

seasons of giving workbook

A four-part course for small groups on money and giving

LEADER'S NOTES



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Seasons of Giving is a four-part course developed by Stewardship to develop our understanding of what the Bible has to say about money and giving, and to challenge our attitude towards money in general, and particularly in relation to generous giving. All the Bible quotations are from the NIV Bible (published by Hodder & Stoughton).

introduction

Thank you for taking on the leadership of this short bible study course, *Seasons of Giving*.

This leader's manual provides general guidance on running the group and more detailed guidance for planning the individual sessions. It also includes an abridged version of *The Selfish Giant* story to read in the group.

Seasons of Giving is not the last word about money and generosity. But it might be the first word in your church, house group or cell group. Money is not an easy subject for a range of reasons but the bible will not allow us to sidestep the issue.

Seasons is written in the belief that good giving is essential to discipleship and one of the keys that unlocks a healthy and a biblical relationship with the money God entrusts to us.

about *Seasons of Giving*

Seasons of Giving is a four week bible study course¹ looking at giving in the wider context of our money. Giving is always influenced by our attitudes to money in general.

Seasons takes a fresh and creative approach, blending traditional bible study with the use of pictures, a modern day story of generosity and the theme of the seasons in nature. It will get group members talking, sharing and learning together around money and giving.

why *Seasons of Giving*?

Because giving cannot be isolated from the changes in our lives, our circumstances and our attitudes. Our spiritual life is about growth and maturity, in prayer, bible reading and service in our church community. We should also grow in 'the grace of giving' (2 Corinthians 8:7). The imagery of the seasons in nature captures this sense of growth and change.

¹ Some groups, especially those that meet for just an hour or so, may wish to split the first session into two separate meetings. This makes for a five week course with the first week being a very relaxed and enjoyable 'taster' to the course leading into week one. For details see the guidance notes to week one.

² For more of Andy's work visit http://www.beehiveillustration.co.uk/artists/andy_robb.html

the structure of the study

Each study session has a central study section with an opening activity and closing worship as bookends. Each session is designed to last 90 minutes. There is a section below on timings if you have less time than this. But first an overview of the structure of each session will help.

- An optional **starter activity** should last five to ten minutes at most. The exception is 'Money Ludo' in session 1. See the guidance notes on session 1 for more on this.
- The central study section is made up of three parts. **Part 1** is a study of the word of God in scripture, a passage from Luke's Gospel with additional passages to consider. As a rough guide 30-40 minutes should be allocated to this section.
- **Part 2** of the study session is called *In the Giant's Garden*. This part uses a picture from *The Selfish Giant* by illustrator Andy Robb² and a worksheet with questions to encourage more general discussion and personal application of the challenge to generous giving. Typically 15 minutes is allocated to this section.
- **Part 3** is called *In the Spotlight* and consists of discussion questions which directly focus on issues relating to giving. Around 20 minutes is allocated to this
- **Prayer and worship** close the session. Suggestions are made for this time but group leaders should not feel bound to use any or all of the ideas.



easy reading

Each week's session is accompanied by some optional 'easy reading' which can be found at the back of the group member's booklet. Please do encourage group members to read this additional material either before or after the bible study. However, the study does not assume that the reading has or will be done. The easy reading will assist leader preparation.

personal reflection after the study session

Not all of the questions on the worksheet in part 2 of the study, *In the Giant's Garden*, will be discussed in the group meetings. Encourage group members to use these worksheets for personal reflection and practical application outside the group meetings.

timings

There is more than 90 minutes worth of discussion material so do not feel you have to tackle every question in every section. The priority is a good, balanced and enjoyable study and discussion, not ticking off all the answers so please be flexible.

If your group meets for less than 90 minutes you will need to plan carefully.

- Maximise the time available, e.g by omitting opening refreshments or working while enjoying them. Perhaps seek permission for an extra 15 minutes for this course;
- Omit the optional starter activities. Some use DVD clips and could be used during introductory refreshments if that is your custom;
- Prayer is always important but don't feel bound to use the suggested materials.

However, to really save time you will need to limit the central section of each session and this can be done in one of two ways. You will need to decide what suits your group best.

- The preferable option is to reduce the study time allocated to each part to fit the time available and so retain the overall balance of the study. The problem here is that this reduces the time available for dedicated bible study which is the heart of the study.
- The second option is to exclude part 2, *In the Giant's Garden* and not use the images and worksheets. This saves time but risks losing the creativity of the giant's story and the seasons imagery. If you take this option:
 - urge group members to use the worksheets from *In the Giant's Garden*, as a personal reflection activity to do at after the session each week;
 - allow some time each week for feedback and sharing from the worksheets;
 - read the Giant's story in session 1 to put the worksheets in context;
 - print and distribute the abridged copy of the story to group members.

your role as leader

You do not need to be a financial expert to run this course, just a disciple of Jesus on the same journey as your group. Money is a personal subject and people may be a little anxious so:

- remind folk that we are all travelling on the same journey and learning from each other;
- keep it light, well paced, humorous and honest;
- share appropriately your own successes and failures around money; your insights into the bible passages and the things you don't understand. Openness in the group is key;
- remind people not to share more than they are comfortable with in themselves;
- keep to time each session.

