



grow. pray. study.

November 3, 2019 Contentment: Gratitude, Generosity and Joy

“More Blessed to Give than to Receive”

Scripture:

[Then Paul said to them,] “In everything I have shown you that, by working hard, we must help the weak. In this way we remember the Lord Jesus’ words: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” *Acts 20:35*

Generous persons will prosper; those who refresh others will themselves be refreshed.

Happy are generous people, because they give some of their food to the poor. *Proverbs 11:25, 22:9*

[Jesus said to them,] “Give, and it will be given to you. A good portion—packed down, firmly shaken, and overflowing—will fall into your lap. The portion you give will determine the portion you receive in return.”

Luke 6:38

Questions in this GPS marked with an arrow bullet point are particularly recommended for group discussion. Group leaders may add other discussion questions, or substitute other questions for the marked ones, at their discretion.

Everything ultimately belongs to God

MONDAY 11.4.19 Leviticus 25:23, Psalm 50:9-12

Israel in Jesus’ day (like most countries in the world today) had a few very rich people, and many who were very poor. Jesus was not against wealth, but he was against giving wealth a higher priority than God. He challenged many of the rich, notably those who were religious leaders, telling them it is impossible to serve God and wealth. Those who usually saw all their wealth as a sign of God’s favor sneered. Jesus wouldn’t back down, saying the things that impress human beings often offend God.

- Leviticus 25 underscored one of Israel’s basic beliefs: God was the true owner of all of the land, of all the earth (cf. [Psalm 24:1](#)). So the law strikingly told all Israelites that they were “immigrants and foreign guests” on God’s land. In what ways can seeing yourself as an immigrant on God’s land, a steward using someone else’s property, shape your inward and outward responses to all your fellow “immigrants”?
- Based on passages like today’s in Psalm 50, preachers or writers may say, “God owns everything. None of it is truly ours.” In the same vein, Jesus described what he called “worldly wealth” in [Luke 16:11](#) as “someone else’s property” in verse 12. How might it alter your life to take that seriously? Would you drive God’s car the same way you do “yours”? Would you watch different things on God’s TV or computer? Would you spend God’s money any differently than you do “yours”?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me keep growing in the sense of responsibility I bring to stewarding the portions of your world that you entrust to my care. Amen.

God’s vast generosity

TUESDAY 11.5.19 Matthew 20:1-16, Luke 12:32

Jesus showed that God’s generosity goes way beyond “fairness.” People who worked all day watched the landowner pay people who’d only worked one hour the same amount that they had agreed to work for—

and they got angry. (We can almost imagine their pro-rated mental calculations.) But the vineyard owner didn't cheat them. Sadly, he asked the upset workers "Are you resentful because I'm generous?"

- Does the master's way of paying the workers in this story feel unfair to you? "It was not unfair, of course. No one was underpaid; it was just that some received 'unreasonable' generosity. That is what the kingdom of heaven is like." * In [2 Corinthians 5:21](#), Paul said Christ was treated as we deserved, and we are treated as he deserved. In what ways does that "unfair" exchange deepen your gratitude for Christ's generosity?
- Jesus said that there is no need for his "little flock" to fear. God generously delights in giving us the kingdom. In [Matthew 6:27](#), he added the practical observation that worry does little good. Can you recall spending a lot of time and energy worrying about things that then never happened? How does worry differ from wise foresight or precautions? What are some more sustainable, useful ways of facing life's challenges than worry?

Prayer: Loving God, in fall foliage and spring flowers, every morning and every evening, you delight in giving to me. Keep my generosity growing, even though it will never match the magnitude of yours. Amen.

* R. T. France, article "Matthew" in *New Bible Commentary, 21st Century Edition*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994, p. 930.

Jesus called us to live generously

WEDNESDAY 11.6.19 Luke 12:33-34, 48; Acts 20:35

Our culture often acts as though "mine" is one of the most priceless English words. Jesus always challenged that all-too-human possessiveness. When we loosen our grasp, he said, we can live lighter lives free of worry and stress. Investing our treasure, time and talent in God's mission to uplift and redeem the whole world is, according to Jesus, the one truly safe investment we can make.

- In verse 34, Jesus said, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." True security and satisfaction, he taught, came from seeking God first, not from externals like food, clothing, or material possessions. How does Jesus' teaching challenge the ways you've learned to think and act about the level of security and satisfaction "stuff" can bring you?
- The principle in Acts 20:35, the only direct quote from Jesus not in any of the four gospels, is more often honored in words than in actions. We usually hear messages more like, "When I have received enough, then maybe I can start to [cautiously] give." How easy or hard is it for you to be generous with the money, time or possessions you have? What wishes or fears get in the way of generosity?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, when I stop to realize who you are, I realize that your whole earthly life was an act of massive generosity. Let that awareness inspire me to greater generosity in my life. Amen.

