

Transforming lives with a generous spirit!

Practising Generosity as a Way of Life!



TRANSFORMING LIVES WITH A GENEROUS SPIRIT! PRACTISING GENEROSITY AS A WAY OF LIFE!

INTRODUCTION

This bible study has been compiled for the Partners in Mission Program for 2026 by Rev. Suzy Sitton. Partners in Mission is a yearly stewardship program of the Uniting Church in Australia, Parish of Rockhampton South, where the members of the congregation are asked to reflect on the way they are building community together through financial giving, their common worship, witness and service.

We remember with great fondness and appreciation Alan and Dorothy Demack, who for many years took turns in writing the studies for the Partners in Mission program.

We all like to receive gifts. So, today I would like you to think about one of the most important gifts, in fact, the most important gift you will ever be given – the gift of God's grace.

There are times and places where God's gift of grace is presented to us. These times are sacred moments. They are the 'means of grace' by which divine grace floods our souls. These sacred moments are times when growth in grace is nurtured.

These sacred moments are found in daily practices that help us to connect to God. These daily disciplines/habits/rhythms bring together the inward/personal (acts of worship) with the outward/social (acts of love/charity/generosity). These practices include daily prayer, fasting, Bible reading/study, worship - regularly meeting with other spiritual friends and participation in the Lord's Supper; and generosity - serving the poor.

Practising these spiritual disciplines is not done to earn salvation. These sacred moments enable us to remain open and responsive to God's transforming presence every day. They open the door and open our hearts and minds to God's transforming love and empowerment. They are intended to nurture faith and transform lives through God's grace.

The readings chosen for this bible study underscore God's expectation of generosity and challenge the mindset of wealth and entitlement. Each reading reveals a different aspect of how generosity relates to faith and discipleship, illustrating the transformative power of selfless giving.

Our call to generosity is a response to God's grace, even amidst the struggles of financial insecurity and the pressures of society. By embracing a lifestyle of generosity, we are able to cultivate a community of love, support, and mutual growth.

In these readings, Christ is seen as the ultimate example of generosity—giving of Himself for the sake of humanity. The rich young man's challenge reflects our common struggle, while the widow's offering embodies true sacrificial giving, pointing toward Christ's ultimate sacrifice.

Consider using different translations of the readings (especially for Mt 19:24). Does a particular translation help you better understand the meaning of the text?

PREPARING MEDITATION

Our hands matter, both literally and symbolically. In the open hand, our palms are up and our fingers extended. A closed hand is usually a clenched fist, tightly grasping what it wants to keep or tensely preparing for battle. To be generous requires that we open our hands. Therefore, generosity is the predisposition to love open-handedly. (Gregory Spencer)

Before each session, take a moment to prepare your heart and mind.

Close your eyes.

Imagine Jesus sitting with you. He is calm and still. Feel His living presence.

When concerns and worries come to you, take them to Jesus in your mind.

When questions come to you, take them to Jesus in your mind.

Find peace in His loving response and care.

TRANSFORMING LIVES WITH A GENEROUS SPIRIT! PRACTISING GENEROSITY AS A WAY OF LIFE!

In Scripture, giving takes many forms: offering our finances, our time, our love, our hospitality, our mercy, and more.

The Bible teaches that everything we have ultimately belongs to God (Psalm 24:1), so our giving is really just returning a portion of God's blessings and being faithful stewards.

Giving is an act of worship and obedience, and an act of joy.

As 2 Corinthians 9:7 (NLT) says, "You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. "For God loves a person who gives cheerfully."

When done with the right heart, giving is life-giving for the giver as well as the receiver.

Jesus promised that "Give, and you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full—pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, running over, and poured into your lap. The amount you give will determine the amount you get back." (Luke 6:38, NLT) – It's not that we give to get, but it is God's gracious design that generosity brings blessing back upon us in various ways.

Giving is a core part of living out our faith: it is an outward expression of inward love and faith, and a practical way we partner with God to bless others.

Generosity is a virtue characterised by a selfless willingness to share one's resources, time, and love with others, echoing the nature of God, the ultimate giver.

"Every good gift, every perfect gift, comes from above. These gifts come down from the Father, the creator of the heavenly lights, in whose character there is no change at all." (James 1:17, CEB), and when we give, we are imitating our Heavenly Father. In fact, love leads to giving. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (John 3:16). Thus, all Christian giving is rooted in love, compassion, and thankfulness toward God and others – never mere obligation.

