

I do not say this as a command, but I am testing the genuineness of your love against the earnestness of others. For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. And in this matter I am giving my advice: it is appropriate for you who began last year not only to do something but even to desire to do something—now finish doing it, so that your eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means. For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has—not according to what one does not have. I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. As it is written, ‘The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little.’ (2 Corinthians 8:8-15 NRSV)

As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life. (1 Timothy 6:17-19 NRSV)

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TREASURING THE COMMUNION

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Scripture for the Journey

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Money makes the world go ‘round and puts food on the table. We talk about it, teach about it and complain about it silently or aloud. Money is one of the major ways we concretely assess and determine value. With little or no effort we use it or lose it, hoard it or squander it.

Jesus gives many pronouncements about money; their number rivals the number of pronouncements Jesus made on such things as Sabbath, healing and food. Below are some passages from the New Testament highlighting Jesus’ and the early church’s thoughts and practice with regard to money. In my reading of these passages, two questions arise:

1. How does the use of money help or hinder the spiritual needs of others?
2. How does one’s use of money help or hinder one’s own spiritual development as a Christian?

Money is really just an agreed-upon symbol of what is considered valuable, what is considered a treasure. In today’s society, lots of money means being rich and having access to and ability to obtain a whole host of things that are not money. A Christian perspective, in my view, challenges whether, these things that are not money—i.e. things that are desired, treasured, valuable—are indeed treated as such. How do we use them, or an even better question is, how do we relate to them?

As you read the words of Jesus, His disciples and the leaders of the early church showcased below, please reflect prayerfully upon your relationship with money in particular, and also what you think about what you value in general. To me these responses highlight the inestimable importance of right relationship. Right relationship is a sign and symbol of our baptism because—like water—it contains, transports and spreads abroad what is necessary to support life in our interdependent and interconnected world.

Is your relationship to money and resources so tight and unyielding that it is difficult to let it go and share it? Are you able to live joyfully with less than you think—and still give that away for God? If God is the source of money and resources, doesn't this make them holy and therefore subject to be used with awe and reverence consistently, no matter how great or small the amount? Is there a time when money and resources solidify into convenient idols which prevent you from being fully present to our physical, mental and spiritual relationship with God and with others? Do you believe that money can be used wisely and sacramentally in such a way that it builds and transforms individuals and communities according to their needs?

Ponder and treasure your reflections on these questions and consider finding a way to share them—as well as your money, time and talent—beyond yourself, starting with The Anglican Communion. 70 million sisters and brothers share with you a common historical and spiritual foundation and life in Christ in a diversity of contexts, circumstances and conditions throughout the world. Visit the Anglican Communion web site at www.anglicancommunion.org to learn more about them. Contact your diocese or visit the Anglican and Global Relations website at www.episcopalchurch.org/agr to learn about how Episcopalians currently “treasure” the Anglican Communion.

May you, O CHRIST, who ever creates, lives and breathes with the Creator and the Holy Spirit, inspire us, Your disciples, to remain in right relationship with You and with all of creation. Help us to live out a new and joyful relationship with money and the myriad things visible and invisible that we value, now and forever. Amen

Then someone came to him [Jesus] and said, “Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?” And he said to him, “Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments. . . .” The young man said to him, “I have kept all these; what do I still lack?” Jesus said to him, “If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” When the young man heard this word, he went away grieving, for he had many possessions. Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Truly I tell you, it will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astounded and said, “Then who can be saved?” But Jesus looked at them and said, “For mortals it is impossible, but for God all things are possible.” (Matthew 19:16-17; 18-26 NRSV) Also see Mark 10:17-31; Luke 18:18-30.

He [Jesus] called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money

in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. He said to them, “Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.” So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them. (Mark 6:7-13 NRSV) Also see Luke 9:1-6.

He [Jesus] sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. Then he called his disciples and said to them, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.” (Mark 12:41-44 NRSV)

Then they sent to him [Jesus] some Pharisees and some Herodians to trap him in what he said. And they came and said to him, “Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality, but teach the way of God in accordance with truth. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not? Should we pay them, or should we not?” But knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, “Why are you putting me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me see it.” And they brought one. Then he said to them, “Whose head is this, and whose title?” They answered, “The emperor’s.” Jesus said to them, “Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” And they were utterly amazed at him. (Mark 12:13-17 NRSV)

Soldiers also asked him [John the Baptist], “And we, what should we do?” He said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages.” (Luke 3:14 NRSV)

[Jesus said,] “Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much. If then you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own? No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.” The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all this, and they ridiculed him. (Luke 16:10-14 NRSV)

After this he [Jesus] went down to Capernaum with his mother, his brothers, and his disciples; and they remained there a few days. The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves, “Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!” His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for your house will consume me.” (John 2:12-17 NRSV)

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. (Acts 4:32-35 NRSV)