

starters for Sunday

Moderators' Worship Notes: Very Rev David Arnott

Stewardship Season

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to thank the Very Rev David Arnott, former Minister of St Andrews: Hope Park with Strathkinness, for his thoughts on the stewardship of money.

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Introduction

Christian Stewardship is a fundamental part of Christian Discipleship. It is concerned with the gifts of God and the way we use these gifts. It is concerned with the love and commitment of God to the world and its people, and with our response to God's love and God's commitment.

Worship has a pivotal role in any consideration of Christian Stewardship in the life of the Church. In worship we give thanks for the gifts of God; we confess our failure to use these gifts as God expects them to be used; we explore the pages of the Bible and engage in theological reflection on God's giving and our response; we offer to God our time, our talent and our money to advance the kingdom.

Four former Moderators of the General Assembly kindly agreed to take us on a journey through some of their personal thoughts about the stewardship of money. They offer us prayers, sermon notes and hymn suggestions. These worship notes are offered in the prayerful hope that they might help worship leaders to tackle the sometimes prickly theme of "money" during worship. However, it is up to the reader to adapt these as he/she sees appropriate.

I wish to express my gratitude to the contributors for their time and assistance in writing this material which can be found on the Church of Scotland [Starters for Sunday pages](#) and on the [Resourcing Mission](#) website, where additional archive material can also be found.

Rev Alan W Gibson

Head of Stewardship



Prayers

Call to Prayer

Create in me a pure heart O God
And renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Prayer

Almighty and Eternal God,
we bring to you in our worship all that we are.
We bring our hopes and our dreams.
We trail our joys and successes.

But we also bring our sadness at our frailties;
the memories of when we fell short and missed the mark;
the painful reminder of words uttered
when silence should have reigned;
of deeds enacted which left a bad taste.

But we bring them Lord
because that is who we are,
a glorious mixture of potential
with room for development.

Yet into all of that
glorious mixture of all that we are
you still come and stand beside us.

We remain grateful for the promise of your forgiveness.
We remain grateful for the assurance
of your continuing presence
to inspire and embolden us.



We remain grateful that you allow us
to approach you as we are
and in your compassion and in your mercy
your outstretched arms embrace us once again.

Lord God hear the prayers of your grateful and forgiven people
In Jesus' name we pray, Amen

Offering Prayer

Lord God we give to you with a cheerful and a joyful heart
for you are such a generous God who loves each one of us to the uttermost.

As we give these our offerings
so also we pray you will bless all we keep for ourselves,
that we may also use a portion of it to proclaim your gospel and
help create a fairer society for all to live in.

Lord God accept our money and accept us all given in your service
Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen

Defined by Extras

How do you begin to talk about money from a pulpit? Should I suggest you all be as generous as you can and leave it at that? Should I go further and suggest a percentage of your free income should be given for the church's work? Should I remind you that one of the vows that you took when you were admitted to church membership by profession of faith was a promise to give a fitting proportion of your... money for the church's work in the world? Do I warn you that the love of money is the root of all evil? Let me try to do something different and ask you to think about the culture in which you live and therefore give. I am a firm believer that if we can't affect the great decisions of life we can affect the atmosphere in which these decisions are made. So if we understand clearly what it means to be a Christian then giving of our money follows quite naturally.



If you were asked for example, for a definition of a Christian, what makes a Christian, I wonder what things you might say? Would you talk about the kind of things a Christian might be expected to believe? Would you talk about such personal qualities as goodness, kindness, and above all love? Would you be the kind of person who would want to include worship and prayer as central tenets of that definition?

In Matthew's gospel, Jesus offers a definition of... well, let us see if you can tell what, or whom, Jesus is defining.