My prayer is that we will all be encouraged to grow in generosity, in practical and joyful ways.

Meditation

Generosity is at its core a lifestyle, a lifestyle in which we share all that we have, are, and ever will become as a demonstration of God's love and as a response to God's grace. It is not enough for the church to talk about generosity, nor is it enough for individual Christians simply to commit to being generous. What makes generosity a real and powerful witness to God's love is our action. (Chris Willard and Jim Shepherd)

A REFLECTIVE HYMN: "LORD, TEACH TO US YOUR WAY OF LOVING"

Lord, teach to us your way of loving,
which is the first lesson of all.
O Christ, who loved the little children,
how sweet and tender is your call!

Lord, help us hear it and then give you
the love you ask of us today.
O Christ, help us love one another,
for this most earnestly we pray.

Lord, teach to us your way of giving,
for this is clearly the next thing:
our love ought always to be showing
what fruit and offerings it can bring.
Tune: SPIRITUS VITAE

Session 1 - Open-Handed to the needy

OPENING PRAYER

A prayer of adoration

Lord God, you are King over all. We know you as holy and true. We come humbly into your presence, seeking your precious love. You, our wonderful and generous God, want only the best for us. You speak, calling us into a beautiful relationship with you. Your holy presence fills us, reaching deep into our being. We imagine in your stillness that we are smooth-flowing waters. The blessed waters of your generosity rippling into our world. We pause to appreciate all you have given to us and to others. (a time of silence . . .) We bask in the light of your love. Heavenly Father, we adore you. Amen.

SETTING THE SCENE

In the book of Deuteronomy, specifically in chapter 15, verses 7 to 11, we find a poignant message from God to the Israelites through Moses. This passage is part of the Mosaic Law, a set of guidelines given to the Israelites to govern their lives and relationships. Here, the focus is on the treatment of the poor and the profound importance of generosity in the community.

God instructs the people not to be hardhearted or tightfisted towards their poor brothers and sisters, emphasising the virtues of compassion and openhandedness. Being “hardhearted” implies a lack of empathy, while being “tightfisted” suggests a reluctance to share resources with those in need.

The passage encourages a spirit of openness and willingness to help those who have fewer resources. This attitude of generosity and readiness to give without reservation reflects God’s desire for God’s people to care for one another, especially those who are struggling. Moreover, the passage acknowledges the perpetual existence of poverty, stating that there will always be poor people in the land. This recognition underscores the continuous responsibility of the community to support and uplift those in need.

Many commentators, over the years, have noted 1 John 3:16-17 as a restatement of Deuteronomy 15. “If you have material possessions and you see a brother without them, and you don’t help them, how does the love of Christ dwell in you?”

The affirmation of this great principle found expression in other words in the New Testament centuries later (refer to Matt. 5:43-48; Luke 14:12-14; 2 Cor. 9:7). Therefore, we are to reach out to our neighbour in love.

Concern for the well-being of neighbours is central to our identity as the people of God. We are to respond to the needs of our neighbours with generosity. In this way, stewardship is not merely a private spiritual practice between God and us, but a broader issue of justice, deeply connected to our life in God and our call to respond to neighbours in God’s love.

God gives abundantly and generously. So also the people of God are meant to share their gifts joyfully and generously. As followers of Christ, our faith informs the way we live, including how we spend our money. We recognise how blessed we are.

SHARE THE WORD

Deuteronomy 15:1-11 New Living Translation

“At the end of every seventh year, you must cancel the debts of everyone who owes you money. This is how it must be done. Everyone must cancel the loans they have made to their fellow Israelites. They must not demand payment from their neighbours or relatives, for the Lord’s time

of release has arrived. This release from debt, however, applies only to your fellow Israelites—not to the foreigners living among you.

“There should be no poor among you, for the Lord your God will greatly bless you in the land he is giving you as a special possession. You will receive this blessing if you are careful to obey all the commands of the Lord your God that I am giving you today. The Lord your God will bless you as he has promised. You will lend money to many nations but will never need to borrow. You will rule many nations, but they will not rule over you.

