

A Thought For Your Pennies – Stan Hankins

I'm going to mention the unmentionable: money. More precisely and painfully, ministry and money! "Uh huh, always talking about money!" Actually, I've never written about money...till now. Fact is the Bible addresses monetary matters more than any other. If I'm committed to being Biblical, I best chip in my two cents.

The story is told of a little boy who swallowed a quarter. Family frantically asked if they should call a doctor. Grandpa wryly suggested out the corner of his mouth, "Call the Preacher, he can get money out of anybody!"

People get nervous whenever ministries mention money. I don't blame them. You can almost sense some sinister symbiosis between Lucifer and lucre. Like you, I have seen tear-stained pleas on television, received glossy mailings promising a hundred fold blessing for seed faith (even Wall Street can't match that!), and read carefully coded "prayer requests" in newsletters. All deftly designed to separate me and my money.

Let's clear the air right up front. I'm not asking for money. True, it does take money for ministry. Consider that it required funds for Jesus and his apostles, thirteen grown men, to roam the countryside, for Elijah and Elisha to prophecy, for Paul and his associates Timothy and Titus to plant churches. The Bible names their sources. If I'm candid, it takes money for me to do what I do. That aside, I am not asking for your money.

Jesus indicated that a clear way to put your finger on the spiritual pulse of a believer's heart was to touch their wallet. He posited, "Where your treasure is, there your heart is also." The Master sat in the Temple strategically perched near the offering plate scrutinizing as people deposited their contribution. Then, He commented publicly on the amount! (Pastor, try that next Sunday!) Particularly, He remarked about the attitude behind the amount.

Scripture reveals repeated instances of God's people giving specifically because the Lord touched their heart to do so. It was an inner spiritual issue. In the building of the Tabernacle in the wilderness (Exodus 35), rebuilding the Temple with Ezra (Ezra 1), when Jehoash of Judah repaired the Temple (II Kings 12), with the infant Antioch church mission effort (Acts 11), and more, intentional mention is made of the Lord moving hearts to give. There's a world of difference between giving out of gratitude and guilt. Paul prized motive when he penned, "Don't give under compulsion...the Lord loves a cheerful giver." Plainly put: if you can't give with a willing heart, keep your money.

Let's be rational. God doesn't need our money. Psalms asserts He owns the cattle on a thousand hills; for that matter, the grass and soil underneath! Apparently, He chooses to use our money; more to the point, to use us! Hence the real issue is not purse strings, but the heart.

Now, let's be practical. How does this apply to you and me, making a living in the real world?

Grasp this: money matters matter. Faith affects finance. We cannot compartmentalize our commitment to Christ. In more than a quarter century in ministry, I have observed nominal believers grumble while spiritual people rejoice when investing in the Lord's work. I remember as a kid, overhearing my parents figure out ways to buy bologna after they had willingly and cheerfully tithed. (I always wondered if the Lord owns all these cattle, how come we never ate steak?) Mom and Dad had a curious private quirk, when they gave, they would insist on using crisp new dollar bills. They wanted to give God their best. You can tell when a believer is maturing in their love for the Lord. They quit asking, "How little can I give?" and replace it with "How much can I give?"

Everyone in Ambassadors For Christ is totally funded in the Biblical manner mentioned earlier. There is no proverbial Big Corporate Pot in the sky. God's people make it happen; or it doesn't. In this ministry, I am called to "Live by Faith" which means support, not salary. I am a receiver. However, the Lord has reminded me; I too, am called to be a giver...a cheerful one at that! Bluntly put: if I can't give with a willing heart, just keep the Lord's money.

I did not write this article to wriggle a few more bucks out of you. The Apostle Paul wrote in II Corinthians 12 about ministry and money. In verse fourteen he cuts to the bottom line: "For I do not seek what is yours, but you..." O.K., here's my bottom line: I don't want your money, I want you. So does the Lord.