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Do Church Leaders Know How Important They Are? Asks Latest *State of Church Giving*

Summary: Church leaders are not keepers of institutions, although that is one of their roles. Church leaders, according to the Bible and history, are those who prepare followers of Jesus to carry out a plan of action on a cosmic scale toward a remarkable goal in the face of great opposition.

Do church leaders know how important they are?

That's the question asked in empty tomb, inc.'s new book, in light of long-term trends both in the church and society.

The 34th edition in empty tomb, inc.'s *The State of Church Giving* series updates church giving and membership trends in the U.S. through Data Year 2022.

The State of Church Giving through 2022 has a subtitle that describes the issue facing church leaders: *Might for Right – At Scale* (May 2025).

As shown in the cover graphic below, U.S. Gross Domestic Product has climbed steadily in recent decades (bottom graphic, Angus Maddison analysis). That means that 6% more of church members' incomes could provide about \$500 billion to address, in Jesus' name, their global neighbors' needs (top graphic). While this sounds like a lot of money, it is a little more than the soft drink budget in the U.S.

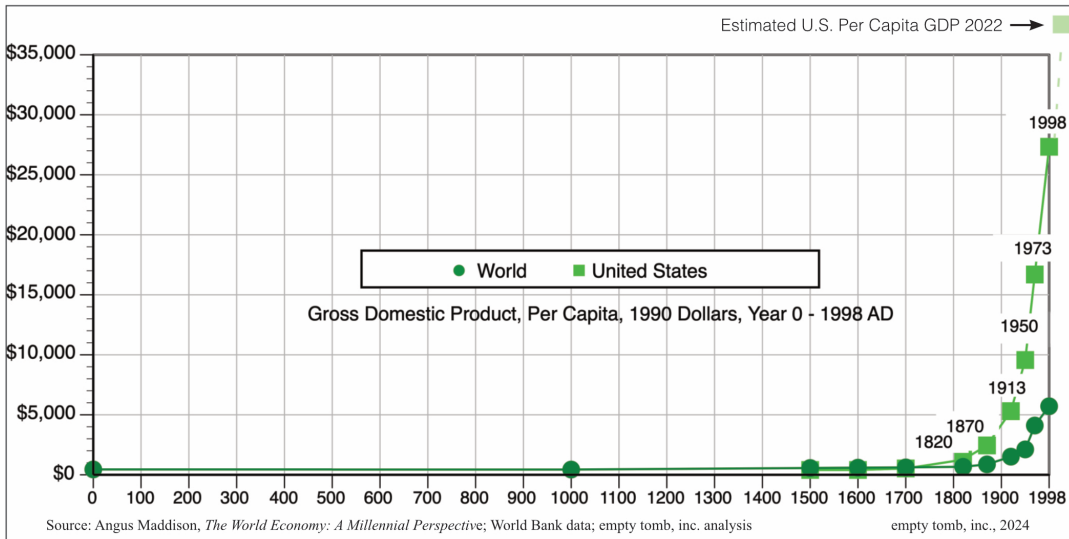
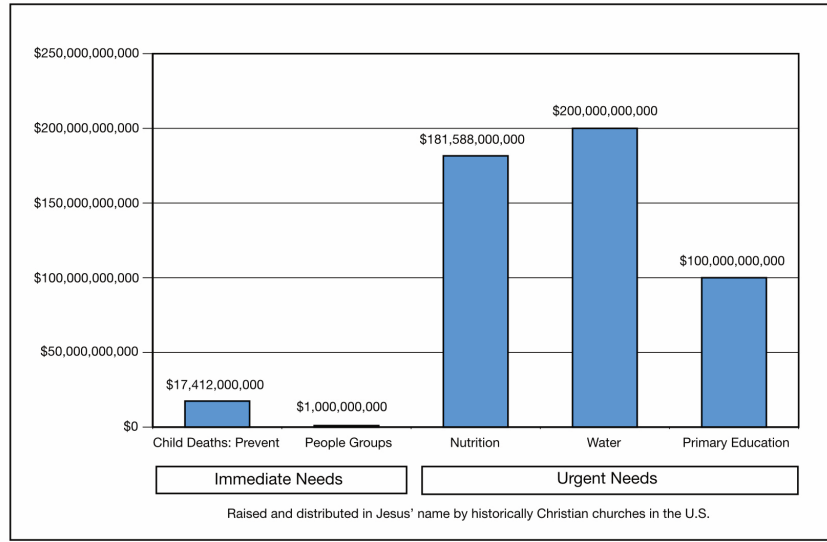
The new book concludes that church leaders are not keepers of institutions, although that is one of their roles. Church leaders, according to the Bible and history, are those who prepare followers of Jesus to carry out a plan of action on a cosmic scale toward a remarkable goal in the face of great opposition.

See specific data findings below the cover art. An excerpt from the new book also follows.

Thirty-Fourth Edition May 2025

The State of Church Giving through 2022

Might *for* Right – At Scale



Close the Promise Gap in Jesus' name
Overview: 1. Over 4,000 Promise Gap Deaths/Day 2. Cost for Treatment: \$16 bil./Year 3. Selected Leisure Spending: Over \$500 bil./Year

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Per Member Giving. From 1968 through 2022, church member giving was down as a percent of income by 43%. Meanwhile, U.S. per capita Disposable Personal Income had increased 171% in inflation-adjusted dollars during that time, from \$17,582 in 1968 to \$47,562 in 2022.

