

# starters for Sunday

## **Moderators' Worship Notes: Very Rev Finlay Macdonald**

### **Stewardship Season**

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to thank the Very Rev Finlay Macdonald, former Principal Clerk, for his thoughts on the stewardship of money.

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## Introduction

Christian Stewardship is a fundamental part of Christian Discipleship. It is concerned with the gifts of God and the way we use these gifts. It is concerned with the love and commitment of God to the world and its people, and with our response to God's love and God's commitment.

Worship has a pivotal role in any consideration of Christian Stewardship in the life of the Church. In worship we give thanks for the gifts of God; we confess our failure to use these gifts as God expects them to be used; we explore the pages of the Bible and engage in theological reflection on God's giving and our response; we offer to God our time, our talent and our money to advance the kingdom.

Four former Moderators of the General Assembly kindly agreed to take us on a journey through some of their personal thoughts about the stewardship of money. They offer us prayers, sermon notes and hymn suggestions. These worship notes are offered in the prayerful hope that they might help worship leaders to tackle the sometimes prickly theme of "money" during worship. However, it is up to the reader to adapt these as he/she sees appropriate.

I wish to express my gratitude to the contributors for their time and assistance in writing this material which can be found on the Church of Scotland [Starters for Sunday pages](#) and on the [Resourcing Mission](#) website, where additional archive material can also be found.

Rev Alan W Gibson

Head of Stewardship



## Musical Suggestions

CH4 468	Son of God, eternal Saviour
CH4 497	Almighty Father of all things that be
CH4 498	Angel voices ever singing
CH4 500	Lord of creation, to you be all praise
CH4 502	Take my life, Lord, let it be
CH3 458	Lord of all good, our gifts we bring to thee

## Scripture Readings

[Amos 8: 1-12](#)

[1 Timothy 6: 3-10](#)

[Luke 12: 13-21](#)

## Prayers<sup>1</sup>

Teach us, good Lord, to serve you as you deserve;  
 To give and not to count the cost;  
 To fight and not to heed the wounds;  
 To toil and not to seek for rest;  
 To labour and not to ask for any reward save that of knowing we know we do your will.

*St Ignatius Loyola*

Lord Jesus, who for our sake became poor, that by your poverty we might become rich; Grant to your people so to give of their substance as to acknowledge that they belong wholly to you; for your name's sake.

*Church of South India*

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<sup>1</sup> Prayers drawn from *Parish Prayers*, editor Frank Colquhoun (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1982) and *The Oxford Book of Prayer*, editor George Appleton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985)



O God, whose Son Jesus Christ earned his bread by the labours of his hands, and taught that all things we possess are committed to us as a trust from you: Help us to be faithful in the exercise of our stewardship; that in earning we may be just and honourable, and in spending we may seek first not our own indulgence but your glory and the good of others; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

I asked for strength that I might achieve;  
I was made weak that I might learn humbly to obey.

I asked for health that I might do greater things;  
I was given infirmity that I might do better things.

I asked for riches that I might be happy;  
I was given poverty that I might be wise.

I asked for power that I might have the praise of men;  
I was given weakness that I might feel the need of God.

I asked for all things that I might enjoy life;  
I was given life that I might enjoy all things.

I got nothing that I had asked for,  
But everything I had hoped for.

Almost despite myself my unspoken prayers were answered;  
I am, among all men, most richly blessed.

*Prayer of an unknown Confederate soldier*



## Sermon Ideas

### [Luke 12: 13-21](#)

This passage concerns a matter which divides families to this day, namely a dispute over inheritance. A man asks Jesus to intervene in such a row and tell his brother to divide the family inheritance with him. Jesus, no doubt wisely, declines to become involved. Arguably, the man had a genuine grievance, though it was not so much against his brother as against the custom of the time. This held that the eldest son should receive a double share, with a view to perpetuating the family name. To our modern minds, with a more likely presumption of equality, this seems unfair. Perhaps Jesus' reluctance to intervene was a way of signifying that the man's focus was on the wrong things, namely material possessions.

As was often the case in such situations Jesus responds with a story. He tells of a rich man who just kept on getting richer and richer, who pulled down his barns to build bigger ones and said to himself: 'eat, drink and be merry'. Interestingly, Jesus omits the words we might expect to follow that expression – 'for tomorrow we die'. But that is exactly what happened. The man did die and the moral of the tale, in the words of Jesus, is a warning against building up treasure on earth, while being short in terms of riches towards God.

This challenging parable of the rich man leads us onto ground which is both political and personal.

Perhaps the first thing to do, though, is to remind ourselves of an often misquoted text of Scripture. St Paul did not say 'money is the root of all evil'. What he said was that love of money is the root of all evil. ([1 Timothy 6: 10](#)) The fact is that money lies at the root of much good. It follows that one of the most pressing debates at this time of economic challenge concerns how we use our national wealth, and whether, when everything is weighed in the balance, the result inclines more to the good or to the evil.

