



Diocese of the
MID-ATLANTIC
Anglican Church in North America

September 18, 2014

Dear Friends,

I'm writing this from the Diocese of Pittsburgh, where I am leading their annual clergy retreat on the subject of generosity and financial stewardship. It's a topic that is very important to me—the Lord used the biblical call to tithe to break me out of a spiritual logjam early in my ordained ministry—and one that I love to teach.

The Bible has tremendously good news for us about our money and how we use it. Scripture says that our decisions about money and possessions are *spiritual* decisions; they affect, for good or ill, our relationship with God. The Bible addresses the issue of our finances over 600 times and Jesus talked about money more than anything else except the Kingdom of God. What does Scripture say about money? It can be summarized by these four great Biblical principles, four great Biblical questions, and four great Biblical promises.

Four Great Biblical Principles

1. “Beware lest you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.’ You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth” (Deuteronomy 8:17-18). In the wilderness before they entered the land of milk and honey and gained riches beyond anything they had known before, the people of Israel heard this warning from Moses. God, Scripture tells us, is the giver of all that we have. What we possess is not earned, but is a gift of him.
2. “It is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy” (1 Corinthians 4:2). We are accountable to God for what we do with all that He has entrusted to us. We are not owners in our own right, who are free to do as we please, but managers of God's possessions. All that we have comes from God and we will one day be called to account to him for what we have done with his bounty.

3. “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms; provide for yourselves with purses that do not grow old, with a treasure in heaven that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Luke 12:32-34). One aspect of being a trustworthy steward is giving. Giving brings us closer to God. What we do with our possessions reflects and shapes, for good or ill, our relationship with God.

4. “He who sows sparingly will reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will reap bountifully. Each one must do as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:6-7). God wants us to give freely, in thankfulness and joy over all that he has done for us in Christ.

Four Great Biblical Questions

1. “What shall I render to the Lord for all his bounty to me?” (Psalm 116:12). The motive for Christian giving is not pride or guilt or duty or fear or even to give to a good cause. The motive for Christian giving is thankfulness. The Biblical answer to this question is found in the same Psalm: “I will offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving” (Psalm 116:17). Our gratitude should lead to generous giving.

2. “My brothers, what use is it for a person to say he has faith when he does nothing to show it?” (James 2:14). Faith in God which is mere lip service is seen by God to be hypocrisy and it counts for nothing. Unless we put our faith into practice, unless it makes a difference in the way we live our lives, then our faith is dead.

3. “Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, ‘How are we robbing you?’ In your tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. Bring the full tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house; and thereby, put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing” (Malachi 3:7-10). The Biblical standard for Christian giving is the tithe. We give at least 10% of what we receive back to God as a way of expressing our understanding that everything comes from Him. Jesus endorsed the tithe and said that we must tithe while living lives that work for justice and show true love for God (Luke 12:42).

4. “Who then will offer willingly, consecrating himself to the Lord?” (1 Chronicles 29:5). King David asked this question in calling on the people to give to the Lord so that the temple might be constructed. He was calling for giving, but, on a deeper level, he was calling on people to offer themselves totally to the Lord. Their giving should reflect their total commitment of their lives to God.

Four Great Biblical Promises

1. “Give generously to [your poor brother] and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to” (Deuteronomy 15:10). As we respond to God’s call to give generously and with a loving heart, God promises to bless us. Our lives will be better as we obey God and give.

2. “God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that you may always have enough of everything and may provide in abundance for every good work” (2 Corinthians 9:8). God will bless us with abundance, not to make us rich, but to enable us to have enough to give. He wants us to experience the joy and blessing that comes from giving to others.

3. “Under the test of this service, you will glorify God by your obedience in acknowledging the gospel of Christ, and by the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others” (2 Corinthians 9:13) God says in Malachi 3:7-10 that we can test him; if we tithe, he will provide for us. Here he says that he is also testing us. We will demonstrate the reality of our love for him by our response to his call to give.

4. “Seek first God’s kingdom and his righteousness and all these things shall be yours as well” (Matthew 6:33). Tithing teaches us to put God first in our lives. God promises that if we trust him, He will meet our needs for food and clothing and shelter, but, far more important, he will also give us the things of his eternal kingdom.

May these truths from God’s Word encourage and challenge you as you consider your giving in thankfulness to our gracious Lord.

Faithfully yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ John". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping 'J' and a smaller 'n'. A plus sign is written to the left of the 'J'.

The Rt. Rev. John A. M. Guernsey