As leader, always come prepared to share something of your own journey in the worksheet discussions in part 2 of the Bible study which uses the worksheets. This will encourage other people to also share and will help create an atmosphere of openness and honesty.

people with money worries

The subject matter may well throw up issues for some people. Some may be defensive: don't let their attitude set the tone of the meeting. Some may be struggling with anything from debt to redundancy to the cost of a new baby and they may share some of this.

- In the group itself, listen, support and pray but don't be drawn into detailed discussion or counselling;
- Arrange to meet outside the group to offer more direct support, male to male, female to female because of the personal nature of the issue;
- If you as leader are not confident to offer practical support, seek someone in the church who can do so. **Do not offer any financial advice, however well intentioned;**³
- If there is a debt problem always seek professional support.

Session 5 in the group member's manual (page 28) suggests sources of local debt help and advice and resources for managing money wisely and well.

about *The Selfish Giant*

Oscar Wilde was not a Christian but he dug deep into Christian things when he wrote a most powerful and beautiful modern day parable called *The Selfish Giant*. An abridged version of the story can be found at the end of the group member's booklet.

Briefly, the story tells how winter settles in a giant's garden: a picture of his cold, ungenerous heart. Unexpectedly, Spring arrives when children play in the garden and the giant's heart is melted, like the winter in his garden, by a small boy whom we later learn is Jesus himself.

The giant allows the children to play in 'the most beautiful garden they had ever seen' until many years later, as autumn falls, the elderly giant meets once again in his garden the Christ child and is invited to share eternity with him.

Meeting Jesus is the key to generous giving. It is the gospel that thaws our hard hearts and the generosity of God in Christ that is the heart of our giving. The story of *The Selfish Giant* simply helps us to grasp this biblical truth in a fresh way.

why use this story?

Because it is a powerful story about the blessings of generosity and we should remember that Jesus used stories to communicate spiritual truths. Because it has a distinctively Christian element. Because the story and the imagery of the seasons can help us think creatively about generosity and so unlock generosity in our lives.

Beautiful though it is, *The Selfish Giant* is not scripture and it does not get equal billing with Luke's gospel! We use the story to help us think about biblical truth in a fresh and creative way. The leader's notes to each study suggest the links between the story and the season. To illustrate:

Imagine that an ungenerous heart is like winter in the giant's garden. Children are excluded, there is no laughter, no play. The North Wind invites Hail and Rain to join him just as lack of generosity can attract other negative attitudes and emotions.

The Bible passage for winter is the rich fool in Luke 12. A man with a winter heart, he stores up good things for himself with no awareness of either God or the community that needs his grain.

³ Stewardship offers intensive one day training in Personal Budget Coaching which equips people to help others prepare a budget and offer personal support and clearly identifies the boundary with financial advice which is a regulated, professional activity. Visit www.stewardship.org.uk/money to find out more about Personal Budget Coaching.

using the selfish giant

The Selfish Giant is a recurring theme, not the main focus of the study. Use it sparingly.

- Read the abridged version (easily read in 10 minutes) in the first session; see the guidance notes for details. Don't simply distribute the story to group members.

- Part 2 of each study uses a worksheet and a picture from the giant's story. Don't try to discuss all the questions as there will not be time. The leader's notes suggest some key questions to ask and always encourage the group to complete the worksheet at home.

There are A4 illustrations in the group member's manual. You may find it helpful to blow up a copy of each image to A3 (or even larger if you can) and place centrally in the room so that group members work from a shared focus and not from their separate booklets.

overview of the course

session 1: I want to break free

Spotlight: Giving helps set us free from the love of money

Bible passage: Luke 18:18-30 – the rich ruler

session 2: the winter of discontent

Spotlight: Giving recognises that everything comes from God and is a gift entrusted to us

Bible passage: Luke 12:13-21 – the rich fool

session 3: a spring in your step

Spotlight: Giving is the hallmark of discipleship around money

Bible passage: Luke 19:1-10 – the story of Zacchaeus

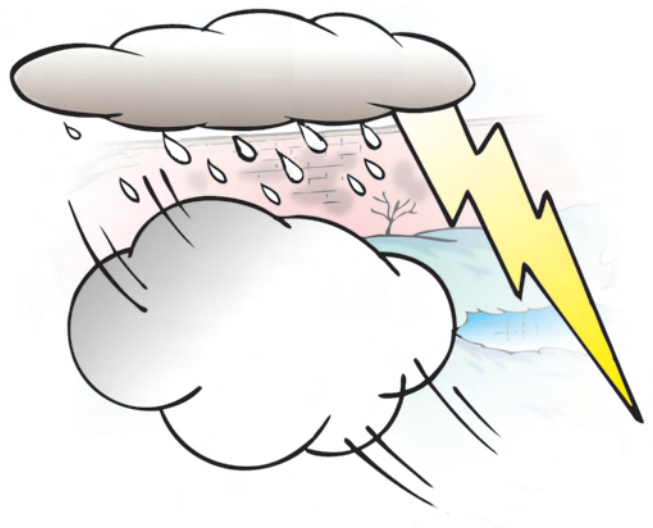
session 4: summer lovin'

Spotlight: Giving is part of our stewardship responsibility before God

Bible passage: Luke 16:1-15 – the shrewd manager

personal reflection: autumn days

A personal reflection exercise for after the group finishes



session 1: I want to break free

These notes refer to session 1 of the Member's booklet on pages 4 to 9.

starter for ten

If this is a new group coming together for the first time make this opening activity count as it will help people to get to know and trust each other. Light refreshments will help.