“But if there are any poor Israelites in your towns when you arrive in the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tightfisted toward them. Instead, be generous and lend them whatever they need. Do not be mean-spirited and refuse someone a loan because the year for cancelling debts is close at hand. If you refuse to make the loan and the needy person cries out to the Lord, you will be considered guilty of sin. Give generously to the poor, not grudgingly, for the Lord your God will bless you in everything you do. **There will always be some in the land who are poor.** That is why I am commanding you to share freely with the poor and with other Israelites in need.

ILLUSTRATION

My grandmother used to say that if you see a neighbour struggling, you should always have a plate of biscuits ready to share. One day, I decided to take her advice, but instead of biscuits, I made some homemade soup and visited the neighbour. It turned out they'd been having a tough time and experienced a family loss, and they were grateful for the meal. Sometimes, it's as simple as sharing what we have, just like the early Christians did in Acts, where they shared with anyone in need. Perhaps this is about being aware and willing to help, even in small ways!

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Questions are provided for reflection and discussion.

I wonder if you hear an echo of Deuteronomy 15:11 in Matthew 26:11: “For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me.”

In our world, 'poor' often describes financial scarcity, but in the Bible, it takes on a deeper meaning. Consider the Beatitudes - 'Blessed are the poor in spirit.' This doesn't just refer to those lacking material wealth, but to those who humbly recognise their need for God. It's a spiritual poverty that opens the door to divine richness. When we recognise our own insufficiency, we become receptive to God's infinite grace.

I once heard a story about a man who went to church every Sunday in his best suit, but he had a secret: his bank account had just a few dollars. When someone asked him what he thought being 'poor' meant, he chuckled and said, 'It means I can't afford to buy my way into heaven, but hey, at least I've got the best seat in church!' Sometimes, our earthly riches don't reflect our true wealth in Christ!

What does the word “poor” mean to you?

What does this passage reveal about God's expectations for the people of God regarding wealth and sharing?

ACTION

You may often feel overwhelmed by the requests for help or donations. This can lead to resentment. Reflect on God's grace actively during these encounters. For every appeal you receive, commit to responding with a prayer rather than just a financial decision. Engage with your community by volunteering for one event this month that resonates with you. This allows you to

give your time and talents without the feeling of being drained by turning your response into an act of grace that reflects Christ's love for others.

Reflecting on God's grace at home can transform how you view your family's needs. You might often feel burdened by the financial demands of raising children or supporting a spouse. Instead of entering into a mindset of scarcity, take time each week to recount the ways God has provided for your family. Write these down and reflect on them with your family or during your family devotions. This perspective of gratitude shifts your outlook, allowing you to give more freely, whether it's time, encouragement, or resources, knowing that God will continue to provide. How does reflecting on God's grace transform your perspective on giving?

At church, reflecting on God's grace can influence how you engage in giving during the service. When the offering plate is passed, recall specific instances of grace you've received from God, which can remind you of the blessings you can extend to others. Instead of giving out of obligation, I wonder how you would feel about committing to support a specific ministry or mission project that reaches those in need.

Discuss with your small group how you can collectively base your giving on what you've experienced in grace, thereby making it a shared journey of faith and generosity.

CLOSE IN PRAYER

Pippa Gumbel

"I'm going to pray for anyone I know who is sick and suffering today or troubled or perplexed and bring them to Jesus."

Pray for people and situations of which you are aware. Finish with these words as a prayer for yourselves, your families, the church, the community and our world:

O gracious and holy God, give us diligence to seek you, wisdom to perceive you, and patience to wait for you. Grant us, O God, a mind to meditate on you, eyes to behold you, ears to listen for your word; a heart to love you; and a life to proclaim you; through the power of the Spirit of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Benedict 480-543)

Session 2 - Choose Faith over Wealth

OPENING PRAYER

Most generous God, we come before you now, recognising that we can have our own very fixed ideas about how best to serve you. You call us to seek something deeper, to focus on kindness, compassion and generosity, flowing from the depths of our hearts. Teach us to willingly share a listening ear, a caring attitude, a helping hand, or a soft and gentle word where needed most, for perhaps what really matters is that we give of ourselves. May this way of life be a journey of generosity, using our God-given gifts. Amen.

SETTING THE SCENE

The passage prior to this one in Matthew 19:16-30 tells of Jesus generously welcoming little children who appear to have done nothing to earn his love. Now, we have this fellow, a wealthy young man, rushing up to Jesus to ask how he can get eternal life.

