

Why Give? A theological primer written by Eucharist elder Stephen Edwards.

As with so much of the Christian life, the question of “why give?” is ultimately about the deeper question of “why God?” An encounter with the God who is GOD can put us on our knees, give us hope and purpose, and lead us into love and worship!

David was the oh-so-flawed king of Israel who had a life of encounters with the living God of his people Israel, and worshiped him as a result. He wanted to build a glorious temple as *worship* to this God who met him. God told him this would be left to his son Solomon, but as recorded in 1 Chronicles 29 David still wanted to give and raise money for it:

29 Then King David said to the entire assembly, “My son Solomon, whom alone God has chosen, is still young and inexperienced, and the work is great; for the temple is not for mankind, but for the Lord God. 2 Now with all my ability I have provided for the house of my God the gold for the things of gold, the silver for the things of silver, the bronze for the things of bronze, the iron for the things of iron, wood for the things of wood, onyx stones and inlaid stones, stones of antimony and stones of various colors, and all kinds of precious stones and alabaster in abundance.

... Who then is willing to consecrate himself this day to the Lord?”

He gave himself and his resources as an act of worship and then invited others to do so:

6 Then the rulers of the fathers’ households, the leaders of the tribes of Israel, and the commanders of thousands and hundreds, with the supervisors of the king’s work, offered willingly;

... 9 Then the people rejoiced because they had offered so willingly, for they made their offering to the Lord wholeheartedly, and King David also rejoiced greatly.

Having received all the gifts, he prayed a prayer of worship and thanks to the God who had encountered him (1 Chronicles 30:10-19). David worships God - the living God who met his ancestors (in fact, who saved them from slavery in Egypt, led and fed them through the desert, and into the promised land) and who met him - and declares that *all* is God’s; everything has been given as a gift, and so it is only right that they should give back to God in worship.

This pattern of our Christian spiritual life still holds today: we believe God meets us to reveal himself as he did to the people of Israel and to David their leader. In this encounter we can begin to see that everything we have is a gift given to us by our Creator, and in worship to him we shall give it back. We give it back to the ‘temple’ - to the place and people tasked with reflecting God’s glory and drawing us together as a community to worship Him.

God gave his people Israel the practice of tithing (a ‘tenth,’ Leviticus 27) to equally invite all his people into worship of him. This was a simple way of bringing their story into resonance with his glory. Likewise, it was a practice to build the temple structurally in a way that met the practical needs of the place and people (Priests and Levites) who were directly focused on leading the

people into worship. This also (along with other practices they had) led them into resonance with God's heart of *generosity* towards each other, and towards the poor, marginalized, and estranged.

Jesus fulfilled and radicalized the old laws, including those related to tithing (see Luke 6:30-38). When he encounters the 'rich young ruler' who sought to receive eternal life (Mark 10:21) he says to him: "One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." Christ knew the power of money to lead us into worship of *it* as an idol (Matthew 6:24): "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."

Thankfully Jesus offers us hope. After speaking to the rich young ruler he says to his disciples: "With people it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God." (Mark 10:27).

It is that same God who leads the early disciples of Jesus to 'sell all they have' and give to those in the community who have needs (Acts 4). That same God calls the church to echo David, giving as an act of worship, whether that giving is towards the saints in need (2 Corinthians 8:3) or what we would see as more traditional church structures (1 Timothy 5:17-18).

Our modern culture (and our economic system of exchange) is obsessed with money as it creates power, value, and worth in addition to being the means of facilitating economic relationships and exchanges. But money also creates the need (and desire) for more money; an idol which takes more than it gives as our lives must accelerate to obtain more and more.

Like with many idols, in our obsession we don't actually talk much *directly* about our relationship to it. If we did, we might reveal it to be a clothesless emperor and so sacrifice the worth (or *lack* of worth!) we thought it was giving us.