Normally the opening activity is short and optional but the activity for this week is different and is strongly recommended, even if the group know each other well.

We suggest that you play Money Ludo with the group and allow 30 minutes for the game. It is fun and simple to play and easy to prepare. Full details on how to play and what you need can be downloaded from the website – www.stewardship.org.uk/money.

timing for this session

This is the fullest session of the course so timing is especially important. One solution is to create an additional taster session⁴ and make this a five week course. If this does not appeal:

- If you play Money Ludo then omit section 2 of the study in its entirety. In the game the group will have already begun to explore their early money memories. Simply encourage the group to use the money story picture and worksheet for personal reflection at home.
- If you choose not to play Money Ludo then go straight into the bible study and give good time to part 2, using the questions on the money story worksheets.



⁴ You may want to treat this first session as a 'taster' and make this a five week course. Play the Ludo game for longer, have some refreshments and go straight to the closing worship and read the story of the *Selfish Giant* as part of that. If a bible passage is desired you could read Luke 14:15-24, the invitations to the wedding banquet. This can prompt discussion or a brief leader led reflection on how our day-to-day business and domestic concerns can come between us and the invitation of grace which Jesus brings.

about money stories

This session introduces the idea of learning to tell our money stories to the group. It is an amusing, moving and powerful way to help people start talking about money in a non-threatening manner and opens up real self-understanding.

In your preparation read the short section on money stories in the easy reading for session one (page 38). For more background visit www.stewardship.org.uk/money and search the resource library for 'Written on our hearts: learning to tell our money stories'

the bible passage: Luke 18:18-30: the rich young ruler

notes on the bible passage for this session

In this passage a wealthy man rushes up to Jesus. To even ask the question about inheriting eternal life the rich man must have known that something was missing in his life. We cannot of course be sure that his money itself was making him unhappy, although the industrialist and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie long ago noted that millionaires seldom smile!

What we do know is that one of the problems of rising affluence is that people are rarely satisfied and that 'enough' is always a little more – TV and advertising make sure of that! We also know that money can get in the way of relationships and that relationships are essential to happiness.

Jesus tells him there is one thing he must do – he must sell his possessions, give all the money to the poor and follow Jesus. The rich man walks away, broken-hearted. He knows exactly what he is walking away from – but the price is too high for him.

Money opens doors for us but here money closes the door for the rich young ruler. The disciples are astounded. For them, wealth was a sign of God's blessing. If the rich ruler couldn't get eternal life, what hope could there be for anyone else?

Jesus remarks that 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 (verses 24-25). That includes us! We may feel that our lifestyles are modest but the average UK salary of £25,000 is enough to put us in the top 1% of the world's rich list. Just 8% of people in the world own a car.

Whatever we make of Jesus' teaching, beginning as we do with Luke 18, we need to be aware that our own decisions around money are made in the context of a world of need.

In the UK in 08/09, a staggering £9.9 billion was donated to charity – which sounds impressive until the maths reveal that, on average, for every £10 an individual earned, just seven pence was given to charity: less than 1% of our income.

part one: bible study (25 minutes)

Because of the Money Ludo starter activity there is a little less time available for bible study this week. If you have omitted the game allocate 35–40 minutes for the study. Try to draw out two elements in this story of the rich ruler.

The first is to tease out the ways in which money can so easily and so often come between us and the gospel. Why can't a rich man let go of his money to follow Jesus? Are we afraid that God will ask us to give all our money away? In what ways can money absorb our energies?

The second is to use question 3 to make the point that giving everything away is not the only way to be a faithful disciple of Jesus around money. But do not allow this to become a cop out! Jesus was clearly saying that money *can* get in the way of discipleship.

Even if we are allowed to keep what we have, we are still called to be free from allowing money and possessions to hold us captive. These things can hinder us spiritually.

part two: our money stories (15-20 minutes)

If you have played Money Ludo then omit this section completely and encourage group members to use the worksheet at home for personal reflection. Refer them to the easy reading for week one which briefly describes what we mean by a money story and why it matters.

If you have not played Money Ludo then use the worksheet questions in the group. Start with the early memory questions. People will discuss freely, often laughing at the memories.

As leader, always ask if the emotions they recall or the attitudes that they share are still a part of their attitudes or emotions around money now. The point is that these early memories shape our actions and attitudes today.

At the end of this section briefly explain that the group has begun to explore their money stories and draw out the two points made in the easy reading (page 38):

- that money stories help us understand our relationship with money better;
- that money stories help us hear the word of God more clearly because we know our deaf spots around money better.