Scripture Readings

[Matthew 5: 38-48](#)

Whatever else that is, it is a definition by extras. Jesus is offering on the one hand the accepted practice. You know what the law says, what the Old Testament says, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth; if a soldier asks you to carry his pack then go one mile; don't forget to love your neighbour. All of these were laid down in the Jewish law. These were the basic, the minimum requirements. This is what was expected of any Jew, like Jesus, who worshipped the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

But Jesus says, for those who follow me I want you to do more. I don't want you to take an eye for an eye, I want you to resist evil, and to turn the other cheek. If you are asked to go one mile by a soldier then I want you to go two. In addition to loving your neighbour you've also got to learn to love your enemies. I want you to be known as people who are defined by extras; extras that are the norm for your living.

But who exactly is Jesus defining? Is this the definition of a Christian? Is the Christian expected to be different in this way from everyone else? Many would argue that is exactly what a Christian is. I have to say I'm slightly nervous about such a stance, for the arrogance it can breed can all too easily overflow with a self-righteous pride of superiority. We can forget that humility is also part of the Christian's armour.

I want to suggest there is more to this passage than a definition of the term 'Christian.' It is probable that the block of teaching contained in chapter 5 was given at various times throughout the life of Jesus but then was all gathered together by Matthew in one place. But he



begins this section ([Matthew 5: 1](#)) by saying 'Seeing the crowds of people Jesus taught them'. These weren't just his disciples. These weren't just the inner twelve. I don't think Jesus is defining a Christian here. Jesus doesn't call us to be Christian in the increasingly, and depressingly, narrow sense that is becoming popular. Jesus calls us to be human; he calls us to define our humanity through him. What I think Jesus is setting out here is a definition of what it means for us to be a human being.

When I die and stand before the Pearly Gates, nobody is going to ask me why weren't you Jesus; why weren't you Paul? I may well be asked why were you not what you were called to be? You and I are called to be a human being, a person who defines our humanity through our discipleship of Jesus Christ.

Sometimes we grow to fulfil other people's expectations of us. If little is expected of a child in the classroom then little is what the teacher will get. If a child is told 'you'll never be half the man your father was' - that is how he will turn out. If little is expected of a work force that is what will be produced. But if the expectation is high we will walk tall and deliver the goods.

Thomas Merton the Trappist monk in his autobiography, 'The Seven Storey Mountain' writes dismissively after visiting a Quaker meeting when he was searching for God: 'They are like all the rest. In other churches it is the minister who hands out the commonplaces and here it is liable to be just anybody. Still I think I had enough sense to know it would be madness to look for a church from which all mediocrity would absolutely be excluded.' And Jesus suggests we are defined by extras.

In writing to the church in Corinth Paul develops this thought begun by Jesus.

[1 Corinthians 3: 1-11, 16-23](#)

'*You are God's temple*'. Paul declares with all the certainty of a recent convert. No hint of a maybe or a perhaps; not even a suggestion that on a good day, if you are trying particularly hard, it might just be construed after a great deal of thought. No Paul goes straight in, '*You are God's temple*'. You are to be defined by the understanding that God lives in you. And who were these paragons of virtue and sainthood that Paul declares to be God's temple? The same people



whom he is not slow to criticise for their immorality, the food they offer to idols, the arguments they have which divide the church; the list goes on.

'You are God's temple'. This from the man who well understood who he was addressing and who had no intention of stopping with the church in Corinth. Paul wanted to convert the world to Christianity. That was how high he was setting his sights. He understood that we grow, you and I to fulfil other people's expectations. So he sets the bar as high as he could not in the expectation people would fail and be shown up in the poverty of their faith but hoping they would succeed and so discover for themselves what it means to live in Christ and to be guided and directed by the Holy Spirit. Despite his criticisms he lifts their expectations of themselves.

One Sunday at the church door after a particularly drab, colourless service full of nothing but words, half of which only the earnest young minister could understand the old farmer took him aside at the front door. *'You should go and study astronomy,'* he said. *'It will do you good.'* Why, queried the young man? *'Because you have an awfu' wee God!'* responded the farmer.

The God that Jesus shows us is light years removed from that. This is a God who is gracious beyond measure, who forgives to the uttermost and who raises no barriers to our approach. Anybody and everybody are welcome and it seems an especial welcome is given to those who nobody really expects to see there in the first place.

