

**Get Your Own Dirt**  
(Used during a church stewardship campaign)  
**Isaiah 25.6-10**

**By Rev. Henry Stone**

'There was a group of scientists, and they were all sitting around discussing which one of them was going to go to God and tell him that they didn't need him anymore.

'One of the scientists volunteered and went to tell God he was no longer needed. The scientist says to God: "God, you know, a bunch of us have been thinking, and I've come to tell you that we really don't need you anymore. I mean, we've been coming up with great theories and ideas, we've cloned sheep, and we're on the verge of cloning humans. So as you can see, we really don't need you."

'God nods understandingly and says, "I see. Well, no hard feelings. But before you go, let's have a contest. What do you think?"

'The scientist says, "Sure. What kind of contest?"

'God replies, "A human-making contest where we make a human being."

'The scientist quickly agrees, "Sure! No problem."

'The scientist bends down and picks up a handful of dirt and says, "Okay, I'm ready!"

'God shakes that divine head, "No, no, no...you go get your own dirt."<sup>1</sup>

"Get your own dirt." God has a great sense of humor, huh? "Get your own dirt," is a reminder in our lives. Just like God reminded that silly scientist, "Get your own dirt," God reminds us that who we are and what we have did not originate with us. Now, we like to think that these things originate with us: we come from our moms and dads, and we work hard for the things we have. It's really not that crazy, it's just regular old human thinking. But, it's still wrong thinking.

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<sup>1</sup> Retrieved 11-18-06 from [www.homileticsonline.com](http://www.homileticsonline.com), Sermon Illustrations.

Top to bottom, inside and out – head, heart, and breath – we come from God. Homes to hobbies, cars to kids, what we have comes from God. Truth is, we never had our own dirt.

We hear it at the beginning of Psalm 24.1-2: “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it. The world and all its people belong to him. For he laid the earth’s foundation on the seas and built it on the ocean depths.” Hard to miss that phrase, isn’t it: “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it.”

I try to remind myself of this truth, especially when things go wrong. “You know, Lord, this is your car, and it would be great if you’d make it work...today, if possible.” You can insert your own things-go-wrong into that sentence: tractors, lawnmowers, kids.

Well, it’s a comic reminder, but the point is the same. This life we enjoy is a gift of God. From first breath to last gasp, we come from God, every bit of our lives.

When we take the offering, many times I try to pray that reminder for us. Sometimes I say, “You are the author of all good and generous gifts,” or “In you we live and move and have our being,” or “Everything we are and everything we have comes from you.”

The reminder that God made it all – every-breathing-thing – is vital to our lives as disciples of Jesus Christ. We remember that truth in worship. We remember that truth praying. We remember that truth in studying. We remember that truth in every time we sit at the table and say grace over our meal.

Every time we say thanks, we remember that God is providing all this stuff we call “us.” Being thankful reminds us of how God provides. God doesn’t provide minimally, though; God provides maximally. In fact, God provides more than all we can ask or imagine (cf. Ephesians 3.20).

That’s what Isaiah is trying to tell us: “In Jerusalem, the Lord of Heaven’s Armies will spread a wonderful feast for all the people of the world.

It will be a delicious banquet with clear, well-aged wine and choice meat. There he will remove the cloud of gloom, the shadow of death that hangs over the earth. He will swallow up death forever!"

Israel is facing lots of enemies on every side, and Isaiah proclaims that God will provide a rich and sumptuous feast with the very best of foods right in the middle of trouble. Are we really surprised?

We shouldn't be. Psalm 23.5 says the very same thing: "You prepare a feast for me in the presence of my enemies. You honor me by anointing my head with oil. My cup overflows with blessings."

In the middle of this life – all the stuff of this life – God provides a feast for you, for me, for us. Our cups, our lives overflow with blessings.

If that's not enough, Isaiah tells us that God will conquer death. The greatest part of God's maximal provision is that in Jesus Christ we have eternal life. "...[T]he cloud of doom, the shadow of death that hangs over the earth" will be removed. How much better can God's provision be than that? More than all we can ask or imagine, right?

And we remind ourselves of these truths by praying, studying, or worshipping. Those are just things we do to grow as disciples of Jesus Christ. We can also remind ourselves that God gives us everything we are and everything we have by giving.

Just like praying, studying, or worshipping, giving is a spiritual discipline that helps us grow as disciples of Jesus Christ. I've said it before, and I'll say it again: "How we give says something about who we are as the disciples of Jesus." That's right.

John Wesley taught about the spiritual discipline of giving as a reminder of who and whose we are: "When the possessor of heaven and earth brought you into being and placed you in this world, He placed you here not as an owner but as a steward – as such He entrusted you for a season with goods of various kinds – but the sole property of these still rests in Him, nor can

ever be alienated from Him. As you are not your own but His, such is likewise all you enjoy."<sup>2</sup>

God placed us here as stewards, but it all still belongs to the boss. We are God's, as is all that we enjoy. Giving reminds us of that wonderful, but very simple truth.

The well-known church growth consultant, Kennon Callahan echoes Wesley very interestingly, "Giving is grace. The reward is the giving. As we give, we grow. We become newer, deeper people. Our sense of confidence and trust grows. Our sense of vision and hope grows. We live forward to our best true selves. It is not 'when you give, God will reward you.' It is not that God 'rewards' your giving. The reward *is* the giving. As you give, you share God's grace. The act of giving is virtually a sacrament of grace. The act of giving is both a sign and an event of the generosity of God in our lives. In this sense, the act of giving is the sharing of God's grace. The giving is the grace. The grace is the giving. As you give, you share in God's grace. As you give, you discover the deeper resources for giving with which God has blessed you. It is not that the grace is 'out there' somewhere. It is in you."<sup>3</sup>

As we give, we stand in God's grace. As we give, we live the reminder that all we are and all we have is a precious and wonderful gift of God. Giving to God's church not only helps us grow as disciples of Jesus Christ, but giving to God's church helps bring others to a saving relationship with Jesus, and it helps make disciples for Jesus. Giving furthers the ministry of God's great church.

But it starts with us living this truth, loving this God, growing in our giving. Giving to God reminds us that we, this dirt we call human, is from God, of God, and will return to God. We may not have our own dirt, but we can sure say thanks for who we are. Amen.

"Blessed are you, O Lord God, King of the universe, for you give us food to sustain our lives, and you make our hearts glad."

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<sup>2</sup> "The Use of Money," *John Wesley's Sermons: An Anthology*, Albert Outler and Richard Heitzenrater, eds., Nashville: Abingdon, 1991, pp. 356-57.

<sup>3</sup> Kennon L. Callahan, *Effective Church Finances*, San Francisco: Jossey Bass Publishers, 1992, p. 157-8.