

Our daily bread: why prayer matters

When Jesus taught us to pray, "Give us today our daily bread" he invited us to live each day trusting in and grateful for God's provision. This paper explores the importance of prayer in the formation of discipleship around money for both individuals and for the church.



Back in 2004 then Archbishop Rowan Williams preached a sermon in Westminster Abbey to celebrate the 300th anniversary of Queen Anne's Bounty. This was a gift of £17,000 made in 1704 to support the poorest clergy livings in the land and in a modern form the Bounty is still with us. In a sermon exploring the funding of parish ministry the Archbishop also recalled the testimony of a fellow Bishop: that in many years of making confession and receiving spiritual direction he had never once been asked about his use of money.

Our personal accountability before God for the money entrusted to us is linked to the funding of the ministry of our churches. Nor can we divorce the material needs of our churches from the spiritual maturity of individual Christians or from the corporate prayer of the church.

Prayer matters to us

The church at Corinth was proud of its spiritual gifts. Paul knew and valued them but was keen that they should add financial generosity to this list of spiritual gifts. He writes, *'Just as you excel in all things - in faith, speech, knowledge so we want you to excel also in this grace of giving'* (2 Cor 8:7). For Paul this giving was not fundraising but the outworking of grace.

Jesus made that same connection of the material and spiritual worlds when he taught, 'Where your heart is, there your treasure is also' (Mt 6:21; Lk 12:34). If we want to know our priorities we should follow the money! As Billy Graham said long ago, a cheque book is a theological document which declares where our hearts lie. It also follows that financial integrity and generosity can shape our hearts as we are formed as disciples of Jesus. As Zacchaeus and a rich ruler learned in their different ways, what we do with money can help or hinder our relationship with Jesus (Lk 19:1-10; Lk 18:18-30). Moses warns those who first settled in the promised land to guard against the conceit, pride and illusion of self reliance that can accompany wealth (Deut 8:12-18). The prophets thundered against injustice to the poor (Amos 2:6-8) while Paul warns early Christian leaders against greed (1 Tim 3:3; Titus 1:7) and the rich against arrogance and false trust in wealth.

The warnings are clear but equally there is no single, right way to follow Jesus with our money. It was wealth women who supported Jesus' own ministry (Lk 8:1-3) and, as Luke T Johnson comments, "throughout Luke-Acts hospitality shown to the emissaries of God is a sign of acceptance and faith" (Lk 9:3-5; 10:5-12, Acts 10:22-33; 16:14-15). William Ramsey used to describe prayer as being in the presence of God with what is on your heart. To be prayerful around money is to allow Jesus to be Lord of this personal, sensitive and powerful area of our lives. Again it was Billy Graham who said that when we get our decisions in the area of money right somehow many other things also fall into place. A willingness to let God be God in this area of life can release joy and freedom in much more



than just financial giving.

Prayer matters to our churches

In the bible financial gifts to resource the spiritual life of the people are often accompanied by public prayer, shared celebration, thanksgiving and praise.

- The Tent of Meeting was richly constructed, resourced by a generous people and its completion marked by the glory of God filling the Tent (Ex 35-40).
- The Tithe provided for the temple priests (Num 18:21-32; 2 Chron 31; Neh 10:35-38) as well as for the poor as the whole people celebrated together (Dt:14: 22-29). So too the offering of first fruits (Dt 26:1-11) supported the priests as the giver offered worship and words of remembrance of all that God has done for Israel.
- The first temple in Jerusalem was built by generous gifts from Israel's King and leaders (1 Chronicles 29). Its rebuilding after the Exile witnessed the same blend of shared generosity and worship (Haggai; Ezra 1-3).
- Paul is clear that a generous, shared, financial gift to Jerusalem will produce spiritual blessings for Corinth and thanksgivings to God (2 Cor 9:11-15).

Individual and shared prayer for the financial situation of the church and a shared celebration of a fruitful programme is both biblical and appropriate. A lasting legacy of an effective, prayerful stewardship initiative is a change in the culture and tone of money talk in the church. Thinking, talking and acting with integrity around money is not a necessary evil but a natural part of the life of the church. Money is increasingly regarded as an opportunity rather than a burden and resources are freed for mission here and overseas. Prayer helps us connect faith, giving and lifestyle.

Fruit of the loom

One of the tasks of the planning group is to pay attention to prayer in their preparation alongside the other planning tasks. Getting this balance right is not always easy but it does matter. An illustration might help.

In weaving the long threads, the warp, are set up first on the loom. The shuttle flies across the warp weaving in the weft threads which bind the fabric together. In stewardship the financial data, the case statement, the literature are all akin to the warp threads, that lay the structure of the programme. The weft is the preaching, teaching and prayer which binds and completes the fabric. Both warp and weft matter and

the planning group must attend to the both lest the leadership and congregation neglect prayer amidst the practical preparation and the material needs of the church

Prayer resources

The prayer resources found under Designing the Programme at the Prayer and Liturgy tab will help encourage both personal and shared prayer. There are liturgical resources for inclusion in services as well as 'plug and play' orders for both Holy Communion and a Service of the Word. There are also short services for planning groups and a church council and creative ideas for shared prayer.

However, resources alone are not enough. Planning groups should ensure a creative balance between prayer and their work of planning and so model with the leadership the priority of prayer.



It's worth asking

Some of the following questions could be discussed at the planning group, the church council, a prayer group or small study group:

- Is prayer a part of any discussion of money matters in our church?
- How can the planning group and church leadership commit to and model prayer to the congregation?
- How best can we encourage the congregation to pray about our financial situation and this Giving in Grace programme?
- What practical considerations are there in using the liturgical resources in our gathered worship?