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One-Minute Stewardship: Creative Ways to Talk about Money in Church. By Charles Cloughen Jr. New York: Church Publishing, 2018. 174 pp. \$16.00 (pbk).

This book is a treasure-chest for congregations and pastors seeking to witness more fully to the grace of God in their lives. An Episcopal priest who has spent a lifetime serving churches and the Diocese of Maryland, most recently as their Director of Planned Giving, Charles Cloughen defines stewardship as being “a manager of what the owner has left in the steward’s care.” The aim of this useful book is to encourage churches to talk about stewardship year-round. With the resources of this book, there is no occasion or ministry in the life of a congregation that does not merit the opportunity (and responsibility) to proclaim the grace of God active in our lives. When the coronavirus threatens the sustainability of many houses of worship, reading this book now can be especially helpful.

Whether it is leaving a personal legacy or “not leaving a mess” after our death, the annual pledge campaign, honoring of traditional church ministries like acolytes, youth groups, or food pantries, milestones in the liturgical year, dimensions of our personal lives like Veteran’s Day or social media, or the embrace of wider ministries like the Nature Conservancy or Five Talents USA, the author offers “one-minute” meditations on to suit the occasion. Written by more than fifty Episcopal and other mainline pastors and denominational and non-profit leaders, they are thoughtfully indexed by the church calendar, theme, and author. A quick peek on one of the indices will reveal an apropos inspiration.

It is hard to acknowledge any caveats to this rich compendium of practical theology, but there is one caution. Some of the best entries in this book reflect on Bible stories I had never considered (like Barabbas or Zedekiah) as well as better-known ones such as Zacchaeus or the poor widow, but many of the most moving “meditations” are personal stories. It’s been my experience as a preacher that sharing another’s personal story of grace may not be as powerful as sharing one’s own. On the contrary, a printed story may inspire a reader’s own stories. The spiritual discipline of meditating on someone else’s experience obviously takes more than “one minute,” but will ultimately reveal new grace.

The author’s introduction to the theology and practicalities of stewardship reads easily at one sitting, comprehensively covering both theological themes, such as God’s abundance and grace, and pastoral topics, such as whether the pastor should know a church member’s pledge, the role of the pastor in the annual pledge campaign, and various approaches to speaking about how to increase a congregation’s pledges over the 238 Anglican Theological Review 103(2) previous year. Readers may not agree with the author, but it is very useful to hear what he has to say.

The book was written pre-Covid, but can alert us to some of the dangers of shibboleths such as “no gift is too small.” We might be sorely tempted to say this when church members’ finances may be strained by illness or job loss, but the author reminds us that “no gift is too small” is “not Jesus talking” (p. 13). Whether you agree with the tithe or not, Cloughen encourages us to send a message that “no gift is too large,” that tithing is a Biblical principle, and we should “give until it

feels good” (p. 12). He reminds us that giving generously makes incarnate our gratitude for the rich, sustaining relationships we have within the church and other charities we might include in our tithes.

The compendium of contributed meditations on the theology of stewardship, giving of various kinds, special occasions in church and personal lives, and planned giving is best read sparingly and prayerfully over a span of time rather than at one sitting. For example, I stopped reading one morning after reading just two especially moving meditations on giving by the Rev. Mary Davisson, Executive Director/Port Chaplain, Baltimore International Seafarers’ Center and Bishop Joe Goodwin Burnett, retired from the Diocese of Nebraska. Both were personal stories that blessed me with an awareness of the power of gratitude. I am retired but wish I had this book when I was in parish ministry. I would keep it on my desk as a resource surely as helpful as other meditations, being deeply grateful for the depth and breadth of Cloughen’s contribution to parish conversations about stewardship.

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