

But it's only a story

What Jesus' stories teach us about money



What to expect

This study guide is designed as a tool to help us think through four specific aspects of stewardship. From the vast number of themes that could be highlighted we have selected the following topics: 1) My stewardship story; 2) Stories of wealth; 3) Stories of greed; and 4) Stories of giving. Five short devotionals begin each weeks study.

At the end of each set of devotionals is a discussion guide designed to be used in a small group or Sunday School class setting. Using a small group setting for discussions allows participants to hear what others have been reflecting on as each has independently spent time dwelling in the word. This concept of dwelling in the word is based on revisiting a common text several times in succession. We hope you find this experience of revisiting a common text enriching as you draw new meanings each of the five day.

I also want to acknowledge the work of Patricia Burdette, whose writings in *Your Treasure Your Heart*, were commissioned by Mennonite Women USA and Mennonite Women Canada and which have been used with permission by Mennonite Publishing Network. We also acknowledge the use of personal stories that have been borrowed from the Generosity Project of MC USA and used with permission.

– Beryl Jantzi, director of stewardship education



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Preface

People remember stories. Maybe that's why Jesus spoke often in story and why his followers wrote stories about Jesus and his conversations with people. Stories connect us regardless of our age, gender or culture. Even short stories are effective. In "the pearl of great value," (Matthew 13:44) it was all said in a sentence. Each word and phrase moved the story forward in time – efficiently and effectively.

One of Jesus' most popular themes in his story telling was money and possessions – 16 of 38 parables told by Jesus focus on this subject. Other stories written in the gospels covered this topic as well. The only subject spoken about in the Bible more than money is the kingdom of God. Over 2,300 passages in the Scripture's (Old and New Testament) address stewardship topics. Compare this to 50 passages about baptism, 200 passages about faith, and 700 passages about love. So when was the last time you heard a good story in church about money and faith, or participated in a Sunday school lesson about money – other than discussing the problems you may be having with meeting the congregational giving plan? This study is intended to help us talk about a subject that is easy to avoid and yet is too important to ignore. If you participate in small group discussions, you will be encouraged to tell your own stories and listen to the stewardship adventures of others.

Following are four weeks of material with five short devotional lessons per week using the "dwelling in the word" approach to Bible study. At the end of each week's study is a small group discussion guide that can also be used as sermon starter material. We hope you enjoy and are challenged by the devotional study and group discussion experience.

For information on other stewardship education resources from Everence go to <http://everence.com/showitem.aspx?id=8640&terms=stewards+of+grace>



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My money story

There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.
– Maya Angelou

Dwelling in the Word – Matthew 13:44-46

The Kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

Again, the Kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

Monday

Read Matthew 13:44-46

In this familiar text, Jesus tells two very short parables, each beginning with the words, "the Kingdom of heaven is like..." It's like someone who finds a treasure in a field, then sells all he owns to purchase that field; or like a merchant who finds a pearl of great value and sells all he owns to purchase it. In each case, the person who finds the item of value sells all that he owns to possess the most valuable of all possessions, which is the Kingdom of heaven.

Are we to sell all we own for the Kingdom of heaven? Probably not. So what is Jesus trying to tell us? Here, as in many other teachings, Jesus is simply using a figure of speech to make an important point. The purpose of all figurative language is to suggest a resemblance or link between two otherwise distinct objects and thus convey a larger and more complex idea. For example, a figure of speech we might use is "a tie in a soccer match is like kissing a dog." Soccer and dogs are not usually linked together.

Some figures of speech are so over-used they become clichés, but we still understand their meaning. For example, we say things such as: "She is thin as a rail," or "better late than never." These figures of speech have been used and reused, but at some point, they were brand new.



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In this Scripture, Jesus created new figures of speech to teach the concept of the Kingdom of heaven. In Matthew 13:13 Jesus explains to the disciples that he speaks to the crowds in parables (story) because “seeing they do not perceive and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand.” Jesus was indeed a master storyteller.

For your reflection

- What figures of speech were prominent in your family of origin or are prominent in your family today?
- What lessons were being communicated through these expressions?
- Why do you think Jesus used figures of speech related to money and possessions when talking about the Kingdom of heaven?

Tuesday

Read Matthew 13:44-46

A more modern story is told of a woman who finds a valuable pearl in an obscure shop. The merchant says he will give it to the woman in exchange for everything she has. Wanting badly to own the pearl, she writes out a check for several thousand dollars, emptying her savings and checking accounts. The merchant asks, “What about your house?” The woman signs over the deed. “What about your two cars?” She signs them both over to him. “What about your boat and your vacation home? Your stocks and bonds, retirement funds and life insurance?” The woman transfers all of these to the merchant.

Then the merchant says, “Now the pearl is yours.” The woman is delighted! She turns to leave her treasure, but the merchant stops her saying, “Here is all that you have given me to purchase the pearl; I am giving these to you. They still belong to me, but I will let you have full use of them for as long as you live. The only thing I ask is that sometimes you share my houses, my cars, and other wealth with those I send your way.” The woman is overcome with joy, “Of course, thank you!”

“Remember,” says the merchant, “you may use these things as if they are your own, but on occasion, I will ask you to share them with others.”

The story of the pearl is a metaphor – a word or phrase is used as a way of symbolically describing a deeper meaning.

For your reflection

- What do you think the pearl represents? What about the shop, the woman and the man?
- How is this modern story similar to the one Jesus told and what added meanings are suggested about our relationship to God and the stuff that we have been given?
- What excites you about the story’s message? What concerns or questions does it create for you, your relationship with God, and the possessions God has given into your care?

Wednesday

Read Matthew 13:44-46

Today’s activity is to write down some of the phrases about faith and money that you heard growing up. We are shaped by our past and, consciously or unconsciously, we bring these “recordings” from the past into the present. Some of these tapes are good and others would benefit from some revising. For example: “Money doesn’t grow on trees” or “A penny saved is a penny earned.”

Maybe your family made up some of their own. One of my favorite lines from *Fiddler on the Roof* comes when the milkman, Tevye, says to God, “If money is a curse, may I be smitten with it ... and may I never recover.” Write down three to four such sayings that you may have heard growing up or that reflect the way money was used or valued in your childhood home.

