

*1 Chronicles 29:1-9 (The Message)*

Then David the king addressed the congregation: “My son Solomon was singled out and chosen by God to do this. But he’s young and untested and the work is huge—this is not just a place for people to meet each other, but a house for GOD to meet us. I’ve done my best to get everything together for building this house for my God, all the materials necessary: gold, silver, bronze, iron, lumber, precious and varicolored stones, and building stones—vast stockpiles. Furthermore, because my heart is in this, in addition to and beyond what I have gathered, I’m turning over my personal fortune of gold and silver for making this place of worship for my God: 113 tons of gold—all from Ophir, the best—and 214 tons of silver for covering the walls of the buildings, and for the gold and silver work by craftsmen and artisans. And now, how about you? Who among you is ready and willing to join in the giving?”

Ready and willing, the heads of families, leaders of the tribes of Israel, commanders and captains in the army, stewards of the king’s affairs, stepped forward and gave willingly. They gave 188 tons of gold, 377 tons of silver, 679 tons of bronze, and 3,775 tons of iron. Anyone who had precious jewels put them in the treasury for the building of The Temple of GOD in the custody of Jehiel the Gershonite.

And the people were full of a sense of celebration—all that giving! And all given willingly, freely! King David was exuberant.

*2 Corinthians 9:6–15 (NIV)*

<sup>6</sup>Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. <sup>7</sup>Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. <sup>8</sup>And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. <sup>9</sup>As it is written:

“They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor;  
their righteousness endures forever.”

<sup>10</sup>Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. <sup>11</sup>You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

<sup>12</sup>This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord’s people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. <sup>13</sup>Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. <sup>14</sup>And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. <sup>15</sup>Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

*Earn all you can. Save all you can. Give all you can.  
Sometimes God’s arithmetic is really quite simple.*

John Wesley preached a lot of sermons over the many-decades span of his ministry. Some of them were written down and preserved for us. One of his most notable sermons is titled simply, “The Use of Money.” At the beginning of his sermon, Wesley sets out three main points, which I am quoting verbatim:

- I. We ought to gain all we can gain but this it is certain we ought not to do; we ought not to gain money at the expense of life, nor at the expense of our health.
- II. Do not throw the precious talent into the sea.
- III. Having, First, gained all you can, and, Secondly saved all you can, Then “give all you can.”

There is beauty in Wesley’s simplicity. The thrust of his argument is clear.

First, make all the money you can but not by sacrificing your life or your health. Set priorities. Put God first in your living. Earn all you can without hurting your neighbor. “Gain all you can by honest industry,” Wesley writes. My wife, Patti, volunteered at

Prestonwood's Pregnancy Center for many years. There, she met a man who had retired but then gone back to work. Why go back? Because he believed that God had given him a talent for making money – and he was going to start making it again so he could give away all of it! In his book, *shiny gods*, Mike Slaughters draws our attention to the sower of seed in 2 Cor. 9:10. God supplies the seed to the sower, but the sower must plant it, tend it, and harvest the crop. We are all given talents and gifts by God that can be put to work. God has created us to do just that – to sow the seed he has given us. *Earn all you can.*

Second, don't throw your hard-earned money into the sea, wasting it, and letting it slip through your fingers. Avoid idle and even hurtful extravagances. Wesley goes on to say that if you think your children will waste money you give them or leave them, then do something better with the money. Use your money wisely. *Save all you can.*

*Give all you can*

We've made the money, we've saved some of the money, now what. Wesley's answer to this question was simple – he kept what he needed and gave the rest away. When John Wesley was a young man he made 30 pounds a year. He figured out that he needed 28 pounds a year to live on and gave two pounds to the church. When his income increased to 50 pounds, he kept 28 and gave 22. When he made 100 pounds a year, he kept 28 and gave 72. Wesley strived to live what he preached – *extravagant generosity.*

Both Scripture passages for this study are stories of generosity. The first is of an extravagant generosity that flows from directly from the celebration of God's blessings. The second is the story of a generosity sought.

*Let the party begin! (1 Chronicles 29:1-9)*

The people celebrate. The king is exuberant. Everyone has opened their hearts to God and the resources to build a temple in Jerusalem have come pouring out like water over a waterfall. If we are to join in this excitement over a building, we have to go back in time, to the time of Moses.

When the LORD God freed his people from slavery in Egypt, he led them to Mt. Sinai, the mountain of the LORD, where God had first called Moses. There, God told Moses, "And have them [the Hebrews] make me a sanctuary, so that I may dwell with them" (Exodus 25:8). . . . Dwell with them!?!? . . . Frankly, God's decision to dwell with his people is one of those key biblical themes we hear so often that we've lost any sense of shock at the claim.

God, the creator of the universe and everything in it, is choosing to dwell with some dusty slaves who have run away from one of the greatest kingdoms on earth. God could dwell anywhere in the cosmos and with anyone – yet it is these landless, powerless, oppressed people whom he has chosen. It isn't very hard to understand why the Israelites were seen as weird and at least half-crazy for making such a claim . . . and why they would be seen this way for millennia thereafter.

