

# The New Stewardship

James A. Moos

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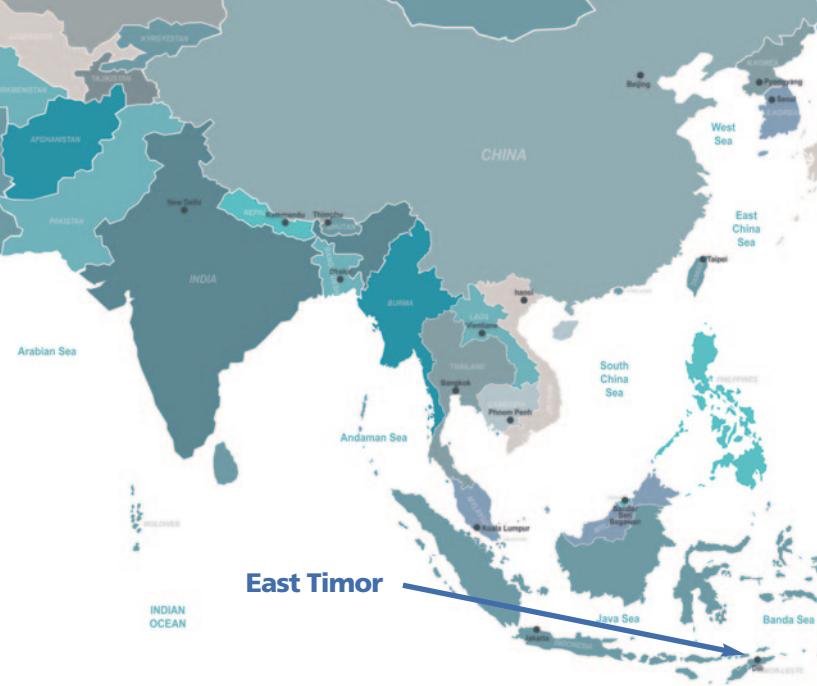
*I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance.* II Corinthians 8:13-14



**T**wenty years ago, I went to East Timor as a short-term volunteer with Global Ministries, the overseas mission agency of the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). East Timor is a small island nation off the northwest coast of Australia. It had recently gained independence after a 24 year long genocidal occupation by the Indonesian military and was among the poorest and least developed nations on earth. Like many a do-gooder, I wanted to help. I wanted to make a difference.

By that time the Timorese church had had its fill of do-gooders who came, threw some money around, told them what they needed to do, and then left, never to be heard from again. So, upon my arrival, the church moderator led me into his office and read me these verses from II Corinthians. He talked about the mutual sharing of abundance between our churches, with both giving and both receiving. He talked about building a lasting partnership. I got the message: “We aren’t charity cases, and you aren’t our saviors.” More than anything else, I was there to learn and develop a relationship.

Charitable giving makes us feel good, and there’s nothing wrong with that. But feeling good and doing good are not the same thing. Doing good is a two-way street that means being vulnerable, it means recognizing our own needs and the ways in which the gifts of those we seek to help can enrich us, even if they are lacking materially. The New Stewardship is about far more than money—it’s about relationship, partnership, and mutuality.



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By and large, Americans are generous with nearly 90% of us involved in charitable giving. Too often, however, we “help” others in ways that are well-intended but are ultimately paternalistic and can do more harm than good—what author Robert Lupton calls “toxic charity.” While the New Stewardship frequently involves money, it should neither begin nor end there. Mutual relationships are antidotes to toxicity and gateways to enrichment.

When Paul wrote to the church at Corinth, he asked this wealthy church to give financially in support of the impoverished church in Jerusalem. But he didn’t end there. Though wealthy, the Corinthians struggled with a poverty of faith and in that the Jerusalem church had an abundance. The relationship was to be mutual with each church

giving, and each receiving, “in order that there may be a fair balance.” The New Stewardship isn’t about “charity” in the sense of the “haves” helping the “have nots” for we are all both; we all have something to offer, and we all have unmet needs and things to learn. The New Stewardship is a return to the biblical practice of mutuality.



## What are some ways that we can contemporize the biblical practice?

### A few thoughts:

- *We go on mission trips to help those in need. Instead, let's go on pilgrimages to see the amazing things that God is doing in other places and discover how we can enrich each other.*
- *We give to homeless shelters and food pantries. Do we also get to know a homeless person or a poverty-stricken family in order to gain new insights and learn from them? Do we recognize that they, too, are bearers of God's image?*
- *We support our local houses of worship. Do they establish partnerships with houses of worship in other settings, in other countries, or of other faiths, in order to share mutual abundance?*
- *We give to organizations involved in Haiti, the Congo, India, and many other places. Do those organizations impose western assumptions in their programming, or do they rely on local partnerships to lead the effort? Do they send us sad promotional pictures and stories to play on our sympathies, or do they respect human dignity and uphold the abundant grace of others?*

In the end I did offer modest service to the East Timorese church, but before I could give effectively, I had to receive. From the Timorese I learned more than I knew existed about hospitality, about forgiveness, and, yes, about being materially generous (you cannot outgive the poor). More than a one-time learning, I've been enriched by life-long relationships with Timorese friends and families into which I have been adopted.

Whatever our stewardship opportunities might be, the biblical practice of stewardship, the "New" Stewardship, means that blessings abound for all.

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