

a holistic approach

by Andy Hale, CBF Global Church Starts Initiative

“Goodbye!” stewardship sermons and emphases.

The pastor gathered the children around him for the weekly children’s sermon. There I was in my cute little shirt, clip-on tie, khaki pants, and penny loafers (yes, with the penny in its slot). The pastor then said a line that haunts me 30+ years later, “You know, kids, God loves money that folds, not money that jingles.”

Were his intentions decent? Yes. Could the message have used a slight tweak? You can bet both pennies in my loafers on that fact.

Yet if we are all honest, talking about money in the church is so awkward. Whether they answered “Yes” or “No” when the pastor search committee asked if they will gladly preach on stewardship, every preacher dislikes preaching about money. Nevertheless, the topic makes it to the pulpit at least once a year, typically during a projected budget dip or in December to remind people they can get charitable contribution credit for taxes.

But what if I told you that the best thing for pastors and churches to do is to say goodbye to the stewardship sermons and emphases? In fact, what if I told you that preaching on tithing has done a tremendous disservice to the church for many generations?

God cares about money.

The reality is that God cares about money. God, however, tends to care about it in a way that we are less likely to focus on.

The Bible talks about money more than 2,172 times. Just to give us a little comparison, the Bible talks about believing only 273 times, praying 371 times, and love 714 times.

Jesus mentions money in 16 of his 38 parables. 1 out of 7 verses in Matthew, Mark, and Luke are about money. All told, Jesus speaks about money 25% of the time.

Is this more fodder for a stewardship sermon? Actually, these passages give us more fodder for a sermon on debt,

greed, lording over the poor, propping up the idol of money, discriminatory laws against the alien and poor, predatory lending, and so on.

It appears that God does care about money, but in a holistically different way than we tend to preach on.

Say “Hello!” to a holistic approach to finances.

It never ceases to amaze me that no matter how much things change, they really do stay the same. Think about the nearly 2,200 passages of scripture on money!

It is time for the church to stop its disservice to members by only teaching on tithing when people are facing financial stress, growing debt, consumerism, and unethical business practices. We need to discuss the disconnect between the way of Jesus and the way we use our wallets.

It is time to say hello to a holistic approach to finances. We might begin that conversation by discussing how the way that we earn, spend, and invest our money matters; how debt has ramifications on our lives and souls; how business practices and following Jesus can go hand-in-hand; why it matters who is making our products and how inexpensive goods come at a price to others; and how the only response to God’s abounding generosity is generosity to neighbors.

It is also way past time for the church to examine how it uses its resources. Maybe spending more on ourselves (buildings, programs, and events) than hands-on-ministry (loving our neighbor as ourselves) matters more than we care to admit.

So, let’s throw away stewardship sermons and start a new conversation around a holistic and gospel-centric approach to finances, both for the individual and the church.

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