Now, the Jews weren't so crazy as to think that they had God all to themselves or that they could contain God in any way. But they did believe that God dwelt with them in a way that God did not dwell elsewhere or with other peoples.

So God, in a very real sense, moved in with them. Because the Hebrews were nomads, God gave instructions for building a moveable tent, called a tabernacle, which would be God's dwelling place. In a small portion of the tabernacle, called the Holy of Holies, the Hebrews kept the Ark of the Covenant, which contained the stone tables on which were written the Ten Commandments. It was there that Moses, and later the High Priest, would go to meet with God. It was the place where heaven and earth met.

As the centuries wore on and the people settled into the land of Canaan, they desired to build a proper house for God. Much of the book of Chronicles is focused on the building of this permanent structure, the temple in Jerusalem. It is King David's son, Solomon, who actually undertakes the building of the temple. But first the people must assemble the funds and gifts to build a proper temple. And they open their hearts and their purses in joy. The time had come to do right by their guest.

Talk about extravagant generosity. Look again at the list of all that was brought forward for the project. David led the way with his personal fortune, his leaders brought theirs, and the people followed suit. What could be a better use for all that they had earned and saved than to bring it as an offering to God. This extravagant giving exemplifies the joy in the hearts of the people. Their generosity is a response to God and what he has done for them. The time has come for the people of God to honor properly the one who made them.

*An emergency fund – from the heart (2 Corinthians 9:6–15)*

From the days of Solomon, we zoom forward a thousand years to the city of Corinth, Greece, in the mid-50's AD. Though the apostle Paul's relationship with the Corinthian Christians has been contentious at times, their commitment to the gospel was evident in their enthusiastic response to Paul's collection for the poor among the Jewish-Christians in Jerusalem (2 Cor: 8-10). Paul has been amassing the collection from the various Christian communities he either founded or visited during his missionary journeys.

For Paul, this collection is the concrete expression of unity among the Jewish- and Gentile-Christians. It is an expression of reciprocity. The Gentile-Christians have been grafted onto the tree of faith whose roots are the Jews (Romans 11:17-24) and now these Gentile communities in Asia Minor and Greece can reciprocate this gift by caring for the poor in Jerusalem's Christian community, where all the Christians are Jews who have embraced Jesus as Messiah and Lord.

Sadly though, the Corinthians' earlier enthusiasm to help out with Paul's collection has flagged. So Paul writes urging that they finish what they started. He doesn't command them to do anything, though I suspect he feels like he could. Rather, Paul lifts up to them the generous act of Christ who became poor so that they might become rich (2 Cor 8:9), evoking Jesus' own words about storing up treasures in heaven. Leslie Allen writes:

“David's appeal for contributions to the building of the Temple reminds the reader of the emergency fund Paul set up. . . . For both Paul and the chronicler<sup>1</sup>, cheerful giving was a measure of spirituality. While in 1 Chronicles David is the example, in 2 Cor 8:9 the “generous act” (NRSV) of Christ choosing human poverty is the example. If the people and the king rejoiced at the willingness of the giving, God, too, ‘loves a cheerful giver’ (2 Cor 9:7) as 1 Chr. 29:17 hints. Consumers experience self-gratification in their spending, and so do misers in their saving; but givers know a deeper joy and a greater gain.”

*A final word from John Wesley*

Here is the final portion of Wesley's sermon on the use of money. I've left it as he wrote it. The English is a bit old, but I think you'll hear Wesley's voice.

Brethren, can we be either wise or faithful stewards unless we thus manage our Lord's goods? We cannot, as not only the oracles of God, but our own conscience beareth witness. Then why should we delay? Why should we confer any longer with flesh and blood, or men of the world? Our kingdom, our wisdom is not of this world: Heathen custom is nothing to us. We follow no men any farther than they are followers of Christ. Hear ye him. Yea, to-day, while it is called to-day, hear and obey his voice! At this hour, and from this hour, do his will: Fulfil his word, in this and in all things! I entreat you, in the name of the Lord Jesus, act up to the dignity of your calling! No more sloth! whatsoever your hand findeth to do, do it with your might! No more waste! Cut off every expense which fashion, caprice, or flesh and blood demand! No more covetousness! But employ whatever God has entrusted you with, in doing good, all possible good, in every possible kind and degree to the household of faith, to all men! This is no small part of "the wisdom of the just." Give all ye have, as well as all ye are, a spiritual sacrifice to Him who withheld not from you his Son, his only Son: So "laying up in store for yourselves a good foundation against the time to come, that ye may attain eternal life!"

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<sup>1</sup>A common term for the anonymous writer(s) of Chronicles.

## A Few Thoughts on Tithing

Malachi 3:6-12 (NRSV)

<sup>6</sup>For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, have not perished. <sup>7</sup>Ever since the days of your ancestors you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts. But you say, "How shall we return?"