For your reflection

- In what ways have these sayings shaped who you are – for better or worse?
- What new figures of speech would you like to govern your life today?
- How does the modern day story about the woman and the pearl impact you?

*Thursday***Read Matthew 13:44-46**

After reflecting on these two verses again, take some time to write out in detail or in outline your own “stewardship autobiography.” This activity has been helpful to people in illustrating the ways that ideas of faith and finances emerge from one’s formative years through their current life experience. Below are a few questions you can use to guide this experience. I am also including part of my own stewardship story as an example of what you might do.

Stewardship autobiography questions

1. What is your first memory of money?
2. What was your first major purchase?
3. How was money talked about in your home growing up?
4. Did your parents tend to be savers, spenders or givers?
5. Was there conversation about money in the home or church?
6. Where and how did you learn about money management?

Beryl Jantzi – My stewardship autobiography*Childhood experiences*

I was born the fifth of six children in Medina, N.Y. My parents, Marvin and Violet Zehr Jantzi, were fruit farmers and were eager to teach all their children the value of a day’s work alongside the importance of a strong faith. The Jantzis were charter members at Harding Avenue Mennonite, a small mission congregation located in the suburbs of Buffalo. This was a formative congregational experience for me and was the faith community where I made my initial confession of faith and was baptized. Early money/stewardship memories were:

- Fairness was a family value – divided up candy and other treats.
- My dad writing out weekly tithe checks on Sunday mornings.
- Hard work – quoting 2 Thessalonians 3:10 – anyone unwilling to work should not eat.

Dating and marriage

In 1986, I was introduced to Margo Maust, a schoolteacher living in Newport News, Va., and after dating for several months living at a distance, I resigned my position as youth pastor at Akron Mennonite to move to Denbigh, Va. We married later that year. While in Denbigh I served as youth pastor half time at Warwick River Mennonite Church and worked as a grounds keeper at an apartment complex.

- Started my first retirement plan through work.
- We agreed on an amount to give to the church which increased later in our marriage to a tithe.
- I made a cedar chest for my wife’s engagement gift/ring. We agreed an engagement ring represented an unnecessary expense and was not an important symbol for us.
- Advice I was given by an older woman at church after announcing our engagement – “don’t be cheap.”
- Our wedding reception was a simple affair with a carnival popcorn machine, ham sandwiches, cider, strawberry short cake – all which carried important family connections.

What is your story?

*Friday***Read Matthew 13:44-46**

In 1863, Johann Franck wrote a hymn entitled, *Jesus, priceless treasure (Jesu, meine Freude)*. It was later translated into English by Catherine Winkworth and printed in *The Chorale Book for England* in 1863. This hymn has stood the test of time and appears in many hymnals today.

Read the words of this hymn which are printed below and note how Franck takes the theme of this text in Matthew 13 and uses it as an expression of worship put to music.

Jesus, Priceless Treasure

*Jesus, priceless treasure,
source of purest pleasure,
truest friend to me,
long my heart hath panted,
till it well-nigh fainted,
thirsting after thee.
Thine I am, O spotless Lamb,
I will suffer naught to hide thee,
ask for naught beside thee.*

*In thine arms I rest me;
foes who would molest me
cannot reach me here.
Though the earth be shaking,
every heart be quaking,
Jesus calms our fear;
sin and hell in conflict fell
with their heaviest storms assail us;
Jesus will not fail us.*

*Hence, all thoughts of sadness!
For the Lord of gladness,
Jesus, enters in.
Those who love the Father,
though the storms may gather,
still have peace within;
yea, whate'er we here must bear,
still in thee lies purest pleasure,
Jesus, priceless treasure!*

For your reflection

- In what ways does your life reflect that Jesus is your most precious treasure?
- Write down several thoughts that have come to mind this week as you have spent time dwelling in the words of Matthew 13 and reflecting on the devotional readings.

Learning together

Parents are more prepared to talk to their kids about drugs, alcohol, sex and dating than they are to bring up an even more sensitive topic – money. A study of 2,000 adults, 630 of whom had a child younger than 18 years old, found that 32 percent of parents involved in the study were prepared to talk about drugs and alcohol and 28 percent were able to talk about sex and dating, but only 26 percent were ready for the “money talk.” Nearly all the parents believed they were primarily accountable for their kids’ financial education, yet only 29 percent described themselves as “excellent” financial role models. (*Money Talk Scares Parents*, by Marcie Geffner, Bankrate.com)

This may be your story as well. Maybe your parents never brought up the subject of money with you and maybe that in part is why you haven’t had these conversations with your children. Money is such a common tool and yet for many parents it’s a very difficult topic to address. This may be the reason the prophets of old and Jesus himself spent so much time talking about it. Jesus brought up the subject in story and everyday conversation. Jesus didn’t seem to be at all uncomfortable talking about money. What can we learn from Jesus’ use of storytelling that can help us talk about this difficult subject? Stories as a communication form get us comfortable with the subject matter and secondly, invite us to imagine applications of principles within the stories for our own lives. On the other hand, some may dismiss a lesson that comes in the form of a story. Unless a teaching comes outlined with three points and multiple cross references we can dismiss it as less than authoritative or applicable for life. If this is your inclination I would invite you to take a more in-depth look as we spend time exploring these four lessons of Jesus and learn there is more to be gleaned from this form of communication.

In a world that has become specialized and professional, there is one area where we are all experts. That one area has to do with our own life experience and convictions. The way we talk about our life experience and convictions is through story. Secondly, we can all learn from each other, whether from our successes or our disappointments. In the Thursday devotional, you were invited to write your own stewardship story to help better understand what has influenced your views – and your struggles – in this area of discipleship.

For group discussion

Take time to review together what stood out from this week’s devotional readings, reflections and activities. If people wrote down “tapes” they remember hearing from the past, have them share what these were as they are comfortable. Allow time for anyone who is willing to share parts of his or her own “stewardship autobiography.” How did your understanding of Matthew 13 evolve as you came back to it over five consecutive days? What would you have missed had you limited your reading of the text to just one day?

A stewardship story example

James’ current work of preaching, teaching and pastoral counseling in stewardship fits well with his lifetime commitment to the church. He grew up on a farm and with his wife, Betty, farmed for five years. Increasing involvement in lay ministries in Reading, Pa., prompted James to take a job that would give him more freedom and compatibility with church work. He sold meat in a farmer’s market in downtown Reading for a family corporation.

