

Way of Discipleship Small Groups

Putting money in its right place.



Touching base (5 minutes)

Open in prayer as is helpful for your group.

If this is your first session take time to introduce yourselves and set any ground rules you want to for your time together.

If you met previously take the opportunity either as a group or in pairs to check in with each other about how your response from last time has gone.



Opening question(s) (5 minutes)

Is money a good or bad thing or both? Why?



Understanding the information (30 minutes)

Share these thoughts in your own words or read them together:

The biggest challenge to discipleship, according to Jesus, was the idolatry of making money a “lord”. Christ says it explicitly: “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.” (Matthew 6:24) In the Gospels, an amazing one out of ten verses (288 in all) deal directly with the subject of money. The Bible offers 500 verses on prayer, less than 500 verses on faith, but more than 2,000 verses on money and possessions. Paul writing to Timothy describes where the idolatry of money can lead: “Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.” (1 Timothy 6: 9-10)



The alternative is to find freedom. **Free to be content.** “But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.” (1 Timothy 6: 7-8) The real measure of our wealth is how much we would be worth if we lost all our money.

Free to have an eternal perspective. Rather than focussing on material wealth in this life which does not last, Jesus advised His disciples to “store up for yourselves treasure in heaven”. (Matthew 6:20) “The only thing that counts at the end of life is what we can take with us at the moment of death, which is I myself as I was in the ultimate depths of my own heart - a heart that was either full of love, or full of spite and hidden selfishness.” (Karl Rahner)

Desmond Tutu says a generous heart is the way to life: “The Dead Sea in the Middle East receives fresh water, but it has no outlet, so it doesn't pass the water out. It receives beautiful water from the rivers, and the water goes dank. I mean, it just goes bad. And that's why it is the Dead Sea. It receives and does not give. In the end generosity is the best way of becoming more, more, and more joyful.” Generosity is the way to break the hold of money in our lives. John Wesley said, “When I have money, I get rid of it quickly, lest it find a way into my heart.”

Generosity can be expressed in many ways – through the giving of time, friendship, hospitality or service. But, as the area of our lives most likely to be like a “god”, the Bible has some clear teachings on how we approach giving financially to those in need.

Financial giving is a response to God's love, and not a rule to obey. Paul writes to the early Christians who were collecting for those in the church who were in need, “Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” (2 Corinthians 9:7)

Financial giving comes freely, cheerfully (the Greek word is more like hilariously – in other words shockingly extravagant!) and from the heart. The question is not, “What is the minimum I can get away with?” but, “How much can I show love for God in my extravagance?”

Financial giving which breaks the power of money will always be sacrificial. When we can give at cost to ourselves we are placing our trust in God's wealth and provision, rather than our own. The story of the widow's mite demonstrates how Jesus saw generosity not in what people gave, but in the amount they had left over. “As Jesus looked up, he saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. ‘Truly I tell you,’ he said, ‘this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.’” (Luke 21:1-4)

In financial giving a tenth of income (tithe) is a useful principle. The first biblical story about tithing comes from 4600 years ago Abram gave a tenth of his goods to the priest in thanks for God's protection in a battle. (Genesis 14:20). Moses then gave the people a law of God telling them to bring all their tithes to the priests. “I give to the Levites all the tithes in Israel as their inheritance in return for the work they do while serving at the tent of meeting.” (Numbers 18:21) Malachi and Proverbs also give teaching on the tithe.

Yet the tithe was never intended to be a rule, but a springboard for generosity. It is a useful guide– for some it may be an aim, for others a minimum. For Jesus, the tithe was a useful principle, given originally to people who lived by laws. But if disciples, for whom financial giving comes from the heart, rightly understand that all they have is God's, then God could easily ask them to give more than ten percent.

Financial giving expresses love. In a very practical way, the early church showed their love for other parts of the church through taking an offering. Similarly, today the only people who should financially support the work of the church are disciples. For this reason, the Church of England offers an aim of 5% of income as a realistic amount for giving financially to the church community.

The story of Zacchaeus shows how the practice of generous, consistent and sometimes spontaneous financial giving sets us free, changing us into people who are increasingly able to make Christ Lord. Someone said, “We don’t think we can live generously because we have never tried. But the sooner we start the better, for we are going to have to give up our lives finally, and the longer we wait the less time we have for the soaring and swooping life of grace.” A content and generous heart, able to place Christ at the centre, is worth more than any bank account contains.

Discuss: What would it look like to be free from the “power” of money?

Reading the Bible (15 minutes)

Read Luke 19: 1-10 in which Zacchaeus puts money in its place.

Discuss the Discovery Bible Study questions:
What does this passage teach me about God?
What does this passage teach me about people?
How does this passage call me to obey God?
What might I do in response to this this week?



Seeing how it looks in real lives (10 minutes)

Watch the video at:

<https://youtu.be/0g6pAS5N9ac>

What struck you as important in the video?



Optional further material and questions

Share these thoughts or read them together:

A further practice which can shape us in turning away from the ‘gods’ which cannot satisfy is to develop simple living. This is sometimes called the discipline of simplicity. Like generosity, simplicity gives birth to contentment because it helps us be free of false gods, while making room for the only God who can fulfil us. It is deliberately choosing not to need, get or buy “more” to be happy – to organize our lives around what is enough, rather than what our society, or our greed, tells us we want. We will consume only what we need. It is not about having ‘no possessions’ or turning our back on things. (This is called asceticism and some disciples have chosen to practise this).

It is about setting things in their proper perspective so that we can enjoy owning possessions without them ‘owning’ us. Jesus’ most famous statement which reflects this is “Seek the kingdom of God first, and all these things shall be added to you.” (Matthew 6:33) Because of strength of the pull in our society to live as consumers, this practise requires real intention, and challenges many of the ways of thinking we can find it so easy to fall into. Richard Foster says living simply occurs through our ways of thinking and our outward behaviours.

Ways of thinking: Everything we have is a gift from God, and not ours. It is God's business, not ours, to care for what we have. All that we have can be available to others.

Things we can do: Foster suggests ten, but these three are a good place to start: Buy things for their usefulness, rather than their status. Learn to enjoy things without owning them. Develop a deep appreciation for God's creation.

Discuss: What could be my first steps in living more simply?

Responding to God's leading (5 minutes)

Give people an opportunity to think about, "What might God be showing me and how might I respond?" They may like to write this down and/or share it with the group and/or share it with one other person. A friendly question is to ask each other, "Is there anything that would be helpful to ask you next time?"



Group prayer (5 minutes)

You, God, are my God,
earnestly I seek you;
I thirst for you,
my whole being longs for you,
in a dry and parched land
where there is no water.
I have seen you in the sanctuary
and beheld your power and your glory.
Because your love is better than life,
my lips will glorify you.
I will praise you as long as I live,
and in your name I will lift up my hands.
I will be fully satisfied as with the richest of foods;
with singing lips my mouth will praise you.



From Psalm 63



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Additional notes:

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