Generous to Jesus through "the least of these"

THURSDAY 11.7.19 Matthew 25:34-40

Jesus gave a word picture of the final judgment, using his familiar method of telling a short "parable" story. His judgment story highlighted his Kingdom's priorities. Kingdom citizens, he said, care for the hungry and thirsty, the poorly-clothed and strangers, the prisoners and the sick—the people Jesus called "the least of these brothers and sisters of mine." Jesus knew that it's often relatively easy to serve people doing well. He said we meet him particularly in those who are poor, sick, hungry—even in prison.

- We sometimes say we should "see the face of Jesus" in people in need and help them. In Jesus' story, both those welcomed and the ones turned away were surprised. We're one human family—and people treated unjustly, or facing poverty and illness, are "us," not "them." Jesus said in the end we are all his brothers and sisters, and we are all in some type of need. In what ways can you sense God reshaping your attitudes toward "the least of these" in your community and world?

- Some think following Jesus only means giving up bad habits, learning large amounts of Scripture, or other “religious” acts. Jesus said those who inherit his kingdom live as his physical presence to meet the needs of the human family he loves. How can you bless Jesus, day to day, by actively working to help meet some of the needs in your family, neighborhood, at work, or in the world at large?

Prayer: Loving Lord Jesus, I get so excited and joyful when I’m able to “give myself a gift.” Help me expand my heart to be more excited and joyful when I can direct that gift (of whatever kind) to other members of your human family. Amen.

Cheerful generosity, like God’s

FRIDAY 11.8.19 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

“God has the power to provide you with more than enough of every kind of grace” (verse 8). “You will be made rich in every way” (verse 11). The apostle Paul, certainly not a rich man by any human standard, wrote that! Even to people who lived in the large city of Corinth, he used the language of harvest, of God increasing their crop. He challenged them (and us) to rethink what “rich” and “more than enough” really mean. God sows generously. He asks us to produce a generous harvest.

- Paul’s specific focus was an offering from Gentile Christians to support suffering Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. Yet he kept talking about what God gives us: “everything you need always,” “every kind of grace” and “You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous in every way.” When (if ever) has a gift “left you speechless,” with no words to fully describe it? How would you compare that feeling your response to God’s gift(s) of which Paul spoke?
- Paul did not invent the idea that “God loves a cheerful giver.” [2 Chronicles 31:4-10](#) said that after King Hezekiah’s call to supply the Temple, “the Israelites generously gave the best of their grain, new wine, oil, honey, and all their crops—a tenth of everything, a huge amount.” Why would God want us to give from free, grateful hearts without coercion or pressure? When have you felt the joy of giving freely from a grateful heart of love?

Prayer: God of abundant life, teach me how to better calibrate my standard of “enough.” And grow in me a heart that cheerfully welcomes invitations to give to bless others. Amen.

Generosity: the best way to save for the future

SATURDAY 11.9.19 1 Timothy 6:17-19

The apostle Paul saw people lose their ways from the faith when money was their life’s highest goal (cf. [1 Timothy 6:9-10](#)). He urged Timothy to “run away” from a life that based its primary hope on finances. Instead, he called Timothy and the members of his congregation to a different view of what we today call “retirement planning.” He said to actively “do good, to be rich in the good things they do, to be generous, and to share with others” was the best way to lay a good foundation for the future. Those choices would enable them to take hold of “what is truly life.”

- So much around us, including some approaches to retirement, tries to convince us that money is the most important part of a satisfying life. As scholar N. T. Wright said, “Every advertisement, every other television program, many movies and most political manifestos are designed, by subtle and not-so-subtle ways, to make us say, ‘If only I had just a bit more money, then I would be content.’” * What are the main drivers of the way you live your life? What kind of outcome to your life do you most wish to avoid? What life goal(s) are you pursuing with all your might? What steps can you take today to resist the temptation to look to mainly to money for happiness, fulfillment, and ultimate security?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for being my ultimate mentor, guide, and accountability partner. Teach me to value what you value, to take hold of what is truly life. Amen.

Family Activity: Create a family generosity chain. Cut several sheets of colored construction paper into strips. Every week give each family member one strip of paper. Have each person write his or her name on the paper strip and one way he or she served or gave to others that week. In addition to giving of time and energy, also include ways your family is giving money to church and others. Form the first slip into a circle and staple or tape the ends together, then add to that circle by connecting the strips together to create a chain. At the end of each month, review the acts of giving your family has shared in. Thank God for the privilege of being generous with God and others.

* N. T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: The Pastoral Letters*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004, p. 71.

Prayer Requests – cor.org/prayer *Prayers of peace and comfort for:*

- Doug Talley and family following the death of Norine Talley (mother), 10/18/2019
- Gail Stout and family following the death of Darlyne Kurtz (mother), 10/21/2019
- Tracy Weaver and family following the death of Mary Knowles (mother-in-Law), 10/26/2019
- Kelly Krueger-Seaman and family following the death of Lawrence Seaman (father), 10/25/2019
- To friends and family following the death of Barbara Shafer, 10/20/2019