Keep this section light and humorous. As with all the illustrations in this study you may like to blow up a copy of this image to A3 (or larger) if you can and place centrally in the room.

part three: in the spotlight

In the introduction to the group member's booklet the picture of Lincoln Cathedral is used to illustrate how several floodlights are used to illuminate this beautiful building at night. Imagine that giving is a beautiful building. Each week we floodlight or spotlight one aspect of giving. At the end of the course we have looked at giving from different perspectives and illuminated its beauty.

The spotlight on giving in this session is that giving is one of the key ways in which we can be set free from the gravitational pull of money in a consumer society. We willingly and gladly release what society sees as all important.

If time is short then from this section focus on question 1 alone as the subject of discussion. Question 2 allows for further bible reflection while question 3 is a wild card discussion, perhaps for another time which explores ways of building resistance to a consumer culture.

prayer and worship (20 minutes)

You could begin with some worship. Some appropriate songs are:

Giver of grace by Stuart Townend

Jesus be the centre by Michael Frye

I lift my hands by Andre Kempen

Then read the abridged version of *The Selfish Giant*⁵, having prepared in advance or invited a good reader from the group to read on your behalf. It is at the end of the group member's booklet.

- At the end of the reading allow some time for silence;
- Invite group members to share briefly any Bible passages that came to mind any lingering images from the story;
- Close with the Lord's Prayer and the grace.

at the end of the session:

- draw attention to the optional easy reading, stressing that this can be done before or after the bible study session but also that is optional;
- encourage group members to use the worksheets for personal reflection on their own.



⁵ The full version is freely available online. Try www.fullbooks.com – click on Gui-Hil and find The Happy Prince and Other Tales by Oscar Wilde. Alternatively www.readbookonline.net – click on short stories and then search for *The Selfish Giant* by Oscar Wilde

session 2: the winter of discontent

These notes refer to session 2 of the Member's booklet on pages 10 to 15.

why winter?

In this session we explore the winter season of giving. The theme of winter comes of course from Oscar Wilde's story of *The Selfish Giant*. His garden is *his* garden: he chases out the children who are playing there and puts a big sign up saying that trespassers will be prosecuted.

For Wilde the coldness of his heart, his lack of generosity is mirrored in the winter that settles in his garden, even when it is spring elsewhere. Snow and Frost claim the garden and invite the North wind who in turn invites Rain and Hail. The sadness is that lack of generosity seems to invite other harsh attitudes.

Our bible study is Luke 12:13-21, Jesus' well-known parable of the rich fool. For him too there is a winter of the heart. He stores his grain and plans his retirement as though he is the centre of the his universe. He gives no thought to the God who is the owner and giver of all he has nor of those who depend on his selling his produce.

In their different ways both the giant and rich fool are asserting their ownership over their wealth and possessions. But Christians cannot do that because all we have is a gift from God who is the owner of all. The winter heart is not fundamentally about individual acts of not sharing or giving but an attitude which says, 'this is mine' when ultimately it belongs to God.

starter for ten (5-10 minutes)

Perhaps over refreshments spread out a number of glossy lifestyle magazines and invite the group to choose one or two adverts from the magazines. Ask people to describe the messages the adverts are sending out about money, possessions and lifestyle choice. Invite one or two to describe the advert that really draws them in. For a shorter opening activity:

- If you have internet access, you could show the YouTube clip of Frank Spencer visiting his bank manager for a loan. Does the group have any similar memories and, if so, how have things changed for them? You'll find this clip at the bottom of the homepage at www.red2black.org.uk
- You could invite two members of the group to read/act out the modern version of the parable of great price which can be found at the end of this section of the notes. Please note that if used here it can't be used as biblical meditation in closing worship.

notes on the bible passage: Luke 12:13-21 – the rich fool

In the mid-1800s, some prospectors in the California gold rush who thought they had made their fortune learnt that their discovery was not gold but iron pyrites: fool's gold. In Luke 12, Jesus tells a story of a wealthy farmer whose earthly wealth was also fool's gold.



The parable comes in response to a question about financial inheritance. It is a fair question to ask a rabbi because religious leaders were to settle inheritance issues (Deuteronomy 21:15-17, Numbers 27:1-11 and 36:7-9). But Jesus refuses to get drawn into the details or to take sides in the argument. Instead, he looks at people's relationships with money.

The farmer is a good businessman; his actions seem reasonable: we all want a pleasant retirement on a good pension. We can also assume that the farmer gives alms to the poor and tithes his harvest. So, to call him a "fool" seems a bit harsh!

When push came to shove, God was not in the farmer's thinking. He is the centre of his own universe! As we say today, 'It's all about me'! He never believed he was accountable, believing himself to be the ultimate owner of what he has.

Neither was the wider community in his thinking. His decision to store the harvest would almost certainly have driven up the price of grain. "People curse the man who hoards grain, but blessing crowns him who is willing to sell," says Proverbs 11:26. One of the problems of increasing affluence is that it sometimes blinds us to our obligations to the poor when in fact this is at the heart of true worship (Micah 6:1-8).

But the Old Testament uses "fool" (Psalm 53:1; Isaiah 32:6; Jeremiah 4:22) to describe those who believe in God but do not consider God in their thinking or their actions and indeed whose actions cause hurt to others (Isaiah 53:4)

The rich fool is the centre of his own universe: "I will"... "my barns"... "my soul". The farmer's time, energy and focus is on himself. His wealth absorbs his attention. For this he is a fool.

part one: bible study (30-40 minutes)

The flexible timing here depends on whether you have allowed time for the starter activity.

