

Investing in 2006: Six Hot Tips You Don't Want to Miss!

I don't know about you, but I'm a novice when it comes to the Stock Market, although we do have some real experts at First Church when it comes to such matters.

Are you planning on doing some investing in 2006? It's likely that you have an interest bearing checking or savings account, that you automatically contribute to your 401K through payroll deduction. It's even possible that you dabble in or strategically maneuver in stocks, bonds and mutual funds.

That's all well and good. Financial responsibility and management speak much about a person's character and discipline. However, *financial matters are not the only way you can or should be investing*. Just as someone who does not save or invest any money over the course of a year will have nothing at the end of it, so to will *you be spiritually broke at the end of 2006 unless you make strategic and wise investments*.

Continuing on with the analogy just a paragraph further, your steady investments over the course of the year will amaze you with how both the principle and compound interest accumulates and the dividends that they yield.

How do you make spiritual investments? You might remember a Windows article from 2005 titled *Closeness to God: A Top Ten List* (copies are available in the church office) which made some detailed suggestions. Here however are some new and restated strategies for 2006!

One, **set aside some time each day that is just for you and God**. This old standard advice will never do you wrong. It is the hallmark of a true and committed believer. Using the *Encounter With God* devotional or participating in *The Essential 100 Challenge* is a great start. Exploring the spiritual disciplines with authors such as Foster, Willard, Nee or J.C. Ryle will yield amazing results as well.

Two, **make it a priority to spend time with other believers, preferably from your church**. Sometimes there is nothing harder than being alone. You can be surrounded by people all the time and still be lonely. Developing relationships that turn into friendships with other believers, especially from your church will be one of the best long term investment decisions you ever make. Sure there will be ups and downs, but the long term gains are immeasurable. Why not try having someone over for lunch next Sunday?

Three, **participate in the activities offered at your church**. The last thing a church wants to do is offer programs for the sake of having a programs. Especially at First Church, everything we offer in 2006 will be strategically designed to come along side you in your walk with the Lord. From Sunday School & Family Night Classes, to GEMS and Imitators, to all the various Youth Activities (and so much more) we not only want to come alongside you, but we want you to come alongside each other. It's not about just what you can get from your church, but also what you can give. Your experience and insight is a lot more valuable than you think!

Four, **faithfully tithe to your church**. God expects each of us to (a) recognize that all we have comes from Him and (b) to reimburse/ give back to Him from what He has entrusted to and

blessed us with. You have surely seen the bumper sticker that reads “*Honk If You Love Jesus*”. A better one I saw reads “*Tithe If You Love Jesus, Anyone Can Honk*”.

I will not try to sell you on the concept of tithing, give you 101 reasons to do so or promise you that if you do the Lord will abundantly bless you many times over. I simply want to point out two facts. (1) Tithing is not an optional idea or suggestion, it is a Biblical *commandment and expectation* of all Christians that they will tithe *to their church*. (2) The word tithe comes from a Hebrew word that means one tenth, and the examples and explanations in Scripture are many and abundant. The ironic mystery here is that the more you get accustomed to giving, the freer you become and in the end it becomes as much a blessing to you as it is to those that are on the receiving end.

Five, **serve in your church and at your church**. Have you been asked to serve in some capacity (if not let me know and I can hook you up) such as Sunday School, Nursery, Grounds Committee, etc.? Are you gifted and aware of a place where your gifts can be used? Have you noticed that the FLC windows could stand to be scraped of paint and then Windexed, is there more painting to be done, the fluorescent lights need to be replaced, there’s outside cleanup to do, or there’s something you’ve always noticed that needs to be fixed or cleaned, etc. Why not take some initiative? There is no law or policy keeping those of us that worship at First Church from actively taking care of our facilities. In fact, we are often in desperate need help.

Six, **give to and serve the poor and those with less than you**. As with tithing, Scripture is full of references to the poor. In fact, if you were to remove all references to the poor and needy (both materially and spiritually) from Scripture, your Bible would only be ½ there. This is in addition to what you might tithe. It is more than just giving money. *It is giving of your heart and your time*. It means leaving your comfort zone and even getting your hands dirty and opening yourself to new and challenging situations. The Pregnancy Care Center & A Woman’s Concern need counselors, Urban Salt and Light needs consistent help simply making food a couple Saturday mornings each month, and the list goes on. The needs surround us. The question is, *Do we even care? Is it not our problem? Are we simply too busy to get involved?*

If you try these out and they don’t work for you, then we should talk. Chances are however, these are more than just “hot tips”, they are long term investment strategies, that if taken seriously (as opposed to superficially or just going through the motions), will pay you great dividends and yield you tremendous capital gains. The trick is, as with all investments, you have to be willing to give of what you have to “get in on” the deal. There is risk. You will become vulnerable and your heart might be affected. Let me know how things work out!

Pursuing Him alongside you,

Michael
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