Because of James’ decision in 1974 to give his energy to the church in a variety of lay ministry projects, and Betty’s decision to remain a full-time homemaker until the youngest child was in school, the Martin family made frugality a way of life. They sold sweet corn from a half-acre plot and several hundred dollars of raspberries and other vegetables each year. Betty was a seamstress, which cut the clothing budget. James enjoyed golf, but opted for tennis because it was far less expensive, less time consuming, and Betty enjoyed playing. “A dollar saved was a dollar earned,” says James as he reflects on those years. “If we didn’t desperately need it, we didn’t buy it.”

In 1983, the year of a second ordination through which James became associate pastor of the congregation, the family's taxable income was \$13,013. Yet there was no sense of regret for having given their lives to the church. James completed a master's degree in church leadership in the 1990's and began working for Lancaster Mennonite conference in 1995.

Today, several years beyond the typical retirement age of 65, James shares Biblical and pastoral perspectives on stewardship and is a strong advocate of firstfruits giving throughout the conference. "We always believed in tithing," James says, "but we didn't always follow firstfruits giving. If we didn't have enough cash to give in the summer, we'd catch up in the fall. Then we attended weekend services in a local congregation led by Ray and Lillian Bair in 1992. I remember Ray saying that he would sooner see a person give a firstfruit contribution of 7 percent than a leftover contribution of 13 percent. I became convinced and have been emphasizing firstfruits ever since." For more stewardship stories go to www.mennoniteusa.org.

For group discussion

- What happens as we take the veil of secrecy away from our stewardship stories?
- Why are we so hesitant to talk about money?
- It's been said that money has a god-like power. Do you agree with this and if so, how does this power manifest itself in our lives?
- But these are only stories – does Jesus really expect us to take them seriously today?



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Wealth

He is rich or poor according to what he is, not according to what he has.

– Henry Ward Beecher

Dwelling in the Word – Mark 10:17-27

As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honour your father and mother.'" He said to him, "Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth." Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the Kingdom of God!" And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the Kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the Kingdom of God." They were greatly astounded and said to one another, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible."

Monday

Read Mark 10:17-27

In this week's Scripture lesson a young man (whom Luke's gospel calls a ruler – Luke 18:18-30) runs up to Jesus, asking what he must do to have eternal life. Jesus loves this man, but still tells him the truth – that he has to divest himself of his power and give his wealth to the poor in order to enter the kingdom, but offers the encouragement that with God nothing is impossible. This shocks everyone within earshot, since the rabbis taught that wealth and power in this world are signs of God's blessing.

(From *Your Treasure Your Heart*, Faith and Life Resources, Harrisonburg, Va., 2008)



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For your reflection

- Why do you think some people can handle wealth well and others cannot?
- As you read these words, consider the responses and confusion expressed by those involved in this scene. Who do you identify with?
- In the list of commands stated by Jesus there is one glaring omission. Can you identify which one? Is it coincidental? We will get to this later in the week.

*Tuesday***Read Mark 10:17-27**

In the 1950s, there was a daytime television show called *Queen for a Day*. On stage before an audience, the host would interview weeping women telling hard-luck stories. The audience would vote by applause to select the woman who would become “queen for a day,” which meant she would receive special gifts from the sponsors of the program. The gifts included things like automatic washers and dryers, refrigerators, stoves, dishwashers and vacation trips to Florida or Hawaii.

Today, it is difficult to find a home in North America without these appliances. It is almost as hard to find couples where the adults have not vacationed in Hawaii or Florida. Does this mean we live like royalty compared to 60 years ago? Are we all in some ways similar to the young, wealthy man in the Scripture reading? Would we be quick to sell our amenities, give up our vacations, and give our money to the poor? Jesus tells us that wealth and power are not necessarily signs of blessing; they may even be a serious impediment to a healthy relationship with God.

For your reflection

Go to www.globalrichlist.com to get a realistic perspective of where you stand in light of the other seven billion citizens of planet earth.

- Do you think of yourself as wealthy? At what point would you consider a person to be wealthy?
- In what ways does Jesus bring the conversation about money and wealth together with an emphasis on our faith and relationship with God?

Have you heard the story about the two people who went to heaven? One came from poverty, the other from wealth. Both, were given identical “mansions.” The poor person danced in front of the open fire of the thatch roof hut, praising God for the mansion. The wealthy person left on their way to the “office” of heaven to inquire about the mistake.

For your reflection

- What is the message of this story?
- Who in this story might you most likely identify with?

*Wednesday***Read Mark 10:17-27**

The young man in this week’s Scripture tells Jesus that he has kept all the commandments listed by Jesus since he was a child. Jesus loves this man, so attempts to help him recognize a spiritual obstacle in his life. The man fails to understand that merely honoring the commandments is not enough; this superficial obedience must be accompanied by spiritual depth, which can only come from knowing the heart of God. This man relies on his wealth and the worldly power to protect and sustain him when he should, instead, have a sense of reliance and dependence on God as the provider for his needs. The “sin” is not the wealth itself. It is what wealth can do to us if we are not connected to the heart of God. What other obstacles can create this barrier in our lives to the heart of God?

For your reflection

- What was the missing commandment left out by Jesus in this Scripture? You shall not covet (Exodus 20:17).
- Why do you think Jesus doesn't mention, "You shall not covet?"
- Was Jesus setting a trap for the wealthy young man?
- What does coveting have to do with our view and use of money?
- Do we have a tendency to view persons with considerable financial means differently than those of modest means? Why can this be a danger in the life of the church (James 2:1-9)?

*Thursday***Read Mark 10:17-27**

One question that comes out of this story is, "Why was it so difficult for the man to sell his possessions when invited to become a follower of Jesus?" The man clearly had a high regard for Jesus. He ran to Jesus, he knelt before him, he even honored him with the title, "Good Teacher."

How do you think you might respond in a similar situation? Do your possessions have a hold on you so strong that it would cause you to choose them over Jesus? Understanding the difference between our needs and our wants can be an important way of distinguishing between what is life giving and what is simply a life accessory.

The Apostle Paul makes it clear God wants our needs to be met: "God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work ..." (2 Corinthians 9:8).

The challenge is determining what is a true **need** – and what is a **want**.

