

Money, Money, Money... Money! Financial Reflections – Jesse Edgington – NADC  
Consultant

“When one does not know how to make room for the Lord and the poor, one is not a master of his wealth but its slave.” - Daniel Groody

It is good to intentionally think about money, finances, stewardship and generosity from time to time. Churches periodically have times of teaching and talking about money, pastors will preach on the heart of giving, charity, generosity and financial justice. Some churches even host courses about money management, budgeting, investing and estate planning. I have heard the question asked, “Are you even Spiritually ready to receive a million dollars?”

Part of the role of the deacon is to deal with church finances, benevolence cases and to encourage the congregation in matters of resource management, including time, talents and money. So immediately I thought of verses from the Bible like in Luke chapter 12, “From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked” and Matthew chapter 10, “Freely you have received; freely give.” (See also Luke 16:9). Those are good starting places and Jesus told many parables about money in his teaching, so reading from Matthew, Mark, Luke and John is a wise thing to do.

I have also recently been reading some books about finances that have given some advice and wisdom about giving from different perspectives. Not Your Parents’ Offering Plate, by J. Clif Christopher, Live Just.Ly, by Micah Challenge & World Renew and Globalization, Spirituality and Justice, by Daniel Groody have each given me some insight and things to think about in my own financial journey. Any one of these is a book well worth reading, but I will try and summarize some of my thoughts from them.

As suggested by the title, Groody comes at the world of finances from a strong justice lens. He says charity is that which is given out of love and charity is the theological virtue by which we love God above all things and our neighbor as ourselves. This sounds really good and I do not think many Christians would disagree with a statement like that but the Barna Research Group has sadly found evidence of Christian lives that are not lived out as the statement suggests. Barna found that people who identify as born again Christians spend twice as much money annually on electronic consumer items, as they donate to their local church.

Groody examines some of the writing of John Chrysostom who dug deep into ideas of equality and commons. Chrysostom points out that God did not create some people poor and some rich, but all were equal and all of Creation was free to all. We have distorted what is God’s and fallen into the trap of prioritizing ideas of personal property, value and wealth. Chrysostom teaches that wealth is not a possession, it is not a property; **it is a loan for use**. For we are all sojourners and have the use of things when we are in this world but we will all die and take none of it with us to the next. An excessive emphasis on ownership separates us from community, tempts us with greed and can lead to a host of other evils including theft, murder and war.

Inequality of resources and finance not only deprives the poor but also dehumanizes the rich. So let's not let wealth absorb all of our energy and attention, to the point that we do not have time for God or good works. This is a cornerstone tenant of our service to God, our churches and communities, so we must guard ourselves against this pitfall and encourage our brothers and sisters in Christ. When we have no time to serve others, blinded eyes of wealth and privilege, we may not see our own (and God's) image in others and it may result in sins of omission by refusing to help those who are crying out for help. Lastly on Chrysostom, he points out that from here, a sure sign of spiritual death is not seeing one's neighbor in need. Much like what Jesus says in Matthew 25:42, "I was hungry and you did not give me something to eat..."

Ironically, sometimes wealth is inversely proportional to generosity. As C.S. Lewis states, "If our giving does not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say it is too small. There ought to be things we should like to do and cannot because our commitment to giving excludes them." As I read from the Just.Ly devotional, I was struck that my own giving was insufficient in light of Lewis's statement. The devotional pointed out a concept to me that I had never been taught, simply called sacrificial giving. When I think of sacrifice, I think of Jesus dying on the cross for us, but I have never thought of my finances in light of that term. The authors of Just.Ly describe it as intentionally giving something that costs you, as an act of worship or devotion. It is a giving from our substance rather than our abundance.

Wow, how often do we struggle with that? Is our ten percent tithe ten percent of our abundance? I know I have to sit down and personally wrestle with that in my own heart and I would guess that I probably would not be alone in that in the body of fellow believers. And what a blessing it could be if I truly could embrace sacrificial giving, so that others might enjoy some measure of comfort or joy in their time of need.

The Live Just.Ly devotional is also helpful to point out that it is not just Jesus in the Gospels who is concerned about resources, but the theme is a constant one throughout the Bible. Paul talks about it in 2 Corinthians 9:6-9 and Psalm 112 is another powerful example. It is truly only God that creates and gives, we are merely vessels who are invited to work along side what He is doing for His Kingdom, as recipients of his love and grace.

I will end with encouraging you to examine the Beatitudes. In our North American lives we can certainly be thankful for what we have and feel blessed by our position in life but we also must remember what Jesus said in his Sermon on the Mount. Matthew follows the Beatitudes very closely with a verse that is possibly familiar to a lot of us, Matthew 6:21, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (NIV)

I have also included a link to a simple PowerPoint about giving that you might want to look at. It focuses on structural types of giving that may or may not be similar to how things are done in your church. There are many subtle differences from church to church, so I would love to hear some of your feedback. Maybe your church has gone beyond cash and cheques to website, app, direct deposit, credit card, kiosks or even text-to-give! Feedback can be sent to [yournadc@gmail.com](mailto:yournadc@gmail.com).