Have you ever wondered why in the Old Testament and the New Testament God is presented in such human terms? Luke describes God as a Father in the story of the Prodigal Son ready to forgive despite the hurt; the Psalmist describes God as compassionate and gracious, long suffering and ever-faithful. Have you ever wondered why, unless it is because these are qualities that ought to be found in people who worship God, who follow Jesus Christ and call him Lord? These qualities define our humanity. And Jesus understands we grow to fulfil these expectations.

Jesus asks you and me to define ourselves by extras. It is against that background we need to think about our money. It may be helpful to consider three types of givers found in any congregation.



There are those who are like flint; the only way they give, is if you hit them with a hammer. Even then all you get are chips and sparks. Then there are those who are like a sponge. They give when you squeeze them and the harder you squeeze the more they give. And the third is like a honeycomb that just sits there and oozes its own sweetness because it can't help it.

We are defined you and I by extras, – because that is how we understand the Father deals with us; showering us with goodness. That is how we understand Jesus deals with us; allowing us the opportunity to begin each day afresh, the slate wiped clean. And that is how the Father and the Son expect those who call upon the name of Jesus to live. You and I know there is nothing else we can do, for you and I know we will keep growing to fulfil those expectations God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit have for us. It will show in every aspect of our lives including how we give our money in our service of the church.

Second Prayer

Almighty and Eternal God

we give thanks for money

for the good it can do and bring to our world.

We give thanks for the generosity of so many

who give to humanitarian crises

and we acknowledge the millions of pounds raised

to alleviate the suffering of others.

We acknowledge too that the only way many can show their concern

is by the giving of their money.

We give thanks for all that money can do

for the lifting of people out of poverty

for the building of schools and hospitals

for providing the basic necessities of life.

But today, before you, we also wish to remember those who have little or no money

and who therefore feel excluded, if not resentful.



We pray for those in the developing world
providing food for our tables and clothes for our backs,
but who are paid a pittance for their labours.

We pray for those who through a lack of educational ability
are often mired in a menial job with less than a fair wage.

We pray for those who are unable to hold down a job
and scrape together what they can
from the cup held up in their outstretched hand.

Lord God, Jesus preached the values that belong to the Kingdom of God.

In the justice and fairness of your kingdom
empower us to help people
to use their money wisely and well;
to create a more equitable division;
to eradicate the scandal of poverty;
and always to be mindful that we are but stewards of all we have
and one day will be answerable to you.

All this we ask in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Musical Suggestions

CH4 157	Sing of the Lord's Goodness
CH4 502	Take my life, Lord, let it be
CH4 694	Brother Sister let me serve you
CH4 468	Son of God, eternal Saviour
CH4 390	Open are the gifts of God



Further Advice

For any advice or ideas on Stewardship Programmes for your church, please contact:

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Additional Resources

Resourcing Mission



[Resourcing Mission](#) is host to Starters for Sunday and other key mission resources for download and purchase. Online booking is available for [Mission & Discipleship events](#). Please check back regularly, as new items are being added all the time. If there is something you'd like to see on this new site, please [contact us](#) via the website.

Prayer Resources

These materials are designed to be a starting point for what you might look for in prayers. [Living Stones](#) is available from [St Andrew Press](#).



Music Resources

The hymns mentioned in this material are ideas of specific hymns you might choose for this week's themes. However, for some excellent articles on church music and ideas for new music resources, please check out our online music pages [Different Voices](#).

Preaching Resources



These materials are designed to be a starting point for what you might preach this Sunday. [Preachers Perspectives](#) is a resource where we have asked twelve preachers to share the insights they have gathered through their experiences of writing and delivering sermons regularly.

Scots Worship Resources

[The Kirk's Ear](#) - Scots in the Kirk series for Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Pentecost and other times of the year

[Wurship Ouk bi Ouk](#) - Metrical psalms, hymns, prayers and words for worship

[Scots Sacraments](#) may give you helpful material if you are celebrating Communion or have a Baptism.

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Please note that the views expressed in these materials are those of the individual writer and not necessarily the official view of the Church of Scotland, which can be laid down only by the General Assembly.