It may be helpful to find in advance a news story about a family dispute over finance such as a very public divorce settlement or the tragic case of the impact of debt. Bankers' bonuses may also stimulate some discussion!

The first four questions in this section are straightforward bible study questions. The key question is perhaps question 3. The main point to draw out is that of God's ultimate ownership of all we have. What we have is not a possession that we have earned or deserved but a gift we hold in trust before God.

Question five focuses on practical application from the parable. Question 6 is a wild card, picking up the community angle from the passage notes above.

part two: in the giant's garden (15 minutes)

You may want to introduce this section of the study by reminding people of the winter part of the giant's story. The group member's booklet has a brief summary. You may also like to make some very brief introductory comments about the winter theme, along the lines of the 'Why Winter?' section above.

Make reference to the A4 image in group member's booklet. As always, it may help to enlarge the image and place it centrally in the room.

Pose some but not all of the questions on the worksheet. The primary question to ask is perhaps Question 1 which explores what things make giving difficult for group members and there may well be enough for discussion in this question alone.

You may like to supplement this with question 2 about the children outside the walls.

However, if you can share a personal experience or story you may want to open a discussion about walls around our 'financial gardens' which is the thrust of questions 3, 4 and 5. Walls are good to protect what matters to us but they can be too high, especially if they exclude others. Insurance might be an interesting discussion for example. However, questions 3-5 are really more intended for personal reflection.

part three: in the spotlight (20 minutes)

Remember Lincoln Cathedral illuminated by floodlights?

This week the spotlight or focus on giving is that when we give we are asserting in the most practical and direct way that God is in fact the owner and the giver of all that we have.

There are two straightforward questions in the main study notes. If time is short focus on question 2 alone.

prayer and worship (15 mins)

Either the group leader or another group member should prepare a closing time of prayer and worship. Suggestions are offered below but do not feel bound to use them.

Possible worship songs:

All I once held dear by Graham Kendrick

Into your hands (Jesus I believe in you)
by Reuben Morgan

Lord you are more precious than silver
by Lynn Deshazo

Jesus lover of my soul by Paul Oakley

A themed prayer

You may wish to read out the following themed prayer for the study (which is printed in the group member's booklet in the coming weeks):

Loving Father
you have made us your people,
richly provided us with good gifts
and called us to live for you;
may gratitude be in our hearts
may generosity be in our hands
may justice and righteousness guide our feet
and may the life of your kingdom
and the joy of heaven be found among us.

Amen

Based on Isaiah 5:1-8

A biblical meditation: the pearl of great price (Matthew 13:44-46)

You may like to use the following biblical meditation:

- Invite each group member to take a small pebble from a bowl on a table in the middle of the room. Ask them to hold it with closed hands. (this exercise can also be done without the symbolic pebble; simply invite people to open and close their empty hands).
- Slowly and thoughtfully read the story of the pearl of great price.
- Invite the group to reflect in silence on the winter garden and their attitudes to their wealth and possessions. It may help to think of just one possession which they find it hard to 'sign over' to God's ownership in order to receive the pearl of great price.
- Then read the parable of the pearl again, slowly and thoughtfully.

- After a moment of silence invite the group to slowly open their fingers, symbolically handing their wealth and possessions over to God.
- Again leave a moment of silence and then invite the group to slowly close their fingers over the pebble again, this time symbolising receiving their material things back from God as *an entrusted gift not a possession*.
- Finally, after a moment of silent reflection in which group members give thanks for what they have ask people to put it back in the bowl as a symbolic act of giving.
- Close with the Lord's Prayer and/or the grace.

reading and reflection

Invite the group to continue to use the worksheets at home for their own personal reflection.

Remind the group about the optional easy reading for this session on pages 40 to 41.



session 3: a spring in your step

These notes refer to session 3 of the Member's booklet on pages 16 to 21.

why Spring?

In the giant's garden he notices that spring has unexpectedly arrived – accompanying the children who have found a way into his garden through a hole in the wall. Their laughter and play thaws the winter snow but not yet the giant's heart. Then he sees a small child unable to get into the tree and his heart is changed. He does not know that this is the Christ child but remember Jesus' words: 'what you do for others you do for me'.

What moves us to give, to share generously? What is the need that moves our hearts to generosity? That is what the springtime of giving is all about.

We have chosen the well-known story of Zacchaeus the tax collector for the spring because meeting Jesus is for him the moment winter turned to spring, the moment that generosity and financial integrity were born in his life. Spring came to the giant's garden when children came to play. For Zacchaeus generosity was born in him when Jesus came to tea.

your starter for ten (5-10 minutes)

If you have the DVD of the 2006 film *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*, show the scene where Father Christmas meets the children (the middle of Scene 12). Simply make the point that the giving of gifts is linked to the thawing of winter in Narnia.

Alternatively, you could show and briefly discuss the *Vicar of Dibley* clip detailed in the worship section at the end of this study.