One common definition of a need: everything we can afford. But just because we get a raise, does that mean we actually **need** a newer car?

A better way to define needs is to go back to basics: food, shelter, transportation, insurance, household needs. And ask: "What do I need to fulfill God's call on my life?" That could involve developing job skills, getting an education, having transportation, raising a family or participating in a ministry.

Then ask: "How much food and what kind? How large a home? How much education? What kind of transportation?" These questions should be answered based on how they support you in or distract you from meeting core needs and living out your faith values.

Evaluating a purchase

Spending money is a daily routine in our lives, like eating and sleeping. Sometimes we give little thought to whether it makes financial sense to splurge on a new coat, spend an evening out, or even buy a muffin from the corner bakery.

Here are a few questions to ask ourselves about our purchases:

- Is this the right item, at the right place, and at the right time?
- Are there other more important uses of my money right now?
- Does this purchase support my faith values?
- Will doing so hinder my long-term goals for saving and giving?
- What are consequences of not buying this item? If I wait a week or a month will I still **need** it?
- If I do make the purchase, will there be additional financial obligations as a result? (i.e., storage for a boat, insurance and registration for the new car, dry cleaning for the new coat, etc.)

Once you are clear about what determines a need, then you can more easily decide when “enough is enough.” See *Creating a Budget: How to align your money with you true needs and values* at Everence.com

Friday

Read Mark 10:17-27

We have spent time reflecting on some of the dangers of wealth. This is not only a challenge for the man in Mark 10 we have been following this week – it is a challenge we all face as citizens of the richest nation on earth. Let’s consider the good that can be done with the resources that are at our disposal.

For your reflection

- Who are people you know who have been good models of how they use their wealth?
- What “assets” besides money do you possess that could become an obstacle to your ability to connect to the heart of God?
- What have you done this week with the resources at your disposal to reach out to the needs of others?
- Harry Emerson Fosdick said, “Money is you in portable form. It can go where you cannot go, speak languages you will never speak.” In what ways does this speak to the good that money can do through us?
- Consider some ways you can work to do good with your wealth by living below your means so that you can enhance the lives of others.

Learning together

Would you rather be poor or wealthy? I don’t know of many who have been poor who would prefer it over the alternative. On occasion, my wife and I imagine the fun we could have being wealthy philanthropists: Wouldn’t it be great to give away a large part of your income or estate?

Our views of wealth reveal many complexities about our lives such as how we make our “wealth” and how generous we should be if we were among the very rich. The other side of this is – if we live in North America – we are among the wealthiest in the world. So what are we doing with that wealth? What makes us think we might actually be able to handle even greater wealth better than how we are managing our current wealth?

To begin this discussion, those who went to the website www.globalrichlist.com as part of Tuesday’s reflection time are encouraged to discuss what they learned from that exercise. How do you feel about your wealth ranking among the other seven billion citizens of planet earth?

Wealthy people in the New Testament

Most of Jesus’ followers were not wealthy, but below are the names of a few notable exceptions. We can learn a great deal in the New Testament from Jesus’ interactions with wealthy people. Many were very humble and were recognized by Jesus for their acts of generosity and service. Divide the texts and stories below among the class. See if there were any common characteristics in how Jesus related to them and/or how they related their faith to their wealth.

For group discussion

- But these are only stories – does Jesus really expect us to take them seriously today?
- What kinds of socio-economic differences come into play between first century and 21st century discipleship and our relationship with money?

Person	Use of wealth	Lessons to be learned
Zacchaeus , tax collector (Luke 19:1-10)	Before faith, cheated citizens and abused the poor. After faith, repented and made restitution.	Ill-gotten gains must be repaid. God saves and changes us – all the way down to our pocketbooks.
Joseph of Arimathea (Matt. 27:56-61; Mark 15:42-46; Luke 23:50-53)	Pre-paid his own funeral. Donated his tomb for the burial of Jesus.	Forsaking treasures on earth for the kingdom will be rewarded.
Women supporters (Luke 8:3; 23:55-24:10; Mark 15:40; 16:1)	Supported Jesus’ work. Assisted in his burial (probably donated expensive perfume).	Generosity characterizes those who follow Jesus.
Roman centurion (Matt. 8:5-13; Luke 7:5)	Showed kindness toward the Jews. Paid for the building of a synagogue. Showed compassion for his ailing servant.	When we love people it shows in the things we do and the projects we support.
Rich young ruler (Matt. 19:16-30; Mark 10:17-31; Luke 18:18-30)	Unwilling to part with his wealth when tested by Jesus.	Those who cling to wealth have difficulty getting into the kingdom. Righteousness cannot be earned, but must be received as a gift. “Many who are first will be last, and the last first.”
Philemon (Philemon 1)	Owned slaves and other property. Forgave a runaway slave, both morally and financially.	How we use our wealth is as important an issue as how much wealth we keep for ourselves.
Joseph, called Barnabas (Acts 4:36-37)	Sold land and gave the proceeds to believers.	Partnership in the Gospel may mean putting your money where believers hurt.
Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11)	Sold land, lied to the Holy Spirit, and tried to deceive the church about their gift.	God is not fooled by gracious appearances but sees the heart and acts accordingly.
Lydia (Acts 16:13-15, 40)	Hosted the first church in Europe in her home. Generous to the poor.	We should use our resources and homes to accomplish God’s purposes.
Cornelius the Centurion (Acts 10:1-48)	Sought out Peter concerning the faith.	Fear of God should prompt us to admit our own need for a Savior.
Ethiopian treasurer (Acts 8:26-40)	Nurtured his belief in God by traveling to Jerusalem. Invited Philip to explain more about the faith.	Stewardship of money and study of Scriptures go hand in hand – as do business trips and worship services.
Simon the Sorcerer (Acts 8:9-25)	Longed for spiritual power and thought it could be bought and sold.	The gifts of God cannot be bought.

(From *The Word in Life Study Bible: New Testament Edition* by Thomas Nelson. Copyright © 1993, Thomas Nelson Inc., Nashville, Tenn.)

A modern story: Miss McCarty’s gift

Oseola McCarty donates \$150,000 to Southern Miss.