The narrative delves into profound themes of wealth, discipleship, eternal life, and the kingdom of God, inviting us to reflect on our priorities and values in light of spiritual truths. The young man's initial question, "What good thing must I do to get eternal life?" reveals a common misconception that salvation can be earned through mere actions, prompting Jesus to challenge his perspective. No human being can do what needs to be done to enter the kingdom of God. For God, however, all things are possible. God can bring anyone God wants into the kingdom. The direction is reversed, and salvation becomes possible. The story of the rich young man is in contrast to the story of the blessing of the children.

Jesus' response, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven," underscores the importance of prioritising spiritual wealth over material riches. Through these teachings, Jesus emphasises the transformative power of letting go of worldly attachments in pursuit of a deeper relationship with God. Stewarding our finances and the giving of ourselves are both essential parts of our life of discipleship. Stewardship is not simply paying our dues; rather, it is tending our souls so that we can see our wealth properly as an instrument to invest in God's kingdom.

True treasure is discovered not in hoarding possessions but in selfless acts of service and compassion. This passage urges us to undergo a radical reorientation of our values, guiding us towards a path of faith, generosity, and spiritual abundance as we strive for eternal life in God's kingdom. It reassures us that despite our human limitations, God's grace makes all things possible, including our redemption and transformation into beings of love and compassion.

I wonder if for the 99% of those who hear this passage, it stirs up a response not unlike that of the disciples. What about us? We go to church, serve on committees, feed the poor, give our time and talent, and we want our fair share. Perhaps we need to go beyond our personal response and consider how it is read by countries in the world that are less wealthy than Australia. The people in these countries are the 99% asking, like the disciples, what about us? We need water, food, housing, and a healthy economy, too.

The metaphorical statement, "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," vividly illustrates the challenges of clinging to earthly wealth while aspiring for heavenly rewards.

For the rich to enter the kingdom or have eternal life, they must give up what they have, so that others may have. They must love their neighbour. They must place their dependence on God alone.

Jesus is very clear about what to do with our possessions. If our possessions rule us, then that is where our treasure is. Eternal life is not something we can buy, or do, or possess. It is something that God does daily; it is what God gives.

SHARE THE WORD

Matthew 19:16-30 New Living Translation

Someone came to Jesus with this question: “Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?”

“Why ask me about what is good?” Jesus replied. “There is only One who is good. But to answer your question—if you want to receive eternal life, keep the commandments.”

“Which ones?” the man asked.

And Jesus replied: “You must not murder. You must not commit adultery. You must not steal. You must not testify falsely. Honour your father and mother. Love your neighbour as yourself.”

“I’ve obeyed all these commandments,” the young man replied. “What else must I do?”

Jesus told him, “If you want to be perfect, go and sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

But when the young man heard this, he went away sad, for he had many possessions.

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “I tell you the truth, it is very hard for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. I’ll say it again—it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God!”

The disciples were astounded. “Then who in the world can be saved?” they asked. Jesus looked at them intently and said, “Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But with God everything is possible.”

Then Peter said to him, “We’ve given up everything to follow you. What will we get?”

Jesus replied, “I assure you that when the world is made new, and the Son of Man sits upon his glorious throne, you who have been my followers will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has given up houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or property, for my sake, will receive a hundred times as much in return and will inherit eternal life. But many who are the greatest now will be least important then, and those who seem least important now will be the greatest then.

ILLUSTRATION

There was a wealthy businessman who, despite having everything, felt empty. One day, he heard about a local charity struggling to keep its doors open, and was moved by their story. He decided to donate a significant portion of his wealth. The next day, he visited the charity and began volunteering there, interacting with those in need. As he watched lives being transformed, he realised that true wealth comes not from accumulation, but from generosity and stewardship—creating a legacy that touches lives.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Questions are provided for reflection and discussion.

What question was asked of Jesus at the beginning of this story? (19:16)

Imagine the rich young ruler, standing before Jesus, perhaps adorned in fine clothing, yet in his eyes, there's a hint of desperation. 'What good thing must I do to inherit eternal life?' he asks. This moment stands in history as a reminder that material wealth does not satisfy the soul's deepest questions. No matter our status, we all seek answers to life's biggest mysteries.

