

'Tis the Gift to be Simple
by Tom Wilkinson, Vice President
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My family and I were standing on the south rim of the Grand Canyon on a snowy afternoon ten years ago this spring. We were among a group of visitors listening to a park ranger tell us about the geologic forces that had shaped the canyon. She went into a layperson's explanation of how plate tectonics, headwater erosion and continental uplift had combined to form the magnificent landscape before us.

At the end of her talk she asked us if there were any questions. Immediately our son Simon, then three years old and in his mother's arms, impishly raised his small hand. A little surprised, the ranger called on him. Simon asked, "But how did that big hole get there?" Everyone smiled and had a good laugh, including the park ranger, and that was the end of her presentation. Simon had already heard the answer, but he wanted something simpler.

Leave it to a three year old to ask for a simple answer to a simple question. Which leads me to ask another simple question, "What is God calling each of us to give in response to God's grace in our lives?" "Hold on," you might say, "that's not a simple question," and you might be right. But think how a three-year old might answer.

I know of several churches in our conference that have begun offering classes on a Christian approach to personal finance. Some of these courses last for weeks, and I'm sure they are full of great information and insight on how a Christian might approach his or her personal financial life. They, too, ultimately ask the question of what God is calling each of us to give to further God's kingdom. The answer may be quite complicated depending on who is answering, but I think there is a very simple solution.

It can be summed up as the "10/10/80" rule. Give the first ten percent of one's income to God, save the next ten percent, and live on the remaining eighty percent. Now there's a simple answer to a simple question. I understand that getting to that simple state is not necessarily easy, especially when you consider that the average United Methodist household gives about 2.5% of its income to the mission and ministry of the church. We have a long way to go before we as a community of faith reach the first ten percent milestone.

By the way, a simple approach to stewardship is not a new thing, at least not in the United Methodist church. Recall John Wesley's famous sermon on stewardship where he said, "Use your God-given gifts well and wisely, to **earn** all you can, that you might practice frugality and **save** all you can, that you might have more than enough so that you are able to **give** all you can."

Finally, as the old Shaker hymn goes,

*'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free,
'Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be,
And when we find ourselves in the place just right,
'Twill be in the valley of love and delight.*

Three-year olds already know that.

As the stewardship voice of the Florida Conference, the Foundation is ready to help you, your family and your church with anything related to comprehensive Christian stewardship. For more information please call, click or write us at 1-866-363-9673 toll-free; www.fumf.org; or PO Box 3549, Lakeland, FL 33802.