

Study 13. We love being generous (practice of giving)

Big idea: nothing frees us from slavery to possessions like learning the art of being generous

Opening question

You might like to start by thinking about generosity in general. Use one or more of the following questions (as time permits):

What do you think it means to be generous?

Can you think of someone you admire for their generosity (you don't have to share their name)? How do you think they got to be so generous?

Would you describe *yourself* as a generous person?

The idea behind this study is to look at the Christian virtue of generosity *independently* of the issue of church finances. Feel free to lead the group to consider examples of generosity outside of regular giving to church.

The word "generous" in 1 Tim 6:18 refers to sharing something valuable with other people. It is not a common word in the New Testament, but commendable examples of financial support (Psalm 112:5, 2 Corinthians 9:5), helping the poor (Proverbs 22:9, Luke 11:41) and hospitality (Leviticus 19:33-34, Romans 12:13) can be found throughout the Bible.

Observation and interpretation

Read Matthew 6:19-21

- Consider the two types of treasure being spoken about here - you may like to use this table to help compare them.

	Treasure 1	Treasure 2
Where is this treasure "stored"?		
Can you think of an example of this type of treasure?		
What are the main benefits of this type of treasure?		
What risk factors can diminish the value of this treasure?		
How do you go about getting this type of treasure?		

- Which type of treasure do you think you seek after most, and why?
- Which one does Jesus recommend? Why is his perspective different to that of other people?

Read Matthew 6:24

- What does it mean to "serve money"?
- What is the difference between serving money, and simply earning a living?

Read Matthew 6:22-23

- These verses are sandwiched in the middle of a section on ambition, particularly to do with money. What might Jesus mean by having "bad eyes"?

The "bad eye" or "evil eye" in Greek is probably (particularly in this context) an expression for an envious or greedy disposition. For example, in Matthew 20:15 the phrase normally translated "envious" is literally "your eye is evil". By contrast, the "healthy", "sincere" or "single" eye presumably represents the opposite: a generous way of seeing the world.

Read Matthew 19:23-24

- Here, later in Matthew's gospel, Jesus warns of the spiritual dangers of wealth (as he does in lots of other places, see for example Luke 12:16-21). Why is wealth particularly dangerous?

Read 1 Timothy 6:17

- In what ways is generosity an expression of faith in God?
- Is it possible to be wealthy *and* a Christian? (You might find 1 Timothy 6:17-18 helpful here)

Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-15

- In what ways is generosity an expression of love?
- They gave “even beyond their ability” (8:3) - what makes this seemingly irresponsible level of giving possible, and even desirable?

Implications

Pick a couple of these (as time permits) that you think are especially relevant for your group - don't be afraid to pursue one issue at the expense of covering it all. The goal is to get practical and honest discussion going which will challenge each other to put Jesus' teaching into practice.

- “Giving is not generous until it hurts”. Do you agree or disagree? Why?
- Why do so many Christians shipwreck themselves in the worship of money? Where do you feel this pressure in your own life?
- How can being generous with our money help avoid some of the dangers Jesus identifies with wealth?
- In what ways can you be generous even when you don't have a lot of money?
- What ways have you seen Christian people use their wealth to store up “treasures in heaven”?
- What general categories of giving could generous Christians think about? What could be exciting or satisfying about seeing our money put to work in each of these ways?
- We pray in public despite the dangers of hypocrisy (Matt 6:5-7), but in western church culture, generosity remains private - the one taboo area. What are the reasons for, and dangers of, this? Who keeps you accountable in generosity?
- What practical obstacles get in the way of being generous? How can we address them to make sure they do not reduce our capacity for generosity?

A common obstacle for generosity is that many of us are not naturally good at managing our finances. Others find that when ad hoc opportunities to be generous present themselves (say, we are stopped in the street, or the collection plate goes past) we never carry enough cash on us to be truly generous.

Lots of people have found that adopting an easy budgeting method (for instance youneedabudget.com, which is free for students) empowers them to be much more generous.

Prayer ideas

Pray that God would make us generous people. You might like to begin your prayers by praying through Proverbs 30:8-9 or 2 Corinthians 8:9.