But the parable also raises personal issues of stewardship, responsibility, just sharing of resources and a credible adherence to the principle that we are to love our neighbour as ourself. In the story the rich man gets richer and richer. There is no specific contrast here, as in that other story of the rich man and poor Lazarus, but it is difficult to avoid thinking in these terms. After



all, the episode begins with a man feeling done out of his inheritance and then moves on to a man who certainly had no such concerns.

The Church and Society Council brought to the 2013 General Assembly a report entitled *Truth and Lies about Poverty*. This was drawn up in conjunction with the Methodist, United Reformed and Baptist Churches and sought to challenge ‘the myths and lies about poverty being spread and repeated by some politicians and journalists’. These find expression in the familiar narrative which contrasts ‘skivers’ and ‘strivers’, ‘worker’ and ‘shirkers’, taxpayers and benefits claimants. The report pointed out, for example, that the majority of children living in poverty are from families where there is a working parent, and that benefit fraud is in fact at an all-time low. In this connection it is instructive to refer to a survey conducted by the Royal Statistical Society and King’s College London which, on a range of issues, contrasted what people thought was the case with what actually was the case. With regard to benefits it showed that people thought £24 out of every £100 was claimed fraudulently, when the true figure was 70p. And yet, as the political parties gear up for the General Election, the question of benefits is clearly set to become a key battle ground, as the main parties vie to appear toughest on the nation’s ‘skivers’ and ‘scroungers’. Sadly, it is politically more profitable to pander to people’s misperceptions and prejudices than to address the real issues which create benefits dependency. Meanwhile, at the other end of the economic spectrum, a recent report from the European Union banking regulator on the number of bankers in the EU earning over 1 million euros revealed that in Germany there were 170 with the total for the whole of the EU, excluding the UK, being 739. The number of UK based bankers earning over 1 million euros was 2,346. I claim no expertise in matters of high finance and socio-economic policy but it doesn’t strike me as an entirely ‘daft laddie’ question to ask whether, at a time of food banks and much emphasised austerity, there is something seriously awry with our current political and economic priorities.

That said, it is easy to rail at social injustice and think that makes us personally virtuous. The truth is, however, that indignation, no matter how justified, cannot become a smokescreen which obscures the personal challenges of financial stewardship. For this reason I suggest a better way to frame that question is to ask not ‘How much should I give?’, but rather, ‘How much should I keep for myself?’ This was the point Jesus made when he saw many rich people donating large sums to the temple treasury and compared them with a poor widow who gave a mere two



pence. Indeed, he went so far as to say that she had given more than all the rich people because they contributed out of their abundance and still had plenty left, whereas she, out of her poverty, gave all she had. ([Mark 12: 44](#)). Certainly, returning to Luke's parable of the rich man, it is evident that he held back a great deal. Why else did he need to keep building bigger barns? And what about that devastating question at the end of the parable: "You fool, this very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?"

Some commentators point out that a more literal translation of the Greek would read: 'You fool, this night they demand your soul from you and whose will these things be?' What then is the 'they' which demand the man's soul? Why, it can only be the wealth and the possessions he has amassed. With these the foolish man had crossed the line drawn so clearly by the apostle when he talked about love of money being the root of all evil. By contrast let us never become slaves to our possessions but see them, rather, as gifts entrusted to us for the purpose of adding to the world's store of goodness.



## Further Advice

For any advice or ideas on Stewardship Programmes for your church, please contact:

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## Additional Resources

### Resourcing Mission



[Resourcing Mission](#) is host to Starters for Sunday and other key mission resources for download and purchase. Online booking is available for [Mission & Discipleship events](#). Please check back regularly, as new items are being added all the time. If there is something you'd like to see on this new site, please [contact us](#) via the website.

### Prayer Resources

These materials are designed to be a starting point for what you might look for in prayers. [Living Stones](#) is available from [St Andrew Press](#).



### Music Resources

The hymns mentioned in this material are ideas of specific hymns you might choose for this week's themes. However, for some excellent articles on church music and ideas for new music resources, please check out our online music pages [Different Voices](#).

### Preaching Resources



These materials are designed to be a starting point for what you might preach this Sunday. [Preachers Perspectives](#) is a resource where we have asked twelve preachers to share the insights they have gathered through their experiences of writing and delivering sermons regularly.

### Scots Worship Resources

[The Kirk's Ear](#) - Scots in the Kirk series for Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Pentecost and other times of the year

[Wurship Ouk bi Ouk](#) - Metrical psalms, hymns, prayers and words for worship

[Scots Sacraments](#) may give you helpful material if you are celebrating Communion or have a Baptism.

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*Please note that the views expressed in these materials are those of the individual writer and not necessarily the official view of the Church of Scotland, which can be laid down only by the General Assembly.*