Bible study notes: Luke 19:1-10

Zacchaeus has heard a rumour that forgiveness goes wherever Jesus goes. We don't know what his need is but we do know that he climbs a tree just to see Jesus. The wonderful thing is that Jesus is already looking for him! It's always like that.

As a tax collector, Zacchaeus is on the margins of society. He works for the hated Romans, and corruption is rife in his trade (Luke 3:11-14). So when Jesus invites himself to Zacchaeus' home no wonder the crowd grumble! In going to Zacchaeus' home and eating with Zacchaeus, Jesus makes a public demonstration that he is extending grace, forgiveness and love – and the opportunity to belong to society.

As a sign of the birth of this new life, Zacchaeus promises to straighten out his financial dealings and give generously. Repaying those he has defrauded four times over and giving away half his possessions far exceeds the requirements of the law. An extravagant invitation from Jesus has changed his life; an extravagant response is the hallmark of his discipleship.

Our giving must go beyond calculation, beyond balancing the books, beyond meeting our local church's financial needs, or the amount a charity asks for. Zacchaeus received Jesus' love with joy; his giving was characterised by that same joy.

Unlike the rich fool (Luke 12), Zacchaeus is open to his community as he responds in generosity.



part one: bible study (30-40 minutes)

As before, the flexible timing depends on whether the opening activity has been used.

There are straightforward questions about the Bible passage, question 2 inviting a more personal sharing of meeting Jesus personally.

If the group likes to delve into other passages then ensure that you leave enough time for question 5. In addition to the passages there you might also like to consider: Exodus 35:20-29; Nehemiah 10:32-39; Luke 6:30-36.

part two: in the giant's garden (15 minutes)

Invite group members to turn to the image of the giant's garden in springtime. It may be helpful to briefly remind people of the story at this point. There is a brief summary in the group member's booklet to refer to.

Use the worksheet to ask some discussion questions. The first two questions are the key ones.

- The first question draws out hesitations around giving – things such as 'you don't know where the money is really going'. This is a different angle to the first question on the winter worksheet in session 2 which asks about day-to-day pressures. If you feel you have already covered this issue however, skip the question.
- The second question is about the 'boy in the tree'. Encourage people to share a personal story of how something has happened which prompted them to generosity.

Come prepared with a personal story to share to kick off the discussion at this point.

part three: in the spotlight (20) minutes

Remember Lincoln Cathedral illuminated by floodlights?

This week's spotlight is that giving is the sign, the hallmark, the barometer, the litmus test (call it what you will!) of the reality of God in our lives, as it was for Zacchaeus. It is said that Martin Luther commented that we need three conversions, not one! A conversion of the heart, of the head and of the wallet. The last is the test of the authenticity of the others.

There are two questions in this section but you probably won't have time for both.

- Question 1 is more general but people may enjoy the story and chewing over the bible passage.
- Question 2 is more direct in reflecting on the way the group members' church approaches the challenge of generosity.

If you have time or if you think the group will enjoy the provocative nature of the quote you could discuss the contribution from Father John Dresko which can be found on page 43 of the easy reading for this session. It is a wild card discussion. Use wisely!

prayer and worship (15 minutes)

Worship songs:

I will offer up my life (Jesus what can I bring)
by Matt Redman

Thank you for saving me by Martin Smith

This is the day that the Lord has made
(*This is the day*) anon

You did not wait for me (I'm forever grateful)
by Mark Altrogge.

Prayer for the poor

Try to obtain the Make Poverty History episode of the Vicar of Dibley, screened 1 January 2005. There is a powerful section at the end which persuades the church council to put on their Make Poverty History armbands.

- Show the video clip and leave a moment of silence.
- Read slowly and thoughtfully Micah 6:6-8.
- Invite extempore prayer focusing on needs in the world and in the local community or alternatively ask a group member to lead some intercessions prepared beforehand.

Biblical meditation

- Ask someone to read 2 Corinthians 8:1-15. Read the text slowly and invite group members to meditate on a particular phrase or thought from the reading.
- After a couple of minutes' silence, it may be appropriate to invite people to feedback on the Bible verse that stood out for them. Or it may be appropriate to invite open prayer.
- Read or sing together, the Matt Redman song *I will offer up my life*. The lyrics are printed in the group member's booklet.

You could then follow this by reading together the words of the theme prayer printed in the group member's booklet.

If appropriate, close with the Lord's prayer and the grace.



session 4: summer lovin'

These notes refer to session 4 of the Member's booklet on pages 22 to 27.

why summer?

Springtime is all about roots and shoots as new life begins to emerge from the winter cold. But, as the parable of the sower reminds us, roots and shoots are only the beginning. As the nursery rhyme asks, 'how well does your garden grow?'

In Oscar Wilde's story the people going to market see the children playing in a most beautiful garden and the giant watching them contentedly.

On the surface the outlook is anything but sunny for the steward in Luke 16 who is facing redundancy for dishonest practice! But this steward is commended by Jesus, not for dishonesty but for the wise and creative use of his earthly finances in the hope of a place to live. Jesus instructs his followers to do the same but in the hope of eternity.

A summer garden needs work to contain the weeds, to water and prune the shrubs. Good money management and good giving does not just happen. Generosity is beautiful when it flourishes. It changes lives, it releases joy, contentment and gratitude and it honours God with the first fruits of all he has given to us. But generosity does not just happen without wise planning and the prioritising our giving.