Oseola McCarty’s lined, brown hands, now gnarled with arthritis, bear mute testimony to a lifetime spent washing and ironing other people’s clothes. Less evident is how this quiet, 87-year-old black woman came to donate \$150,000 to The University of Southern Mississippi.

“I want to help somebody’s child go to college,” Miss McCarty said. “I just want it to go to someone who will appreciate it and learn. I’m old and I’m not going to live always.”

McCarty's gift establishes an endowed Oseola McCarty Scholarship, with "priority consideration given to those deserving African-American students enrolling at The University of Southern Mississippi who clearly demonstrate a financial need."

Bill Pace, executive director of the Southern Miss Foundation, which will administer McCarty's gift, said, "This is by far the largest gift ever given to Southern Miss by an African-American. We are overwhelmed and humbled by what she has done."

Miss McCarty has done laundry for three generations of some families. In the beginning, she said, she charged \$1.50 to \$2 a bundle, but, with inflation, the price rose. "When I started making \$10 a bundle – I don't remember when ... sometime after the war – I commenced to save money," she recalled. "I put it in savings. I never would take any of it out. I just put it in. It just accumulated."

When Oseola was in the sixth grade, her childless aunt had to go to the hospital, and, McCarty said, "I had to go and wait on her. McCarty never returned to school."

"All my classmates had gone off and left me," she said, "so I didn't go back. I just washed and ironed." Meanwhile, McCarty washed and ironed and lived frugally. She has never had a car and still walks everywhere she goes.

McCarty, who never married, said, "After my aunt died, I began to think, I didn't have nobody. I began to think about what to do with what little I had."

McCarty's arthritis in her hands forced her to retire from washing and ironing in December 1994, at the age of 86. "I can't do everything," she said, "but I can do something to help somebody. And what I can do I will do. I wish I could do more."

This is an excerpt from the 1995 story written by Sharon Wertz.

For group discussion

- How does this story redefine terms like wealth, work, generosity, etc.?
- How does this story challenge us in our view of money and wealth?
- Do you know others like Miss McCarty?



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But it's only a story

What Jesus' stories teach us about money

Greed

You say, "If I had a little more, I should be very satisfied." You make a mistake. If you are not content with what you have, you would not be satisfied if it were doubled.

– Charles Haddon Spurgeon

Dwelling in the word – Luke 12:15-21

And he said to them, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." Then he told them a parable: "The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?' Then he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich towards God."

Monday

Read [Luke 12:15-21](#)

In this week's lesson, Jesus warns against greed and tells the story of a rich man who becomes even wealthier as his land becomes more productive. The man has such an abundant harvest that he runs out of space to store it. To remedy this problem, the rich man plans to build larger barns to store all his wealth so he can rest, relax, and have fun for "many years," unaware that his life will soon end. God calls this rich man a fool. Jesus tells his audience that those who store up treasures for themselves, but fail to be rich toward God, are also fools. (From *Your Treasure Your Heart*, Faith and Life Resources, Harrisonburg, Va., 2008)

So, how do we know if we are being prudent and saving for the needs of the future or if we are being greedy? One rule of thumb for financial management is to give 10 percent, save 10 percent and live on the remaining 80 percent. Everyone's situation varies so this is just a guide. I like this idea of being rich toward God – or trying to give to God at least as much as I am trying to save for my future. As our means increase and our expenses decrease we are able to give more as well as save more. The danger



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is when we tend to our own wants above and beyond our needs. As this successful man's income grew, we do not read anything that suggests his generosity also increased. His only interest is in his own well-being. This seems to be one of the barometers Jesus uses to determine what should be considered prudent and what amounts to greed.

For your reflection

- What are the guidelines you have set up for yourself to guard against greed?
- Have you been able to match your giving goals with your saving goals?

Living below your means has become more in vogue with the economic downturn. To live above our means suggests an unsustainable lifestyle that will lead to unwanted ends. To live within our means suggests that we are taking care of our immediate needs – one paycheck to another. To live below our means allows us to divide our income between our sharing, saving and spending values proportionally.

Over this next week, take time to consider your financial lifestyle and how Jesus might appraise the decisions you are making. If there is imbalance in this part of your life, what changes do you need to make in order to find balance?

Tuesday

Read Luke 12:15-21

In this reading, Jesus tells his audience that greed is dangerous. He warns us to “be on your guard against all kinds of greed,” indicating that there is a danger in coveting possessions we may not immediately recognize. Perhaps he is warning his audience of the seductiveness of materialism. It is difficult in our consumer society to know when we have accumulated enough of anything.

How many necklaces and scarves do we need to accessorize our wardrobe? Similarly, do we need to have a complete tool chest with ratchets or wrenches that will never grab hold of a bolt more than once a year? Why not arrange to share accessories and tools with two to three other families who live nearby? Do we need more than one home? Do we need to buy that shed for the backyard or rent that storage unit when a good old fashion garage sale may take care of the problem? We all know of people with greater excesses than our own! Yet, as we read our magazines and watch television, these **excesses** can start to feel normal.

This is not a call to guilt – rather it is a call to be on guard. What accountabilities do we have in place to protect us from crossing the line between what is prudent and what is **foolish**, to use the words of Jesus.

For your reflection

- What words or phrases stand out to you having focused on Luke 12:15-21 for a second day this week?
- Looking at your own life, what action or decision might cross the line between being prudent with your finances and spending greedily?
- What accountability structures do you have in your life to keep you in check?
- But this is only a story – does Jesus really want us to take this seriously today?

In the late 1990s, there was a popular infomercial on television. Some will recall the Tom Vu infomercials on how to make money. His advertisements vividly proclaimed, “You too can have all this! Come to my seminar!” Watching Tom Vu’s infomercial, one would see him on his large yacht, in front of his estate, or sitting on one of his many luxurious cars. Vu was letting everyone know, “You too can have all this!” He reminded people that if you want to be happy and have a fulfilled life you must have a yacht, a mansion and luxurious cars. Above all, you need money. As it happens, Tom Vu is no longer making these infomercials or selling his seminars. Numerous lawsuits charged he was swindling people through his seminars. In 2009, Tom Vu, known as Tam Vu Pham in court documents, was sentenced to 12 years in prison for perpetrating the largest medical fraud in California’s history. He operated a medical clinic that performed unnecessary medical procedures on mostly low-income immigrants in order to defraud health insurers.

