

Partners in the Gospel

Serving God with your money

Series: **On a Mission from God**

Location: St George's Battery Point

Date: 26 January 2025

Readings: Deuteronomy 14:22-29, Philippians 1:1-5, 4:14-19, Matthew 10:5-10

I want to tell you about 2 of your ancestors in the faith here at St George's. The first is William Cripps Jnr. William's dad William started the Cripps bakery just down the road at what is now Jackman and McRoss. If you're a Tasmanian, you'll know Cripps bread is one of our iconic brands. What you may not know is that William Cripps Jnr was also a Sunday school teacher here at St George's. There's a picture of him in our museum.

There's also a plaque to him on the wall behind the organ. It names him as a "generous benefactor". That's because he never married, and when he died in 1949 he bequeathed his entire estate to St George's.

The second person I wanted to tell you about is Henry Baldwin. Henry Baldwin was a lifelong parishioner here at St George's. He was a long time warden, serving under 7 rectors! He was also a lifelong bachelor. When he died in 2007, amongst other things he bequeathed his house, just across Sandy Bay Rd up Hampden Rd, to TMAG. He gave the Menzies institute a bequest for a research fellowship. And he also gave 4 churches in Hobart \$1.2 million in shares, including us at St George's.

William and Henry both gave countless volunteer hours to God's mission through St George's. But they also gave financially. Indeed, their financial legacy has continued to fund the work of God's mission in this church to this day.

Eg. 2 – Paul and the Philippians.

Rewind the clock 2000 years. The year is 62AD. The apostle Paul is in prison in Rome when he receives a special visitor. Epaphroditus, one of the leaders at the church in Philippi had just arrived bearing a substantial gift from them for Paul.

Paul wrote them a letter in return. We get a sense of his affection for the Philippian Christians in its opening words,

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now... Phil 1.3-5

The source of Paul's joy, the thing that filled him with thanks to God, was the Philippians' *partnership in the gospel*, the good news of Jesus.

The word translated *partnership* has the connotations of sharing in a business partnership and that is exactly the picture that Paul is going for.

Paul had planted the church in Philippi some 12 years earlier and since then they had

been silent but vital and generous partners in the grand task of promoting the gospel to the world. We know that their *partnership in the gospel* refers to financial partnership as Paul returns to the theme of partnership at the end of the letter.

Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; 16 for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need. 17 Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. 18 I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. 19 And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

This is the 2nd in our series “On a Mission from God”. God has created us to live for the praise of his glory and God has called us to invite others to join us in worshipping God. This is what the life and mission of the church and us at St George’s are all about. In this series we’re looking at different ways in which we can contribute to the mission of the church. We’re starting today with maybe the most delicate subject - money. Just like the Philippians, like William Cripps and Henry Baldwin, how can we be partners in God’s mission here at St George’s through that very practical and vital way of giving money? Culturally we don’t like talking about money. But the Scriptures have lots to say – too much for one sermon. And what we do with our money is a core part of our spiritual life, a way we can practically respond to God.

I’m hoping that today is going to be very practical. We’re going to look briefly at **5 principles from Scripture for giving**. Then we’ll look at **what we should give to**, and then **how much to give**. You hopefully have a copy of our “Your Part in the Budget” flyer which gives you a little guide to giving. I want to invite you to take that home, think and pray about it, and then use it to make a commitment to partner financially in the work of the gospel at St George’s.

5 principles for giving

Money in General

1. It’s all good

1 Tim 4.4, *For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving*

Money is a good gift from God, to be received, used and enjoyed with thanksgiving.

Terrible as a master, great as a servant – but that’s for another sermon.

2. It’s all God’s

Psalm 24.1 *The earth is the LORD's and everything in it*

Fundamentally, we don't really own anything. God has created and sustains all things. All things belong to him. He is Lord of all.

The point was impressed upon Israel as they entered the promised land. In Deuteronomy 8, Moses warned Israel that when they entered the promised land, when they ate and drank and built fine houses and settled down, when their herds and flocks had grown large and they had silver and gold in abundance – Moses warned that their hearts would become proud and that they would be tempted to say:

“My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.” But [Moses continued] *remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today.*

3. Stewards for the Common Good

1 Peter 4.10 *Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms*

God may own the cattle on a thousand hills, but he is in the business of sharing his wealth. In Genesis 1 we learn that humanity has been made God's vice-regents upon the earth. The creation is given to humanity in trust – to tend it and take care of it. This is reflected in 1 Peter 4. **All that we have is a gift from God, given for the service of others.** The letter may be written to the church, but as God's chosen people we learn what it is to live as true, authentic human beings.

Our wealth is a good gift from God, but it's first and foremost his and is a gift held in trust to be used for the common good.

These are some general principles about money. But what do the Scriptures have to teach us about how we can be partners in the gospel through our finances – how we can contribute to the life and mission of the church with our money?