In a small village, a wise old man was often sought for advice. One day, a young man approached him, eager to learn about life and its many complexities. The wise man simply pointed to a beautiful tree and asked what the young man saw. Confused, the young man replied about its beauty, but the wise man said, 'Look deeper; appreciate its roots, for they hold it firm. Life's goodness stems from being rooted in something greater.' Jesus highlighted the essence of goodness; we must dig deeper into the commandments that connect us to eternal life.

Why do you think Jesus specifically mentioned the commandments to the rich young man before addressing his wealth?

In a classroom, a teacher posed a question to her students: 'What is the definition of good?' Responses ranged from 'kind' to 'helpful.' She then emphasised that true goodness is contingent on adherence to values and principles, much like the commandments we are called to follow. We must not only seek goodness but also commit to the commandments that anchor our moral compass and lead us to Jesus.

Despite the rich young man's adherence to the commandments, Jesus challenged him to sell all he had and follow Him. In doing so, Jesus illustrated that goodness is not merely about commandment observance but about the heart's inclination towards God. Our pursuit of good when aligned with divine expectation leads us to eternal life.

There was a woman known for her generosity. Every year, she donated a portion of her income to those in need. As she watched families thrive because of her contributions, she realised that she felt richer than ever. Her heart swelled with joy. She had shifted her focus from saving money to creating a lasting impact. Her wealth was not measured in dollars, but in the flourishing she witnessed in others and in the love and gratitude for others she shared. Perhaps we are being directed toward treasures in heaven rather than earthly gain.

In what ways could practising generosity help shift your focus from earthly wealth to eternal treasures?

ACTION

I wonder . . . do you and your family often find yourselves caught up in consumerism? Why not challenge one another to a 'no-spending month' where you only buy essentials? Instead, redirect those funds into a family savings jar for a charitable donation. At the end of the month, have a celebration where you all decide which cause to support. This practice helps shift your family's focus from acquiring more to sharing and investing in eternal treasures, fostering an environment of gratitude and awareness of those in greater need.

CLOSE IN PRAYER

Pippa Gumbel

"I'm going to pray for anyone I know who is sick and suffering today or troubled or perplexed and bring them to Jesus."

Pray for people and situations of which you are aware. Finish with these words as a prayer for yourselves, your families, the church, the community and our world:

Generous God, may our hearts and minds be always thankful for your good and bountiful provision.

Generous God, may we place our trust in you, always certain that you know what we need.

Generous God, may our hands be always ready to share our riches with others. Amen.

Session 3 - Sacrificial Giving of the Heart

OPENING PRAYER

God of truth and grace, and infinite possibilities,
when the world says, "No," you say, "Yes!"
The world lauds the industry of the rich, but you cherish the sacrifice of the poor.
We give you thanks for the opportunities to give.
Teach us not only where our gifts may best be used,
but how we might give wholly of ourselves to you and to others.
Build us into a household of love and strengthen the walls around our spirit,
that we may remain strong in service to one another. Amen.

SETTING THE SCENE

In this powerful passage, Jesus observes the crowd at the temple treasury. Among the wealthy, making large contributions is a poor widow who comes forward and quietly puts in two small coins. Jesus uses this moment to teach his disciples about sacrificial giving and God's perspective on generosity.

The widow loved the Lord and was humble in her faith, and though she had limited means, she gave her last two coins as an offering unto the Lord. Others had more to give but failed to discover her joy in giving. Their gifts were tokens, but the widow gave from her heart with a spirit of celebration. This giving was more than paying the temple tax; ***it was an act of worship.***

The widow's offering may seem insignificant compared to the grand donations of the wealthy, but Jesus sees differently. He praises the widow, pointing out that she has given all she had to live on, while the others gave out of their wealth. This shows us that true generosity is not measured by the amount given, but by the heart behind the gift. The widow's offering exemplifies sacrificial giving, giving not out of abundance but out of a genuine desire to contribute to God's work.

The story of the widow's offering reminds us that God values the spirit of generosity above all else. It encourages us to give not out of obligation or for show, but out of a deep sense of devotion and trust in God's provision.

Most of us are wonderfully blessed, with security, enough money to live on, plenty of good food, homes and possessions. I wonder . . . are these good gifts and blessings from God to us?