For your reflection

- What are the traps that tempt us to be distracted from being “rich toward God?”
- What other choices could the rich man have made with his abundance?

Wednesday

Read Luke 12:15-21

Jesus directs his warning to the crowds: “Take care,” or “Watch out,” and “Be on your guard against all kinds of greed.” Jesus in this story is addressing all people. Jesus knows that the issue of materialism and the desire for more possessions is not isolated to only one group of people. It’s something we are susceptible to – whether we are rich, middle class or poor.

Greed is an issue the Apostle Paul addresses as well. In Romans 1:29, greed equates to “wickedness, evil and depravity.” Colossians 3:5 warns of “... evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.” Greed is the worship of the creation rather than the Creator. Often a reason for desiring things is the fear and anxiety of never having enough. What is it that we feel we are missing in our lives? Subsequent to this parable, in Luke 12:22, Jesus states “therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life.” It’s a common thing to worry about having enough to provide for ourselves or our family. Desires often reflect a lack of trust in the one and only true Provider. It is no wonder that Jesus warns everyone, rich and poor, against excessive desires or distractions.

For your reflection

- Are you aware of your own areas of vulnerability? What is it that you would be most tempted to build bigger barns over? What is it you worry about most and what temptation does that tend to make you susceptible to as a result?
- In a society of abundance and overindulgence, what does it mean to reject a materialist culture (Romans 12:2)?
- How might Jesus retell this story in our own context?

Thursday

Read Luke 12:15-21

It is evening, and you have just finished supper. You decide to sit down to relax for a few moments. You turn on the TV. “We interrupt this program to bring you a very important announcement. Tomorrow has been canceled!” How ridiculous, you may say.

But is it? For you see, that announcement comes to millions of people in the course of everyday life. For all you and I know, this announcement could come for you and me today.

The truth is, everyone is only a heartbeat away from the announcement that our tomorrow has been canceled. Tomorrow was canceled for the rich man. This was just a story, but it will be each of our stories someday. Notice the often repeated words by the rich fool: "I" and "my."

*"What shall I do,
for I have nowhere to store my crops?"
And he said, 'I will do this:
I will pull down my barns, and build larger ones;
and there I will store all my grain and my goods.
And I will say to my soul,
Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years;
take your ease, eat, drink, be merry.'"*

All this points to this man's selfishness. He was a child of this world's philosophy. You know what that is. "Take care of number one!" He was concerned only about himself and nobody else. He didn't care to help anyone in need. He wanted to get all he could in this life for his personal enjoyment.

This man had success, satisfaction and security. What more could he possibly want? One could say that as far as this world was concerned, he had it made. He was enjoying life. But Jesus makes it clear that true life does not come from an abundance of things. Nor does true life come from success or security. This man had a false view of both life and death.

There are many people like this rich man. In this world, they feel secure and invincible. They think they will live to be 100 years old. They refuse to think of death. They refuse to think of eternity. Their attitudes and actions reveal that they believe this world is all there is. How foolish to think this way. We will all face death, judgment and eternity.

For your reflection

- If you knew that your next week would be "canceled," how would that affect what you value most and how you live the next seven days?
- In recent years there has been this new phrase tossed around – "crossing activities off my bucket list." What are the things you want to do for others or the kingdom before you "kick the bucket?"
- Reflect on any life-altering events in your life that transformed the way you live and the priorities that guide your decisions.

Friday

Read Luke 12:15-21

Our family reads from *Our Daily Bread* after evening meals. Below I share a portion of a reading that I hope inspires you as much as it has me. We need not give in to greed, for there are ways to be on guard against this sin as followers of Jesus.

Greed has toppled highly paid executives, brought down giant corporations, and cost thousands of workers their jobs and retirement funds. One columnist has written that unrestrained corporate greed is a greater threat than terrorism. Greed whispers in our ear that we might be happier if we had more money, more things and more power. It creates discontent and a growing desire to do whatever it takes to gain position and possessions. But the Bible commands us to trust in God, not in "uncertain riches" (1 Timothy 6:17).

Paul told Timothy that the way to overcome greed is to flee from it and to “pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness” (1 Timothy 6:11). And those “who are rich in this present age,” who have more than is needed, should “be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share” (1 Timothy 17-18).

Contentment and generosity are the opposite of greed (1 Timothy 6-8). As we learn to thank God for what we have and freely share it with others, we stop trying to fill the spiritual vacuum in our heart with things. And when we love Jesus more than money and possessions, we find that He is the greatest treasure of our lives. We discover that knowing Him is the source of genuine satisfaction. (*Our Daily Bread*, July 12, 2004, by David C. McCasland)

Learning together

The Seven Deadly Sins, also known as the Capital Vices or Cardinal Sins, is a classification of vices that have been used since early Christian times to educate and instruct followers concerning humanity's sinful nature. The list of sins includes: wrath, greed, sloth, pride, lust, envy and gluttony. It's interesting to consider the sins that are missing from this list that the church today spends far more time talking about than these seven.

Greed is also referred to as avarice or covetousness. Like lust and gluttony, greed is a sin of excess. Greed is defined as, “an excessive pursuit of wealth, status and power.” St. Thomas Aquinas wrote that greed was “a sin against God, just as all mortal sins, in as much as man condemns things eternal for the sake of temporal things.” Outside of the Christian tradition and writings, greed is viewed as, “an inordinate desire to acquire or possess more than one needs, especially with respect to material wealth.” So, how do we protect ourselves from the subtle enticements to accumulate more than is necessary? How do we resist a culture that encourages us to buy on credit, go in debt and indulge in all that is pleasurable?

It includes a series of real stories of people who were consumed by get-rich-quick schemes with no regard for the impact on the lives of their victims or even their loved ones. It is no wonder Scripture gives such strict warnings about giving in to this destructive sin. Paul's instruction to young Timothy, whom he was grooming for ministry, is a reminder that even those in the service of the church need to be on guard. You may want to show portions of this video to the class and consider the stories of misdirected decisions made evident in the video clips alongside the Scripture texts below.

Ephesians 5:5 – Be sure of this, that no fornicator or impure person, or one who is greedy (that is, an idolater), has any inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ and of God.

