

Finances and Faith

3. 'The Cycle of Grace' Grace, generosity and giving

Aim of the study: To reflect on the ways we view our money and make decisions about the way we give. Rather than a formula or system to work out the minimum we can get away with, or even how much we SHOULD give, this study looks at the effects of our generosity on both a material and spiritual level, helps us re-think our attitudes and consider how we practically outwork that.

To start with (10 min max):

Share a time when someone has really been generous to you (it might be financial or otherwise). Why was it such a blessing? How did you respond?

Thinking through the issues:

Christian Giving...

Some Christians give in a spontaneous way that they regard as 'spirit-led'. Others adopt the idea that the Old Testament idea of 'tithing' applies to Christians and they generally understand this to mean that we should give 10% of our income to Christian activities.

1. What do you think are the positive and negative effects of the attitudes and practices involved in these different sorts of approaches to giving? (You could make 2 lists on a big sheet of paper)

An alternative perspective...

In what follows Paul is mainly talking about the collection for the impoverished church in Jerusalem and the collection that he has agreed to make (Galatians 2.10) to alleviate their poverty. But he is also articulating principles of grace and generosity more generally.

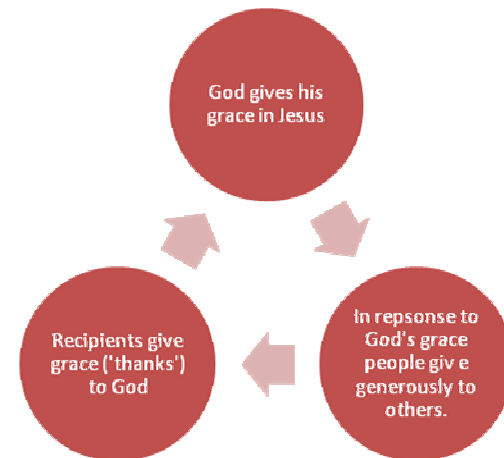
Read 1 Corinthians 16.1-3.

2. How does Paul expect the collection to Jerusalem to be organised in Corinth? What discipline and attitudes does he expect? What can we learn from them?

Read 2 Corinthians 8.1-9.

3.
 - a. According to Paul what situation are the churches of Macedonia facing? (verse 2)
 - b. What have they been given in that situation? (verse 1)
 - c. What effect does that appear to have had on them - despite their circumstances? (How has it caused them to behave?)
4.
 - a. In what ways does this pattern of Christian giving differ from the idea of spontaneous giving or of tithing?
 - b. How would it affect the positives and negatives you listed in the first section?

Paul describes a 'cycle of grace' where the idea of grace is used in three ways. (Note to leader: you might like to draw this for people to visualise.) It means God's grace to us, our generosity (what Paul calls 'this grace/this generous undertaking') to others and thanksgiving (a 'grace' at a meal is a prayer of thanks) being given to God.



5.
 - a. What is required for this 'cycle of grace' to work?
 - b. Where do you think it tends to break down? Why do you think that is the case?
6.
 - a. Why do you think human beings tend to 'hoard' what they have been given with?
 - b. What do you think are the consequences of that and how might we counteract them?

Read 2 Corinthians 9.6-15.

7. How would you summarise what Paul says here about blessings, giving and the effects of that?
 - a. verse 6
 - b. verse 7
 - c. verses 8-11
 - d. verses 12-15
8.
 - a. In what ways have you heard these verses misused?
 - b. How do you think Paul would respond to these attitudes towards our giving as followers of Jesus?
9. In the light of what we have discussed over the past few weeks on:
 - **Where our possessions come from**
 - **How we should view them as a community of believers**
 - **Our attitude and the purpose of our giving**

What do you think are wise ways for us to make decisions about how we handle our possessions and money? (Think about how much we give - and to what? How much we save and what for? Who we share our things, time and gifts with?)

Reflect and pray

- Spend a few minutes on your own with a piece of paper and ask yourself, practically, what do you feel God is asking you to do with regards to the possessions and finances He has blessed you with.
- Break into pairs and pray with each other about what you have resolved.