Giving to the Lord's Work

4. The worker deserves his wages

1 Corinthians 9.14 *the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel*

cf. Matthew 10.10

If you've ever wondered about how Amy and Erica and I get paid, or where the money for the church power bill comes from, the simple answer is through the money that you give to St George's. It's why we have the collection box and tap'n'go up the back. There are of course many other good places to give money to, and we'll touch base on those in a

moment, but the simple equation is that all the good things we do in God's mission here at St George's comes from you giving financially.

5. Generosity

2 Corinthians 9.6-10 *you will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God*

The Scriptures urge us to be generous in our giving, generous in our partnership in the gospel, generous in our care of the needy. Generosity of course isn't measured in absolute terms. It's not the dollar figure, but rather how much in relation to what you have, but more on this in a moment.

Where to?

The teaching of the New Testament sets out 2 main areas to which we can direct our finances

- 1) To support the work of the gospel
- 2) To provide for those in need

As a church the majority of our budget goes to the local ministry of St Georges – it lets us not only do what you see on a Sunday, but also our kids church, youth discussion group, pastoral care, our bible studies, Alpha and our witness in the community, with our big 4 public events of Easter, the Henry Baldwin lecture in June, Christmas, and coming up soon Shrove Tuesday Pancakes.

I want to suggest that your primary giving responsibility lies with St George's: It's the church you are part of; It's the community of faith in which you are fed and cared for. Your financial giving is a vital concrete way in which you can contribute to our mission as the Light on the Hill. We can't do any of our ministries without your financial partnership.

As a church we also give \$10,000 a year to the Durdins who work with Wycliff Bible Translators in Cambodia. They are our cross cultural mission partners. Joey works in Aid and Development. Marc leads an international team using computer technology to facilitate Bible translation and minority language preservation. So some of what you give goes to funding their work. Our local mission partners are Andy Maskell working with the University Fellowship of Christians at UTas. And second, Anglicare Tasmania - practically showing the love of Christ by serving the most vulnerable in our community. We particularly help out with Anglicare's winter and Christmas appeals. We aim to hear

regularly through the year from these 3 mission partners.

On top of that there are a plethora of different places into which you can direct your giving. Keep those two areas in mind – the work of the gospel and support of the needy. You might want to pick one thing from each category – for example we support a Nungalinya College in the Northern Territory - a Bible College training indigenous church leaders. We have a sponsor child in Uganda with Compassion. I'd also suggest that you set aside some money in your budget for Occasional things or Crises that arise – the homeless person; a local or international disaster..

How much? As much as you want

In the Old Testament the Israelites were commanded to tithe – that is give 10% of their income to the ministry of the Levites in the Temple and the care of poor Israelites. As Christians we don't live under the law, but under grace. There is no command as to what percentage of our income we should give. So the short answer to How much? Is as much as you want.

But the apostle Paul does give some advice in 2 Corinthians 8-9.

First he says that our giving is a response to the grace God has shown us in Christ. And he puts that in financial terms

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich. (2 Cor 8.9)

If the Lord Jesus himself gave up his wealth in order to give us spiritual riches, then we too ought to be generous.

And so Paul continues

2 Corinthians 9.6-8

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 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.

Aside: This is not a divine formula for material prosperity.

The reaping may not be financial. Jesus promises treasures in heaven, not on earth.

Plus, the point, as you can see, is that *in all things, at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.*

That is, once again, whatever wealth you have is for *good work* – ie not only for

your own good but for the service of others.

So how much? As much as you want – but generously and cheerfully.

CS Lewis has some helpful advice on the question of how much.

“I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare. In other words, if our expenditure on comforts, luxuries, amusements etc., is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little. If our charities do not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say they are too small. There ought to be things we should like to do and cannot do because our charitable expenditure excludes them.”¹

So how much? As much as you want. Generously and cheerfully; and, let me also suggest deliberately. When you do a budget, don't get around to your giving as the last item.

Have it in there as one of your essentials, like groceries and car insurance, before your luxuries like eating out and holidays. We've put a guide on the front of the “Your Part in the Budget” flyer to help you work out what giving a percentage of your income would look like according to your income bracket. So say if you get \$80,000 a year, giving 10% would look like \$154 per week.

How?

If you have a look at the “Your Part in the Budget” flyer you'll see on the back different ways to give. The most convenient for you and for us is setting up regular bank transfers. You can also give by cash or cheque in the collection box, or by credit card via the tap'n'go. For those of you who are older, I want to challenge you today to make a bequest to St George's in your will. You could be a William Cripps or Henry Baldwin. A Bequest is a way to keep giving to God's mission even after you've gone to glory. It's a powerful way to demonstrate that you are seeking treasures in heaven, not on earth. It is, as Paul puts it, a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice to God. And what a wonderful thing to be able to see still at work when you stand at the Father's side.

3 final words. First, as we give, we do so remembering God's promise in Philippians 4. God *will* supply all that we need according to the riches of his glory. Generous giving is a way of exercising your faith muscles. You can trust God as you give.

Second, Many of you do give generously – Thank you! Third, There are lots of other ways to contribute to God's mission here at St George's. We're going to hear more about those in the coming weeks. We're on a Mission from God here at St George's. Your financial generosity is a powerful way you can partner in God's mission.

¹ Mere Christianity, p82