1 Timothy 6:10 – For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.

2 Timothy 3:1-5 – You must understand this, that in the last days distressing times will come. For people will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, inhuman, implacable, slanderers, profligates, brutes, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to the outward form of godliness but denying its power. Avoid them!

The broker

A New York commodities broker goes on a losing streak. Stephen Trantel is out of a job and hundreds of thousands of dollars in debt. Broke and desperate, he makes an unthinkable decision. The broker turns to bank robbery. Trantel's loving family still believes he works in the trading pits. He pretends to leave each morning for work ... but secretly goes to the local library. It's easy to learn his new trade. Trantel scours the Internet for bank robbing tips. Trantel needs money fast. He walks into a bank and steals \$10,000 in cash. It's just the beginning. He targets unsuspecting banks on New York's Long Island for easy prey. Over the course of his crime spree, he robs 10 banks for over \$60,000. Nevertheless, he was eventually caught by police, sentenced to nine years in prison and is scheduled to be released from prison in 2021.

CNBC has put together a series entitled *American Greed* that is now available online at www.cnn.com.

For group discussion

- What have you learned from dwelling in Luke 12:15-21 this week?
- Have you ever been the victim of a scam, credit card fraud or outright theft? How did the greed of another affect your life?
- In what ways are you tempted by greed and the get-rich-quick mentality?
- How do you determine how much is "enough" when it comes to possessions, savings, vacations, etc.?
- What is the difference between living above, within or below your means? How do our decisions about our lifestyle impact our susceptibility to greed?
- But these are only stories – does Jesus really expect us to take them seriously today?
- What kinds of socio-economic differences come into play between first century and the 21st century discipleship and our relationship with money?



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But it's only a story

What Jesus' stories teach us about money

Generosity

I have held many things in my hand, and have lost them all; but whatever I have placed in God's hands that I still possess.
– Martin Luther

Dwelling in the Word – Mark 12:41-44

He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. Then he called his disciples and said to them, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."

Monday

Read Mark 12:41-44

In this week's Gospel story, Jesus observes people making financial contributions as they enter the temple. He calls his disciples to him and points out that a poor widow has contributed all she has to the offering. He uses her as an example of someone who makes a true sacrifice to God.

We see that Jesus has a way of turning everything in his world on its head to explain God's perspective. We see that God's "economics" are drastically different from those of the culture at large. In this Scripture, we are told that God looks at what we give compared to what we actually have. Yet, in Jesus' time, as in our own, most of us look at the size of the contribution alone. Jesus seems to be asking us to rethink our definition of generosity.

It is often difficult to consider how different the life of a widow in Jesus' time was from most widows today. There was no financial safety net of Social Security, Medicare, food stamps or heating assistance, and no church agencies to help. There was no pension system for widows, built up over years of work or a pension from a deceased husband. Widows were absolutely at the mercy of their sons, if they had sons, and older community members. It is possible that there were certain levels of assistance made available from a temple widows fund of that day, but those amounts would have probably been quite limited given all the needs that would have been present.



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For your reflection

- What words, ideas or themes stand out to you as you dwell on these?
- Do you know of any truly needy people in your community?
- How are widows cared for in your congregation and community?

*Tuesday***Read Mark 12:41-44**

Who are the people in your life that have modeled giving in spirit and in practice? Sometime back true life stories of giving and generosity were gathered by the leadership of Mennonite Church USA. I hope they inspire you even as the woman from Mark 12 does for many of us today.

Dwilyn and Janelle Ebersole live in the western part of Lancaster County, Pa., in an attractive 1,200 square-foot house along Donegal Springs Road. In the driveway sits a Camry with quite a few miles on the odometer.

They give generously and yet with a disciplined structure. Their agriculture-based business sends them a monthly salary check, which they tithe. Actually, in recent months, it's been about 14 percent. This money goes to their home congregation. Their plan consists of five boxes, each of which is designated for their 14-percent tithe along with additional offerings to favorite church agencies and charities.

Below is a typical month's division of tithes and offerings.

- **Box one:** The Sunday offering of \$13,526.
- **Box two:** A tithe to their conference (\$1,352.60).
- **Box three:** \$2,800 for "Erb Mission" which included specific missionaries and designated projects.
- **Box four:** \$7,600 for congregational finances, including staff salaries, utilities, supplies, etc.
- **Box five:** Discretionary gifts to agencies of congregational interest.

Janelle speaks fondly of her grandmother who modeled gift giving. She remembers her parents carefully calculating the tithe when writing out the Sunday morning check. And, when she took her first job at a bulk food store, her mother counseled that she was supposed to give.

Similarly, Dwilyn's parents were disciplined givers. Upon getting his first job on a local farm at age 11, Dwilyn was encouraged to begin giving. He set aside his tithe in a special envelope when cashing each check.

Their giving now opens what feels like a personal link – not only to the congregation, but also to missionaries, as well as local charitable organizations. The Ebersoles do not see giving as just a command but as something very enjoyable. To read more of the Ebersole's stewardship story and others like it go to www.mennoniteusa.org.

For your reflection

- Who were your early models when it comes to giving?
- Who is watching and learning from you when it comes to giving? What single thing would you like to be sure you convey to the next generation through your generosity?

Wednesday

Read Mark 12:41-44

This story about the widow making an offering in the temple is related to the previous passage (Mark 12:38-40) in which Jesus condemns those scribes who exploit widows. Whereas the scribes (leaders in the temple) were criticized, this widow is praised.

Mark describes a widow making an offering in the temple. Rich people make a great show of giving large amounts while this woman gives only a tiny sum of money – all she has, probably. Who has given more? Jesus argues that the widow has given the most because while the rich have only given from their surplus, and thus have not sacrificed anything to God, the widow has indeed sacrificed greatly. She has given “all she had to live on,” suggesting that she may now not have money for food.

The purpose of the passage may be to explain what “true” obedience as understood by Jesus was: being willing to give everything you have for the sake of God. Those who merely contribute from their own surplus aren’t sacrificing anything, and therefore their contributions will not be considered as a significant gesture by God.

This incident is connected to more than this previous passage. It parallels the coming passages in which Jesus is anointed by the woman who gives all she has, and it is similar to the discipleship of other women described later in the book of Mark.

For your reflection

- What is the relationship between discipleship and stewardship?
- One definition of stewardship that I have been challenged by is: “Stewardship is everything you do after you say you believe.” Do you agree with this statement?
- What next step in your stewardship journey would give witness to your trust in God to provide?