<sup>8</sup>Will anyone rob God? Yet you are robbing me! But you say, "How are we robbing you?" In your tithes and offerings! <sup>9</sup>You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me—the whole nation of you! <sup>10</sup>Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house, and thus put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing. <sup>11</sup>I will rebuke the locust for you, so that it will not destroy the produce of your soil; and your vine in the field shall not be barren, says the LORD of hosts. <sup>12</sup>Then all nations will count you happy, for you will be a land of delight, says the LORD of hosts.

It's a mistake to read a passage like today's from Malachi as some sort of tit-for-tat bargain between God and his people. Pay the tithe and I'll reward you with lots of blessings. Send in your money and you'll get that promotion or new job.

As Elizabeth Achtemeier writes, "That crude bargain is not what is involved here when Judah is admonished to 'bring the full tithe' (v. 10). Motivating and accompanying all true gifts to God is the pouring out of our life, our love, our all. And when we so present ourselves, a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, it is surely true that heaven's richest bounties are heaped upon us. . . . We find ourselves given graces anew every morning, too numerous to count—the glories of a good creation; joy in daily work; patience, kindness, self-control in the fellowship we have with one another; release from guilt and anxiety and dread of death; and above all, peace with God, who winds us round and round with mercy, as if with air. The Kingdom's goal—the glory of God—becomes our chief occupation, and we find all these other things added to us as well."

Isn't the tithe just an Old Testament practice?

No. The biblical tithe was woven into the religious practices of God's people. There were offerings and taxes for a variety of purposes. But the tithe was for sacred purposes, given for God's priests, for the temple, and some even for the poor. Jesus didn't set aside the tithe. Why would he? Granted Jesus took to task those who prided themselves on tithing even of their spices while ignoring the larger matters of loving God and neighbor (Matthew 23:23-24). But Jesus kept God's Law and would certainly have given his tithe, as would have Peter, Andrew, and the rest. Not out of pride or obligation. They would have given out their love for God, knowing that their giving was the incarnation of their faith.

## Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. What usually comes to mind when you realize that the "stewardship" campaign is coming? Is this a time of obligation or joy? How can we make it a time of excitement and joy for our congregation – not just this year, but every year?
2. Today's passage from 2 Corinthians is an appeal for money from Paul to Christians in Corinth. Paul is gathering together a collection for the poor among the believers in Jerusalem. You might begin by sharing your reaction to Paul's appeal. What is its tone? Is there anything here that would inspire you if Paul were writing to you?
3. Most of us have heard a lot about tithing. Do you tithe? If so, why? If not, why? What do you think about this whole business of tithing? Does it make you feel generous? Guilty?
4. John Wesley didn't tithe. He used what he needed for himself and then put the rest of God's wealth to work for God. Wesley's approach turns tithing on its head. What would be the consequences for each of us if we followed Wesley's example? What would it mean for St. Andrew and God's church?

## Daily Bible Readings

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

*These passages are all about the collections for the poor believers in Jerusalem.*

<p><b>Monday, Galatians 2:1-10</b> In v. 10 Paul speaks of this work for the poor in Jerusalem.</p>	<p><b>Tuesday, 1 Corinthians 16:1-4</b> Paul's instructions regarding the collection for the saints. Each person's giving is to be commensurate with their income.</p>
<p><b>Wednesday, 2 Corinthians 8:1-15</b> This begins Paul's lengthy appeal for the collection for Jerusalem. He even compares the Corinthians to the Macedonians!</p>	<p><b>Thursday, Romans 15:25-32</b> Paul speaks about the final stages of the collection as he prepares to take it to Jerusalem.</p>
<p><b>Friday, Acts 11:27-30 &amp; 24:17</b> More references to the ministry of giving among the early Christians.</p>	<p><b>Weekly Prayer Concerns</b></p>

## Scott Engle's Weekday Bible Classes

Join us whenever you can. Each week's lesson stands on its own. This is very "drop-in." Bring something to eat if you like. Bring a study Bible. On occasion Scott has to cancel class, so if you are coming for the first time, you can check [www.scottengle.org](http://www.scottengle.org) to make sure the class is meeting.

### **Monday Evening Class – now studying Romans**

Meets every Monday from 7:00 to 8:15 in Piro Hall

### **Tuesday Lunchtime Class – now studying 1 Peter**

Meets from 11:45 to 1:00 in Piro Hall on Tuesdays.

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## Scott's 11:00 Sunday Class in Festival Hall

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.

This week – beginning a new series:

***Everyday Theology: from the checkout line to the funeral home***

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**Scott's New Book, *Restart: Getting Past Christian-ish*, is available in the St. Andrew bookstore.**

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**Scott Engle and Robert Hasley will be leading a trip to Israel in late October 2014. This will be a land-only trip that will include all the major sites in Israel.**

*For more information go to [www.scottengle.org](http://www.scottengle.org) or email Scott at [sengle@standrewumc.org](mailto:sengle@standrewumc.org)*

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Scott's Weekly Bible Studies are available at [www.standrewumc.org](http://www.standrewumc.org). Just go to "worship" and then "sermons." You'll find the study with each week's recorded sermon. There is also a complete archive of the studies at [www.scottengle.org](http://www.scottengle.org)

## Sermon Notes

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