

Money Matters

Maybe it works like this. The degree of ardent assurance shown by the speaker is inverse to the probability that the answer will be convincing in all instances.

“There is always more money if people catch the vision.”

“Preach and teach stewardship of all life, not just about giving money.”

“Be practical, always plan the annual campaign thoroughly and execute it well.”

“Rely more on prayer and the empowering breath of the Spirit than on programs and mechanics.”

“It is a matter of Scriptural obedience.”

“Never ask directly for money; invite engagement and seek commitment and money will follow.”

“It is a matter of grace not law.”

“Never fail to adopt a fresh theme every fall.”

“Religiously eschew gimmicks.”

“Use numbered pledge envelopes.”

“Make it clear where every cent will be spent.”

“Encourage people to give freely without strings attached.”

There are plenty of stories showing how various appeals for money have resulted in breathtaking generosity, or fizzled, or led to polarization and conflict, or worked like a charm. Contradictory real life tales emerge from different settings and people, the congregation’s spiritual practices and maturity, the quality and transparency of communication, the aptitude of leaders, past achievements and missteps, degrees of trust, and scores of other factors pertinent to each place and time

Why is asking for and raising money sometimes so hard? When we revisit Jesus’ admonition to the rich young ruler or face our own terror in locating the point where generosity ends and justice begins, we recognize some of the reasons. We know that money matters. **How we think about, gather, spend, and use money matters to us.**

And it matters to God. Which is sufficient cause for more prayer and careful attention to what the Lord requires. In addition to “paying the bills,” when we teach and preach about and present opportunities for giving, we are helping people learn to live with joyful obedience as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Perhaps that matters to God most of all.



Neil M. Alexander
President and Publisher
The United Methodist Publishing House

OPEN FORUM

Your Jan./Feb. issue is right on target for emerging ministries, and the title "Visible and Invisible Wounds" is so appropriate. As a retired-but-still-active UMC clergy, I want to say a heartfelt thanks.

Like many families, ours has been deeply affected by mental illness. Here in Virginia, we have made significant progress within faith communities in presenting the issues. And I have seen in several congregations that genuine positive response comes after understanding where we really are in these "invisible" wounds. Keep up the good work!

Jay Luther

Fredericksburg, VA

Andrew Sung Park's theology of the cross (March/April, What About the Victims?) is more influenced by the Korean concept of *han* than by the Bible,

the classical creeds, or our Wesleyan heritage. While adapting the gospel to various cultures is important to the mission of the church, we cannot allow culture to compromise the essence of that gospel. A couple of excerpts make the point:

Park wrote, "If God cannot forgive sinners without the violent execution of Jesus, then God is neither gracious nor merciful, but interested only in retributive justice. In reality, however, our God surpasses the sin-penalty model that we have seen above, and is greatly merciful toward suffering humanity.... Taken as propitiation-fulfillment of God's requirement that someone has to pay for sin—Jesus' execution is hard to understand, let alone defend."

First, this means Jesus' death on the cross has no power to save and was essentially unnecessary. He's just one among many Jewish martyrs. That is easy to understand but emptied of all power. Second, Dr. Park's idea of God seems to

be all love, mercy, and grace, without the counterbalancing characteristics of holiness, righteousness, and justice that are so prevalent in the Bible. A shallow, one-dimensional concept of God, very popular among universalists, but not true to Scripture.

Dr. Park's unstated conclusion is that the death of Jesus did nothing to release us from sin and guilt. It means nothing more than God identifying with us in our suffering. The closest Park comes to salvation is to say in essence, "Misery loves company."

J. David Trawick

San Antonio, TX

May/June is excellent. Thanks for biting the bullet and taking on such an ambitious project. Some of the articles are really outstanding—because they appeal to me. But, the whole issue is to be commended. We need to revisit John Wesley more often.

James J. Pfander

Lakewood, OH

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Creating a Climate for Giving

by Donald Joiner
(Discipleship Resources, 2001, 0881773182)
How to move from a "fund-raising church" to a "ministry funding church."
Includes a financial campaign for developing Christian philanthropists.

See issue of *Living Pulpit* on "Wealth"
(April-June, 2003) Order back issues on-line at **www.pulpit.org**

For the 20/30-year-olds in your congregation, see this small group resource:
Abundance: Living Responsibly with God's Gifts
(Abingdon, 2001) 0687091438.
Seven topics, including
"Ways We Are Handled by Our Stuff."
Wrestles with personal finances, seeking to discern the will of God.

God's Vision of Abundant Living

Abundant living is a life of greater simplicity, of a more responsible use of resources, and of a deeper faith.

Jesus discusses the foolishness of the rich and the greed that builds treasures on the earth. He admonishes us to build treasures in heaven, so that we might keep ourselves pure in heart and faithful to God (Luke 12).

In the "new heaven and new earth," we will choose a just lifestyle and share our wealth with the poor because we no longer need "things" to give us worth. With a theology of "enough," we will find gracious and fulfilled living in meeting our own basic needs and those of others. We will truly be "keepers" and "doers" of God's Word.

There is a conflict between what abundant living means for a Christian and what it has come to mean in secular society. In secular society, abundant living is defined by one's aspiration to purchase an endless number of things, far more than is needed. Secular abundant living is experienced when one desires to live in luxury with every whim satisfied. This type of abundant living creates a system where the wealthy consume a disproportionate amount of resources and produce a disproportionate amount of waste. This living is rooted in a consumerism that exploits natural resources, exacerbates global resource crises, and causes cycles of global poverty that often lead to local and international violence.

Hearing these facts often raises feelings of guilt, anger, and denial. The false hope that technology will find fixes for all problems leads us to believe that change is not necessary. We who live in a culture of consumerism believe we have earned and deserved all of what we have; we do not want to give up anything. Our "things" give us a misguided status, a false sense of security, and a distorted sense of self-worth.

If we fail to believe in our hearts that our worth comes from our relationship to Christ and that we are called to bring God's redeeming love to creation through our actions and lifestyles, then all the arguments and information on the global crisis will be ignored. We will care about our impact on creation when we each recognize that creation is a gift given by a loving God for the benefit of all life. Only then will we assess how our lifestyles (what we do, use, buy, wear, eat, live in, and travel in) affect all present and future life.

We have a choice: We can be sustainers, or exploiters, of creation.

—From *The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church, 2000*. Excerpted from Resolution 188.