Generosity is a huge part of how God wants us to join with the Holy Spirit in making the world more like it was intended to be. When we are generous with our time, possessions, money and skills, we create a more equal and happier society. The early church practised generosity with transformative results:

The group of followers all felt the same way about everything. None of them claimed that their possessions were their own, and they shared everything they had with each other. In a powerful way, the apostles told everyone that the Lord Jesus was now alive. God greatly blessed his followers, and no one went in need of anything. ACTS 4:32–34

We are to live with open hands, alert to God's promptings to share whatever we have to bless others: by alleviating loneliness; sharing our possessions with those who don't have enough; using our skills to help others; and being ready to use our money wisely and generously. When we do this, we are making God's love and generosity a reality.

The widow's few pennies were "more" in God's eyes than the bags of gold given by the wealthy, because she gave everything, trusting God completely. Even if we feel our contribution is small, when it is given with love and surrender, it delights God.

SHARE THE WORD

Mark 12: 41-44 New Living Translation

Jesus sat down near the collection box in the Temple and watched as the crowds dropped in their money. Many rich people put in large amounts. Then a poor widow came and dropped in two small coins.

Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has given more than all the others who are making contributions. For they gave a tiny part of their surplus, but she, poor as she is, has given everything she had to live on."

ILLUSTRATION

During a charity event, a renowned millionaire gave a whopping \$100,000 to the cause. The crowd cheered loudly. Then, an elderly lady, known as Grandma Edna, stepped up and handed over a crumpled \$5 note. The crowd paused, puzzled. Then a voice rang out, 'You know what? She probably sacrificed more for that \$5 than the person giving the generous contribution!' Think about the widow, perhaps Grandma Edna reminded everyone that the intention and sacrifice behind giving are what truly matter.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Questions are provided for reflection and discussion.

What did Jesus see from where He sat near the temple? (12:41)

Generosity is not merely something we do; it is an admirable quality of character, something we are. Undergirding the character of truly generous people is a special awareness of themselves, others, and God's gracious provision for the world, and this understanding inspires genuinely generous activity.

What stands out to you about the widow's offering in this passage, and what details do you find most striking?

How is God generous?

This story challenges us to reflect on our own attitudes towards giving.

There is a gentle challenge: do we give God our leftovers, or do we give in a way that truly costs us something?

God's reign, founded on God's subversive generosity, stands opposed to Roman oppression in the New Testament. Today, it provides the moral vision to see through the distortions of consumerism and gives an alternative way to understand our obligations to one another and to God. Are we giving sacrificially, with a heart full of gratitude and love for God?

Most of us admit that our giving behaviour does not match our personal or our religion's ideal of what it should be. Yet we are oddly content with this. Are we more concerned with the size of our gift or the sincerity behind it? Why do we have this comfortable guilt, and how can we change our habits to be rid of it?

ACTION

I wonder . . .do you sometimes feel disconnected at church and question what your service means? Why not explore ways you can actively engage in a ministry that resonates with your passions? Attend a volunteer meeting and find a ministry team to join, whether it's working with youth, providing pastoral care, or maybe it is being part of the worship team. As you contribute your time and talents, you'll not only serve your church community but also strengthen your own faith. Take the time to document your journey in a journal or create an artwork to recognise how your contributions over time are part of a bigger picture in God's work.

CLOSE IN PRAYER

Pippa Gumbel

"I'm going to pray for anyone I know who is sick and suffering today or troubled or perplexed and bring them to Jesus."

Pray for people and situations of which you are aware. Finish with these words as a prayer for yourselves, your families, the church, the community and our world:

Almighty God, with you, giving and receiving work hand in hand.
We gladly rejoice in your holy name.

Sing, all you people, you who are, upright in heart.
We praise you for inviting us to share in your abundance.
We gladly rejoice in your holy name.

Sing, all you people, you who are upright in heart.
You speak to us. You show us how to be our best selves in you.
We gladly rejoice in your holy name.

Sing, all you people, you who are upright in heart.
We praise you, God, for the joys that flow from your generosity.
We gladly rejoice in your holy name.

Sing, all you people, you who are upright in heart.
Rejoice. Sing psalms, hymns and spiritual song to the Lord.
We gladly rejoice in your holy name.
We are yours, Lord, always and forever.

Love the Lord your God
with all your heart, soul, mind and strength,
and love your neighbour as you yourself is loved.

