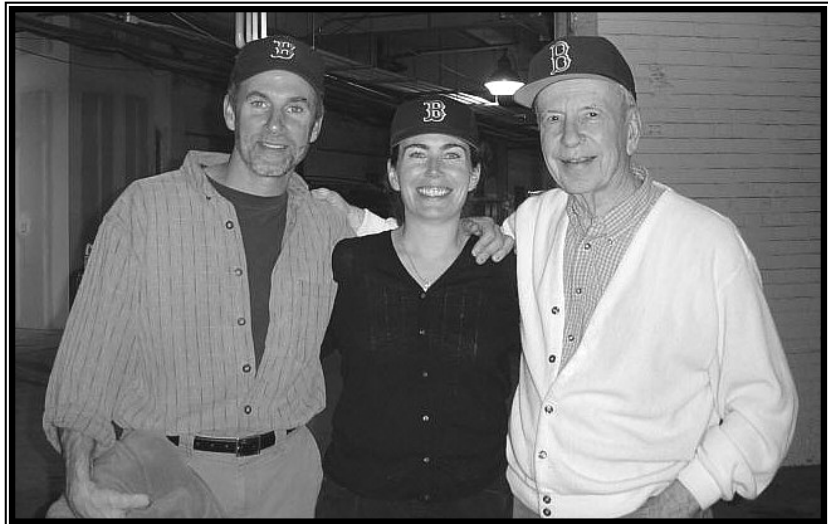
Reverse Mission

Bryan leads short, 3-5 day pilgrimages of reverse mission to Haiti and Washington, DC for individuals and small groups who would like to touch and be touched by the realities of poverty and economic injustice. These are also opportunities to form relationships with ministries that are responding to these realities.

Financial Gifts

Those who are so led, can make financial gifts to the organizations we are partnered with through Harvest Time. Every month, we wire money to Haiti to support ministries that serve hundreds of the poorest and most vulnerable people in some of Haiti's most volatile neighborhoods. In addition, we distribute funds to several ministries that serve the poor in Washington, DC. A comprehensive listing and brief description of these organizations can be found on the Partnerships page of our website www.harvesttime.cc. Donors are welcome to designate gifts for a particular ministry or to let Harvest Time staff determine where funds are most needed.

For more information about Reverse Mission and gifts to Harvest Time, please call Bryan at 608-251-0869. All financial gifts can be sent to Bryan's office in Madison, WI.



Harvest Time Co-Directors

Bryan Sirchio, Rosemary Feerick, and Don McClanen

UPCOMING EVENTS

Often wealthy Christians who are asking questions about economic justice and who are trying to discern what God is calling them to do with their wealth lack spiritual community around these issues. Harvest Time gatherings provide opportunities for Christians of exceptional wealth to get to know each other and Harvest Time staff in order to nurture a growing network of support, encouragement, challenge, and inspiration as we strive to become more faithful disciples. Gatherings are also opportunities to ask the hard questions in an atmosphere of extravagant love.

"Creating Community Along the Narrow Path"

October 21-23, 2005

Montreat Conference Center
Montreat, NC
(45 minutes from Asheville)

January 13-15, 2006

Collins Retreat Center
Eagle Creek, OR
(45 minutes from Portland)

For more information about either of these retreats, 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