Summer is a time for working as well as enjoying the garden. What work does 'summer' giving, ie good giving, need in order to flourish?

starter for ten (5-10 minutes)

This is a full session. An activity is not recommended and time is not allocated. However:

- for something short and light-hearted use this Vicar of Dibley YouTube clip (3mins, 37 seconds) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SCWHFDgYQ9A>. Stop the episode immediately after Owen comments that "you can't beat God's own creation can you?"

- Alternatively read, or hand out, and briefly discuss Steve Turner's poem £500 Million found on page 19.

Bible study notes: Luke 16:1-15

This is Jesus' most difficult parable to understand, but fortunately we don't have to grapple with it like preachers do! A manager is dismissed for financial irregularities and fearing for his future he seems to 'cook the books'. Except that might not be true! He may be stripping out interest or securing at least something from bad debts. In any event he hopes that his master's debtors will be grateful to him and take him into their homes when he is dismissed.

It's all a bit seedy at least on the surface and yet in verse 8 we are told the Lord commended the dishonest (or unrighteous) steward. It seems as though Jesus is condoning dishonesty (or is the Lord of verse 8 not Jesus but the Lord in the parable? We cannot be certain).

In verse 8 the manager is called 'unrighteous', and the same Greek word is used in verse 9 in the phrase 'unrighteous mammon' and again in verses 10 and 11. The idea is probably not that the steward is morally corrupt or dishonest (although he may well have done dishonest things to get fired). More likely the thought is that he is 'worldly', and his actions are those of this world.

Jesus is not approving immoral behaviour but observing that a worldly man can act shrewdly with money to secure a home in this world. The disciples are to learn from this and use their wealth in this world to gain an eternal home.

The parable does not teach that we can buy a place in heaven! But it does teach that we have to live with, and manage, 'unrighteous mammon' in the light of eternity. Instead of focusing on what money means in this world we need to treat it with kingdom values.

part one: bible study (40 minutes)

This is a lengthy bible study section for two reasons. Firstly because the story is so complex and secondly because the money teaching is so direct and challenging.

You may want to allow additional time but don't lose the balance with the other sections of the study. Part 3 includes a discussion of tithing and if that will hold the interest of the group you may want to leave time for that by skipping one or two questions here.

There are seven bible study questions. You may want to omit question 1 if time is pressing although it is designed to get people talking from their experiences.

part two: in the giant's garden (15 minutes)

Use the summer garden worksheet to raise one or two questions about the work needed for good giving to flourish. As always, an enlarged image in the centre of the room might help.

Time is tight here. You can only discuss one question and you may not even have time for that. Concentrate on question 1 which takes Paul's five 'Ps' of giving and asks group members to think about how healthy their giving is measured against Paul's teaching.

Definitely start with a personal example to illustrate the task. For example, *'for me it is giving proportionately that is being choked! I want to start giving a percentage but every month there seems to be something else to worry about, a bill to pay and I never make it'.*

Or. *'it is making giving a priority which I struggle with. It's like that flower which is failing hopelessly! I always forget to fill the church envelope at the start of the week and by Sunday morning there is little left to give!'*

In any discussion on planned giving try to draw out a brief discussion about the different ways in which people can plan their giving as opposed to 'cash on the plate': weekly envelopes, standing orders and charitable bank accounts, such as those available from Stewardship (www.stewardship.org.uk).

Some people don't like standing orders because there is nothing to put on the plate in church. One option is simple: credit-card-sized cards at the back of church which state that giving is done by standing order to be placed in the offering.

part three: in the spotlight (20 minutes)

The floodlight or spotlight on giving for this session is that giving is a key part of managing our money well before God and an act of responsible stewardship for which we are accountable and which must be done well.

There are three questions in this section. Each of them is substantial and you will probably have to choose which to tackle based on your experience of leading the group.



If you tackle question 1 then, as the notes say, don't get bogged down by Malachi 3. The context is important. Malachi is not just making a statement about tithing. He is criticising the priests for all kinds of failings. It is obedience to God's law that allows the natural fruitfulness of the promised land to flourish – not a specific law about a specific amount.

Question 2 should be avoided if you discussed the last question on the worksheet in part 2 (about the three shrubs and giving to church, UK and overseas) as they cover similar ground. The question here is intended for general discussion and less for personal reflection.

Be careful to monitor any discussion on tithing in question 3 as it often generates as much heat as light! Opinions can be strongly held on both sides and some who struggle to give can be hurt by a challenge that seems impossible. If discussion is going well you may want to ask the three questions at the end of the easy reading for this session which are reprinted here:

- If my giving was returned cash in hand would it make a real difference to me? If not, then arguably my giving is neither proportionate nor meaningful in terms of income.
- Does my attitude to giving and the way I give remind me that God is the owner of all I have?
- Can I learn to trust the promise that no-one who gives generously will be made poor by their giving (2 Corinthians 9:7-8; Proverbs 11:24-25)?

As an alternative to these questions, in addition to them or as a handout to take away you may want to make use of the **Frequently Asked Questions** sheet in these notes on page 18. They are not printed in the group member's booklet so will need a brief introduction.



prayer and worship (15 mins)

This optional silent reflection should not be rushed and can be extended if you are comfortable with leading this, and if time permits.

