**Module 7: Virtuous Cycles, Strategy, and Mission**

“What do you have that you did not receive?” (1 Corinthians 4:7)

**Devotion**

In the Bible, we see plenty of vicious and virtuous cycles. Vicious cycles include Abel’s death, Noah’s Flood as judgment, the diversifying of languages at Babel, the enslavement of the Hebrew children, the time of the judges when “everyone did what was right in their own eyes,” the idolatries of various Hebrew kings, the Exile, the Roman destruction of Jerusalem, and many others. But we also see virtuous cycles such as the call of Abraham, the stewardship of Joseph in Egypt (and his forgiveness of his brothers), the liberation of Passover, the conquest of the land, the glories of David and Solomon, the reform of Josiah, the rebuilding of the temple and the walls under Ezra and Nehemiah, the burning of the menorah lights under the Maccabees, the resurrection of our Lord, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and so many other things.

As Christians we encounter all of life as a gift. And, we discover that there is such a surplus of joy, love, and compassion throughout life. Luther talked about a “law of love,” where trees bear fruit not for themselves but for us and that the sun shines not for itself but for us. We too, when grounded in God’s love, can channel this abundance, this generosity, this goodness to others.

It’s easy, when experiencing a vicious cycle either to blame others or oneself for the pain. It can be challenging not to foster grievances especially if they are quite legitimate and instead find and explore new paths that give us and those we serve new identities. We flourish not as we succeed but instead as we are willing to take risks, even the risk of becoming lost. Will the new path we forge bring growth or will it be a waste of time?

We can only live from God’s grace and mercy. We can never know for sure if the risks we take will lead to good things or not. But we can trust that God is not stingy and is eager always to share in goodness. Even in loss we discover the goodness of God to support us through grief.

My own college religion teacher Harold Ditmanson said that grace involves the disposition to affirm life rather than regard it with fear or contempt. In such affirmation we are able to take the risks that lend themselves to capable leadership.

**Prayer**

*Teach me, God, never to take your generosity for granted but instead to be a faithful steward of all that you have given me. Help my congregation too to be faithful in its stewardship. Amen.*