Holy One, help us see the goodness of your caring presence in our lives.
Help us welcome you into our homes.
Help us release toil and anxiety and find peace. Amen.

Session 4 - Stewardship: A Divine Call

OPENING PRAYER

As we come before You today, our hearts are filled with both reverence and awe. Your divine wisdom transcends our understanding, and Your ways are higher than ours.

Loving God, you are our rock and our redeemer. You are our strong foundation, even when we are unsteady. Be our guiding light, even when we wander in darkness. Be our steadfast faithfulness, even when our faith falters. Be our coach and our cheerleader, and push us to grow closer to you, closer to love, and closer to your creation. Amen.

SETTING THE SCENE

In this parable, Jesus uses the imagery of a vineyard owner who rented out his vineyard to tenants. The tenants end up mistreating and even killing the servants sent by the owner to collect the fruit. When the owner finally sends his son, hoping they will respect him, they choose to kill him, thinking they can inherit the vineyard. Some commentators feel that this parable symbolises God as the vineyard owner, sending prophets and messengers (the servants) throughout history to guide and lead people back to God. Despite these gracious efforts, some reject and harm the messengers, culminating in the ultimate rejection and crucifixion of Jesus (the owner's son).

In an earlier parable, the vineyard owner instructs the steward, who could be translated as “foreman”, to organise and pay the workers. This request goes beyond simply managing the affairs of his master; the steward is also called to watch over what has been entrusted to his care —both the individuals and the land. Stewards are more than task masters and paper pushers; they are to be nurturers. Like good parents and mentors that seek to nurture the unique gifts of their children and students, our calling as stewards is to nurture and care for others. The vision of a wise steward would be one who walks the vineyard, tends to the needs of individual grapevines or individual employees, and knows their needs are not the same.

Stewards are called to nurture, not just manage. We too are to nurture our gifts, generosity, and sense of gratitude as we seek to be better stewards of all that we have and all that we are, and as we live more fully into the life and promises of God.

I wonder if it is more art than science. I wonder if this parable represents us, the church. That we are to be good soil as the terroir¹ of the vineyard is the soil in which the grapes take root and derive their distinct flavours. Cultures of financial stewardship must be tended to take root and grow. The environment and the end product might not always be the same, but they share the need for nurturing.

Stewardship is not managing finances by simply moving money from one column to another. Stewardship is more about tending our souls, aware of our unique fears and desires; nurturing our relationships with money as it marks a way of life; and leading us to experience faithful living and the joy of giving.

Stewardship is how we share money, but also how we acquire, spend, and invest our resources—our full experience with the gifts God entrusts to us.

We cultivate the fruits of God's kingdom in our lives by recognising God as the owner of all things and understanding that we are also to tend and care, as stewards entrusted with God's resources. God has given us these resources for God's purposes and glory, rather than for us to selfishly seek control or power. God calls us to bear fruit in our lives that reflects the character of God and

¹ Terroir - the complete natural environment in which a particular wine is produced, including factors such as the soil, topography, and climate.

advances the kingdom, just as the vineyard owner in the parable expected fruit from those whom he entrusted the vineyard to.

Cultivating the fruits of God's kingdom involves working diligently and faithfully in all that we do, knowing that our labour is not in vain when done for the Lord. This requires embracing the values of the kingdom – love, justice, mercy, and humility – and allowing these to shape our actions and attitudes. We participate in the growth of God's kingdom and contribute to the abundant harvest God desires to see in the world by being proactive in serving others, sharing the message of salvation, and living lives that reflect Christ.

SHARE THE WORD

Matthew 20: 1-16. New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

"For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the labourers for a denarius for the day, he sent them into his vineyard. When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and he said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' So they went. When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around, and he said to them, 'Why are you standing here idle all day?' They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard.' When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, 'Call the labourers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.' When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received a denarius. Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received a denarius. And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?' So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

Matthew 21: 33-46. New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

"Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a winepress in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went away. When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other slaves, more than the first, and they treated them in the same way. Then he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.' So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time."

Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the scriptures:

'The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;
this was the Lord's doing,
and it is amazing in our eyes'?

"Therefore, I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces its fruits. The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, and it will crush anyone on whom it falls."

When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realised that he was speaking about them. They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet.

