

Today as we introduce our stewardship campaign for this year I'd like us to consider a profile in giving that is based on an article by Charles Edward White in a old issue of *Leadership Journal* a publication of Christianity Today.

Many of you know who John Wesley was and some of you may know a great deal about him. But what you may not know is that to talk about John Wesley is to talk about stewardship. It is to talk about money, how to get it and what to do with it.

John Wesley was the brother of Charles Wesley and together they are linked with what became Methodism in England and in this country. John was the theologian and preacher while Charles was the hymn writer. You will find 16 hymns by the Wesleys in our Presbyterian blue hymnal. But John and Charles Wesley are responsible for the foundation of the Methodist denomination of Protestantism.

They were 2 of the 9 children of Samuel and Susannah Wesley, the 9 who reached adulthood that is. Susannah, bless her heart, had 18 children in all. Their father Samuel was an Episcopal priest who had been disowned by his family because he joined the Episcopal Church. Samuel was a poor man because not only had he been disinherited but he was a pastor serving one of the poorest-paying parishes in all of England.

As you can imagine, with no inheritance, with only a pittance of a salary and with 9 children to feed and clothe, there wasn't much money in the Wesley household. In fact, they were destitute. The Wesleys lived in poverty so grinding that John once saw his father hauled off to debtors' prison.

In spite of this John Wesley followed in his father's footsteps and he too became an Episcopal minister. Unlike his father though, John didn't serve the poorest of churches - he got a job teaching at Oxford University where he earned 30 pounds a year, a very handsome sum for a single

man. Being unmarried and with few obligations he lived comfortably and spent most of this money on playing cards, good tobacco and choice brandy.

But one day something happened that changed John Wesley's perspective on money. He noticed one of the chambermaids who cleaned his rooms was shivering because she had no coat against the cold damp winter weather. So he decided to give her some money to buy a coat.

However, when he reached into his pocket he found he didn't have enough to give her. He had just paid for some paintings for his rooms. And even though his heart was generous and even though he wanted to give the poor girl money to buy a coat - he couldn't. He had spent it all: he didn't have anything left to give.

Well, Wesley decided then and there to change the way he handled money. His records show us the result. In 1731, the year of the chambermaid, Wesley earned 30 pounds, spent 28 on himself and gave away 2. He didn't quite tithe that year.

The Bible says that 10 percent of what we earn belongs to the Lord - that's a tithe. Wesley gave 2 pounds from an income of 30, 1 pound short of a tithe.

The next year Wesley still joyfully spent 28 pounds on himself, but he earned 60 pounds and gave away 32.

The third year his income was 90 pounds, he still spent 28 on his pleasures but he gave away 62.

This pattern continued throughout John Wesley's entire life. His income went up by leaps and bounds until one year he earned over 1400 pounds, almost 50 times the salary of a well paid Oxford professor. It has been said that at one time, John Wesley was the highest paid man in England. He was literally a money making machine. Yet for his entire life he happily lived on less than 30 pounds a year and gave away all the rest.

Now John Wesley had no family, and no reason to lay up treasures. He said he never had more than 100 pounds at any one time in his entire life.

The English tax commissioners, akin to our Internal Revenue Service, had a hard time understanding Wesley's lifestyle. In 1776 they examined his tax records and wrote this to him: "[We] cannot doubt that you have more plate for which you have neglected to make entry." What they were saying was that a man of his prominence and income must surely have some silverware in the house that he hadn't paid excise tax on. Wesley wrote back saying, "I have two silver spoons in London and two at Bristol. This is all the plate I have at present, and I shall not buy any more while so many round me want [for] bread."

John Wesley, with probably the highest earned income in England, preached a lot about money. And thru all his preaching run 3 rules.

First, Wesley said, “Gain all you can.”  
Earn, make, gain all you can thru honest and lawful labor. Within the bounds of Christian ethics, gain all you can. Seek after pay raises, demand a decent price when you bargain, don’t sell yourself cheap. So, rule #1 - Gain all you can.

Second, Wesley taught, “Save all you can.”  
Live a lifestyle that knows when enough has been had. You needn’t deprive yourself of pleasures but put a cap on them. Recognize that the more you spend on things not needed the more your appetite for such things increases. The more we indulge ourselves the more spoiled we become. And saving thru a modest but still pleasurable lifestyle not only improves our financial condition but also our spiritual condition. So, save all you can - that is rule #2.

And Wesley’s third rule was, “Give all you can.”  
He taught that money in the hands of good Christian folk is a tool for good. Money can be food for the hungry, drink for the thirsty, clothing for the naked. Money instead of being paintings

for Wesley's walls could be a coat for the chambermaid. Money instead of being silverware in a drawer in Wesley's house could be bread for those in want. Money can be housing for the homeless, education for the ignorant, protection for the oppressed, medicine and care for the sick. Money in the hands of church elders can keep the church doors open and extend the care of God's people beyond the boundaries of the building. So, give all you can is rule #3.

Wesley believed that Christians begin with the tithe, the 10 %, then our giving goes up from there. The more God blesses us with gifts, the more we are able to bless others with our gifts.

Of course Wesley recognized and taught that we all have a responsibility to care for ourselves, to care for our families, and to provide for the possible loss of the family breadwinner. But, according to Wesley, Christians do this in a modest, pleasurable but wholesome manner so that the surplus can be given away.

Now. We are not all like John Wesley.  
We have family obligations; he did not.  
We earn average amounts of money; he earned  
spectacular amounts.  
His income kept increasing by leaps and bounds;  
ours seem to level off or even go down as we age.  
So you and I are probably not able to give the  
prodigious amounts that Wesley gave.

But even tho we *may not* be able to give the huge  
sums that Wesley gave, we *can* adopt his attitude  
toward finances:

We can adopt his attitude that, in the hands of a  
Christian, money should be a tool for doing good  
work.

We can all accept Wesley's belief that the more  
wealth God places in *our* hands, the more *we* are  
obliged to use it for good.

And we, like Wesley, can learn to recognize when  
we have enough.

John Wesley certainly lived a good life.  
He enjoyed his cards, his fine brandy and good  
tobacco. He didn't deny himself pleasures.

But Wesley knew when he had enough.  
And when he had enough, Wesley gave the rest  
away.

The more God blessed him, the more he was a  
blessing for others.

**GAIN ALL YOU CAN    SAVE ALL YOU CAN  
GIVE ALL YOU CAN**

These were the financial rules for this practical,  
sensibly indulgent and generous man who grew  
from poverty to become the highest paid man in  
England.

In 1744 Wesley wrote these words:

“When I die, if I leave behind me 10 pounds ...  
you and all mankind [may] bear witness  
against me, that I lived and died a thief and a  
robber.”

Forty-seven years later he did die.

And the only money mentioned in his probated  
will were the miscellaneous coins in his pockets  
and dresser drawers.

Over his lifetime it is estimated that John Wesley earned 30,000 pounds the equivalent today of over \$6,800,000. Less than 10% was used for himself. The rest, well over 90% of his life's earnings, he gave away.

GAIN ALL YOU CAN    SAVE ALL YOU CAN  
GIVE ALL YOU CAN

JOYFUL GIVING - JOYFUL LIVING

Amen.