Print off a copy of the autumn picture of the giant's garden from the group member's booklet. An A3 copy of the image is probably unsuitable here; A4 is fine.

Explain that, as the course has come to an end, we need to listen to God for how he wants us to take action (individually and as part of the local church).

- Place the image on a table in the middle of the group. You may also want to put a candle, a Bible, a cross or other helpful objects – even some money – on the table as a focus for worship.
- Ask the group to reflect quietly on the four studies they have shared together. Encourage them to prayerfully think about:
 - one thing they have learned from, or valued sharing with, the group
 - one Bible passage or insight that stood out for them in the group
 - one thing that they specifically intend to do or change now
- Now ask the group to think about the picture of the giant kneeling before Jesus.
 - What do we want to say to Jesus about our relationship with money?
 - What is Jesus challenging us to address?
 - What words of encouragement does he have for the future or how is he commending us for our faithfulness to date?

Close by singing, or listening to *The Potter's Hand* by Darlene Zschech, or say the words out loud together as a group. The words can be found in the group member's booklet. If appropriate, end by saying the Lord's Prayer and the grace.

autumn personal reflection

These notes refer to closing reflection of the Member's booklet on pages 28 to 32.

As the group ends draw attention to the final part of the course, the closing personal reflection on the theme of autumn in the group member's booklet. Encourage group members to give this some time in the coming week.

If as group leader you have pastoral responsibilities for your group or you feel it would be helpful you may also want to plan to visit your group members.

evaluation

Finally, please also draw attention to the request for an evaluation of the course from group members. In the group member's booklet there is link to an online survey which will help Stewardship improve *Seasons of Giving*.

Thank you once again for leading this course. We trust that you found it helpful and stimulating for you as a leader and for your group.

Frequently Asked Questions

Here are some FAQs. The answers are deliberately provocative. What do you think?

Should all my giving go only to my local church?

The local church is the first priority. It's where we are nurtured and where God has placed us for mission and ministry. People sometimes say that giving to the church is limited because they support other charities. Why is the church so far down the league table of charities they support?

What about other Christian agencies such as Tearfund?

We have a wider responsibility to support mission in this country and overseas and Scripture tells us especially to give to the poor. The House of Bishops commends tithing 5% to church and 5% to Christian agencies. Is this a cop out or a great way of practising responsible stewardship?

What about secular charities?

Support them: they do amazing things. Giving to secular charities should be above and beyond what we decide, before God, to give to church and Christian ministries.

Should I give if I am repaying debts?

This is a very hard question. Some argue for tithing even in debt as the path to God's blessing. Giving acknowledges God's hold on your finances, even when you're in the grip of debt. Always give something so you don't lose the habit. Decide in advance what you will give when you are debt free.

Do I have to tithe?

All of us should give a percentage of income, not a fixed amount. Tithing is neither legalistic nor a compulsion otherwise it could not be joyful. It should be normal practice for most working people. Those on benefits or a minimum wage may never get there; many on above-average wages should see tithing as a starting point rather than a ceiling. Tithing on a minimum wage impacts lifestyle in a much greater way than tithing an annual earning of £75,000. The biblical standard of giving cannot ask more of the poor than the rich.

What if my partner won't let me give?

This is also tough. It may be due to hostility to faith, concern about finances, mistrust of charity or a desire to control. Talk it through gently. You might want to compromise on supporting a Christian ministry but push hard for giving to the local church. Give only from what you earn or, if not, from what is yours to spend on yourself. God knows your heart. Giving should not cause trouble in your relationship.

I don't tithe but would like to – how do I get there?

Decide on a percentage figure that you can give joyfully and freely. Then, firstly increase that giving as your income increases. Secondly, periodically, maybe each year, increase by a percentage. At each stage give thanks for what you have and trust God. He will prove faithful.

Five Hundred Million Pounds

The Earl of Grosvenor
has five hundred million pounds.
He is honeymooning in Hawaii.
He has five hundred million pounds
and he still has to honeymoon
in the world.
He has married Natalia.
She is not my sort of girl.
Five hundred million pounds
and he has to marry someone
who is not my sort of girl.
The Earl of Grosvenor
carries a black case
in his right hand.
Five hundred million pounds
and he still has to carry
a black case in his right hand.
It is probably heavy.

He will probably sweat.
Damp patches will form
beneath his arms
as if he were a construction worker
or an unemployed gentleman
carrying a black case.
I expect his shoes hurt sometimes.
I expect he forgets his handkerchief.
I expect he wonders whether Natalia
really loves him.
I expect he wonders what it would be like
to only have four hundred and fifty million pounds.
The Earl of Grosvenor takes off.
He wonders whether the engines will catch fire.
He knows you can't pay engines off.
He knows that the ocean is indifferent to
millionaires.
Five hours in the air and he is restless.
Five hundred million pounds and he is restless.



*Poem by Steve Turner
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Stewardship provides charitable giving accounts,
resources for the biblical handling of money and
professional expertise to encourage generous
discipleship and excellent governance in churches
and Christian charities

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