Thursday

Read Mark 12:41-44

What do you think motivated this woman to give as she did? What is it that motivates you to give? Dr. Kennon Callahan has been a highly regarded consultant to churches for decades. He specializes in the area of stewardship and church finances. In his book, *Giving and Stewardship in an Effective Church* (Jossey-Bass, 1997), Callahan identifies compassion, community, challenge and commitment as the four main catalysts for giving. Too often congregations attempt to instill the importance of giving in the Christian’s life by appealing to challenge and commitment. That unfortunately is not as effective as drawing on the values of compassion and community.

People want to give to people – not programs and projects. All ministries of the church ultimately are about people and that’s what we should highlight, especially with new and young believers. A building program is mainly concerned with being able to better meet the needs of people – not about acquiring more bricks and mortar on the property.

After the earthquake in Haiti, millions of dollars were collected in a relatively short period. People felt compelled to do something out of compassion – even people who were not part of a faith community. Can you think of other times the broader community comes together to help meet the needs of the less fortunate or those faced with unexpected losses?

Perhaps the widow gave because she knew other widows who did not have even one penny. It was also the result of an instruction she received that, in giving to God, we recognize that ultimately God provides for our needs, and God can be trusted to meet our needs.

For your reflection

- Identify a time when you were very motivated to give. What was it that caught your attention? Was it related to compassion, community, challenge and commitment?
- What happens to you when you make a decision to think beyond yourself and give to someone or something beyond your own needs and wants?
- How does the faith of the widow inspire you in your own practice of giving?
- Have there been occasions when you were the recipient of a gift that came just in time? Describe the miracle.

Friday

Read Mark 12:41-44

Where did this woman learn to give? For most of us giving from our excess is one thing but sacrificial giving is something else entirely. Did her parents model this kind of trust in God to provide? Did it come from the spiritual leaders of her community? That seems difficult to believe given how harsh Jesus is on the leaders of the temple.

I recently visited with a group of pastors in the South to share the theme of Ministry and Money. It was here I heard a story from a pastor who serves in a congregation predominately made up of Native Americans. A single grandmother who is the sole breadwinner for the family cares for her daughter and two grandchildren along with several other family members who will come and be part of her home from time to time. She expresses the very spirit of generosity in spite of living with very limited financial resources.

This congregation has a practice in which members bring their offering forward each Sunday. One Sunday morning, the pastor stood with a basket receiving the gifts of the people when the woman came up to him with a smile on her face and a one hundred dollar bill in her hand. She whispers to the pastor that she found the bill in her Bible and didn't know where it had come from, but decided that she was to give it in the offering that morning.

As the pastor told the story, he was still emotional even though this had occurred sometime in the past. He knew very well her needs and that she lived on barely enough to survive as it was. The woman's ability to offer this money as a gift to God was true to all the other expressions of generosity she lived every day among her family, friends and church community.

For your reflection

- How do stories like this stir your soul?
- Why is it that people with so little can so often be the most generous?

Learning together

What is the tithe? Traditionally, it has referred to the giving of one-tenth as an offering to God; this first appears in Scripture in Genesis 14:20. The Old Testament has multiple references to the practice of tithing, but there are only passing references to it in the New Testament (Matthew 23:23; Luke 11:42, 18:12; Hebrews 7:5-9).

As the term is used today, it often takes on a more general meaning of whatever a person determines to give as an offering, which may be less or more than one-tenth of one's income. The New Testament has other ways of talking about generosity. Specific percentages are not referenced but we are clearly called to give bountifully (generously), intentionally, sacrificially and cheerfully (1 Corinthians 9:6-8).

For group discussion

- What principles for giving have you found helpful?
- Who are your models when it comes to tithing?
- How do you interpret the term tithe? Do you find this term helpful today as we talk about the giving and generosity? Are there better terms we might use today?

There is discussion in certain circles as to whether the tithe was an Old Testament practice and thus not intended for followers of Jesus and not specifically taught in the New Testament. Whether we take our cues from the Old or New Testament there are clear teachings on intentional, proportional and generous/sacrificial giving throughout Scripture.

Below is an overview of key texts and teachings you may want to review and discuss as a group. The Old Testament actually teaches about (at least) three separate tithes. Some were to be given each year, others every 3 years. Depending on the year, a household's annual "tithe" could range between 20-30 percent.

Read aloud the following verses and discuss the key concepts concerning the tithe and generous living from both Old and New Testaments.

Text	Teaching
Deuteronomy 14:22-23	The tithe was to be shared and consumed with others (the potluck tithe!).
Deuteronomy 14:28-29	Tithe for the poor collected every three years intended for the poor and foreigners.
Numbers 18:21	Support for the Levites who work in the tabernacle and later in the temple.
1 Corinthians 16:2	Give intentionally – set aside weekly offering.
2 Corinthians 8:2-4	Give sacrificially – beyond your means and comfort zone.
2 Corinthians 8:12	Give proportionally – according to what one has.
2 Corinthians 8:13-14	Give generously – like the Macedonians who gave in spite of their poverty.

I recently saw an artist's depiction of the Mark 12 widow's mite story. He depicted the widow as a young woman carrying a child on her hip. Scripture doesn't say if the widow was young or old. For some reason we assume she is an older woman, but Scripture doesn't mention her age or stage of life. How does this change the meaning of the story if it were a young widow with children?

The stories of the Scripture are for more than entertainment. They are more than nice lessons to recite to our children. The parables and references to Jesus' interaction with the people he met are there to help explain the Kingdom of God and provide us with instruction for how we are to live. There are few biblical themes that get to the basics of discipleship like those of stewardship. The question now is how do we respond to these teachings from Scripture and from our own experiences?

During the first week, you were encouraged to write your stewardship story. You now have a chance to write additional chapters. Hopefully, you have been inspired from the stories of contemporary disciples as well as first century disciples.

Discussion questions

- But these are only stories – does Jesus really expect us to take them seriously today?
- Write down two or three specific next steps you want to take in your stewardship journey.
- To what new place does God want to move you in supporting the ministry of the Kingdom of God with your time, talent and treasure?
- What kind of accountability would be helpful for you as you make these new commitments?



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