ILLUSTRATION

In the early church, the believers shared all they had, bringing their possessions to the apostles to help those in need. One account tells of a man named Barnabas, who sold a field and gave the money to the disciples. His generosity inspired others, establishing a culture of giving that would characterise the early church. This biblical example exemplifies how stewardship is rooted in community and compassion. When we give selflessly, we mirror the heart of God and encourage others to do the same.

There is also the story of a family that went on a camping trip, and the dad asked everyone to take on a responsibility. The youngest child was assigned to gather firewood. Instead, he found a stick and started drawing in the dirt, saying it was his 'artistic expression.' The dad chuckled but then realised that in the kingdom's stewardship, even the simplest task done with love can create a warm, inviting space. That is why love, justice, mercy, and humility, when shared, will make the whole experience richer. This is how we show kindness in stewarding God's creation.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Questions are provided for reflection and discussion.

The message of stewardship and accountability resonates with us. God has entrusted us with various gifts, responsibilities, and His message of love and redemption. The parable warns against complacency and rejection of divine guidance.

Once we have come face to face with the ugly truth about ourselves, we are ready to hear the wonderful good news about God and God's undying love for us in Christ. Our Bible passages call upon us to examine our lives, as individuals and as communities of faith. They call us to discover what sort of vines, what kind of tenants we are. Are we bearing good fruit? Are we giving God the gifts and glory that are due? Are we living our lives as faithful caretakers of God's Vineyard?

Does God's Word soften your heart like wax or harden your heart like clay?

Today or tomorrow, how can you show God your appreciation for God's goodness toward you?

How can we understand the concept of the vineyard as a representation of God's kingdom in our lives today?

ACTION

There are many pressures we need to navigate, whether it is at school, work, home, or even church. Sometimes we find it challenging to stand up or influence our peers positively. We struggle to invite a friend to join a Bible study group, start a prayer group or a pastoral care group. When we actively share our faith in these environments, with God's help, it is possible to create opportunities to bear fruit for the kingdom by encouraging others and fostering a supportive community where faith can flourish.

In a world often driven by self-interest, embracing a lifestyle of generosity can inspire others and reflect God's love and provision. Are you ready to love and serve the Lord in all you do, and how will you do so?

CLOSE IN PRAYER

Pippa Gumbel

"I'm going to pray for anyone I know who is sick and suffering today or troubled or perplexed and bring them to Jesus."

Pray for people and situations of which you are aware. Finish with these words as a prayer for yourselves, your families, the church, the community and our world:

The cornerstone that the builders rejected is our foundation and our strength.

Christ, we build our lives on you.

Those who turn from God and forsake God's ways labour in vain.

Christ, we set our hearts on you.

The ways of life are hidden from the unrighteous.

Christ, we place our hopes on you. Amen.

The heavens are telling the glory of God.

The skies proclaim the work of God's hands.

Day and night return endlessly, showing God's steadfast love.

The sun shines upon the earth, reflecting God's light.

The law of God is perfect, reviving the soul.

The decrees of God bring wisdom, making wise the pure of heart.

The heavens are telling the glory of God.

The skies proclaim the work of God's hands. (Psalm 19)

Thank you for joining me on this journey of transforming lives with a generous spirit! Practising Generosity as a Way of Life! Rev Suzy.

Acknowledgements

We give thanks to God for the resources used in compiling this bible study.

Roots for Churches has kindly written prayer resources for churches.

About Roots for Churches

Roots for Churches is an ecumenical Christian charity providing weekly, lectionary-based resources to help churches worship, learn and grow together across all ages. It supports intergenerational worship, children's and youth ministry, bible study and seasonal events through practical and accessible print and online materials.

Betsy Duffy

<https://mailchi.mp/betsyduffy.com/bring-them>

Copeland, Adam J. *Beyond the Offering Plate: A Holistic Approach to Stewardship*.

J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 5, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1974).

Timothy J. Keller, *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).

Jarvis, Cynthia A.; Johnson, E. Elizabeth. *Feasting on the Gospels--Matthew, Volume 2: A Feasting on the Word Commentary*.

Fairless, John; Chilton, Delmer. *The Lectionary Lab Commentary with Stories and Sermons for Year A*.

Beu, B.J.; Scifres, Mary. *The Abingdon Worship Annual 2024*.

Seasons of the Spirit. Prayers for All Seasons: Based on The Revised Common Lectionary Yr. B.

Scripture references and quotations are from a few different translations.