If church member giving had remained at the 1968 level, Total Contributions would have been 74% more in 2022 than the actual amount received. (Chapter 1)

Membership. Membership declined for a group of 33 Protestant communions and the Roman Catholic Church from 45% of the U.S. population in 1968 to 31% in 2022. (Chapter 5)

Americans' Charitable Choice Remains Religion. Yet, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Expenditure Survey again found that Americans reported the majority of their giving went to “church, religious organizations” in 2022. The analysis by age group found the Under-25 cohort gave 60% of their charitable dollars to “church, religious organizations.” (Chapter 7) A similar finding appears in both the Giving USA *Giving by Generation* report (2025) and the Lilly School of Philanthropy *The Next Generation of Philanthropy* report (2025).

Overseas Missions Support. Once again in Data Year 2022, on average, about two cents of each dollar donated to churches supported the denominational overseas activities. That number compares to an average of eight cents of total donations among a set of 11 denomination for the period of 1916-1927. (Chapter 6)

Excerpt: empty tomb, inc.'s 34th edition, *The State of Church Giving through 2022: Might for Right – At Scale*, Pages 181-182.

What Will It Be?

Choice points are important to God.

Moses put a choice before the Israelites in Deuteronomy 30: “See I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction ... Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him” (vv. 15, 19-20).

Joshua put a choice before the Israelites as well in Joshua 24: “Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness ... But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve ... But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD” (vv. 14, 15).

Jesus, when He was physically present on earth, also put a choice before His followers who had relatively little money among most of them. The question resonates through the millennia with even more power today to church members awash in a tsunami of affluence: “No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money” (Matt. 6:24).

In this present age of affluence, this choice between God and Money could be the key turning point. Church leaders have not understood the important role they have, to help church members harness their might, represented in the resources they have, for right. During this same timeframe, the church has declined in membership, in the portion of income it commands from members, and the role it is perceived to play in the society at large.

When Jesus was physically present on earth, He used the might of the Godhead to perform person-to-person miracles over a three-year recorded period.

Today, the body of Christ has been given access to the might of the Godhead in great resources that have been expanding over the past 200 years. These tremendous resources can help accomplish the “greater things” that Jesus foresaw in John 14:12: “I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.”

Great things have happened in the past. Greater things than church leaders ask for or imagine (Eph. 3:20-21) can happen today. But it is a choice.

Al Taylor, when he was director of stewardship of the Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee), observed, “In history, when people got right with God about money, then revival happened. In the U.S., we won’t have revival until people come clean about money and align ourselves and our affections with God’s priorities. Until then, it won’t happen in the U.S. And people won’t come clean unless the church tells them the truth. The people proclaiming the truth about money need to live out that truth or people will say, ‘This is another docudrama.’”¹²⁶

Church leaders can recast the purpose of affluence to might *for* right at a scale that has not been pictured before, or even been possible before. Or they can choose not to do so.

The choice they make is important. If church leaders do not understand how important they are in the ongoing cosmic battle, church members can be overcome and destroyed by the great resources entrusted to them in this age of affluence.

Were the church to be overtly attacked, confronted with a sin of commission, church leaders would likely respond with organized resistance. Such sins of commission might try to destroy the church from the outside, and the church would likely resist and fight back, although martyrdom could result. Tertullian’s observation in his second century defense of Christianity, *Apologeticum*, has become an accepted concept:

The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church ...

Because those who see us die, wonder why we do, for we die like the men you revere, not like slaves or criminals. And when they find out, they join us.¹²⁷

However, sins of omission are from within the heart of the church, and are capable of destroying the church from within in this age of affluence.

Today, communications are such that people know there is suffering in the world. James writes, “Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins” (James 4:17). What can happen as a result of the ongoing undercurrent caused by a sin of omission, as Brother Émile of Taizé observed, is that a “certain fatalism with regard to evil insidiously seeps in.”

To counter these forces, church leaders can help church members imagine what it would mean to harness the great resources available with a focus on a broadscale movement of might *for* right. The journey from imagination to the Possible can make this an incredibly exciting age of affluence, as church members display God’s love in Jesus’ name by loving their neighbors at scale with the resources entrusted to those members, fearlessly facing the level of need experienced by a hurting world.

Tom Holland said that the apostle Paul’s writings were like a depth charge that rippled out through Western culture. Here is one of Paul’s writings, from 1 Timothy 6:17-19, that may help church leaders understand their vital importance at this point in history:

“Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything

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for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.”

Church leaders can embrace their important calling to rally members to achieve great things in this cosmic battle. Church leaders can help members use their might *for* right on the scale Jesus foresaw when He said the disciples can do greater things than He did.

What happens next will be defined by what church leaders choose.

Available: The new book, *The State of Church Giving through 2022: Might for Right – At Scale*, is the 34th edition in the empty tomb series. The book is available from Wipf and Stock: (541) 344-1528 or info@wipfandstock.com.

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¹²⁶ John Ronsvalle and Sylvia Ronsvalle, *Behind the Stained Glass Windows: Money Dynamics in the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), p. 292.

¹²⁷ Tertullian; *Apologeticum*; Tertullian.org; 12/11/1999; <<http://www.tertullian.org/works/apologeticum.htm>>; p. 3 of 8/26/2019 12:24 PM printout.