

Session 5

Exploring a Life of Discipleship - Generous Sharing

INVESTING IN HEAVENLY TREASURES

“How we earn and spend our money is both a highly personal issue as well as a social concern. Having access to someone’s checkbook is also having access to that person’s value system. ‘For where your treasure is, there also will be your heart.’” (Mt 6:21)

Bishop Robert F. Morneau,
(Auxiliary Bishop Emeritus, Diocese of Green Bay)

GATHERING: (15 minutes)

Welcome and Greeting

Group Members Share:

- One word that describes me today is...
- What did I commit to in Session 4?
- How did I follow through on my commitment?

PRAYING: (15 minutes)

Songs

Traditional songs to sing/play or select a contemporary personal favorite.

- Only a Shadow - Carey Landry
- Seek Ye First - Karen Lafferty

YouTube selections:

- I Offer you My Life—Don Moen
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FTLGBfv4xaM>
- The Gift of Generosity - Ministry Spotlight
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yhmmeFuzGRk>

Scripture for Inspiration

Matthew 19:16-22

Question for Group Reflection

- Words or verses that spoke to me are?



Quotation for Silent Reflection

Consider a word or phrase for possible sharing

Desire for true happiness frees man from his immoderate attachment to the goods of this world so that he can find his fulfillment in the vision and beatitude (happiness) of God. “The promise of seeing God surpasses all beatitude . . . In Scripture to see is to possess . . . Whoever sees God has obtained all the goods of which he can conceive.”

(CCC, no.2548 citing St. Gregory of Nyssa)

Prayer Conclusion (Together)

God of life, we praise you and thank you for the ongoing inspiration found in your Holy Word. Jesus, help us to hear and be transformed by the message in the Parable of the Rich Young Man as if we were present in your first telling. Spirit, infuse us with the truth that we should not look for security and happiness in our money and possessions but first and foremost in our relationship with you and others. We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Let us master this great and simple truth”, Cardinal Newman once said, “that all rich materials and productions of this world, being God’s property, are intended for God’s service; . . .

(Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response, United States Catholic Conference of Bishops)

CONSIDER THIS: (38 minutes - If participants have not read content prior to gathering, please take a moment to read aloud, rotating willing members.)

Jesus on Money and Possessions: Direct & to the Point

Jesus' very life speaks volumes to the value of wealth and prestige in relationship to the kingdom and salvation. The King of Kings was born into a family of meager means and throughout his short life, acquired no known possessions except the very garments which were divided at his crucifixion (*Mt. 27:35*). Needless to say, it was an unexpected setting and lifestyle for the anticipated Messiah.

Jesus is the perfect model of stewardship. His mission was to restore the broken relationship between his Father and humankind. He gave his life to accomplish it. During his three year ministry, his teachings on money were very direct and to the point. Jesus' concern for peoples' attachment to wealth and his responses are some of our most quotable and challenging scripture passages. Consider the following: "No one can serve two masters...You cannot serve God and mammon" (*Mt 6:24*). "Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give" (*Mt 10:8*). "It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of God" (*Mk 10:25*). "Much will be required of the person entrusted with much, and still more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more" (*Lk12:48*). "There is still one thing left for you: sell all you have and distribute it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven" (*Lk18:22*). Though Jesus stressed his Father's promise of love and care for them (*Mt 6:25-34*), the previous words, no doubt were difficult to hear. Many people of Jesus' day, especially those of financial means, were saddened and confused by his instructions because they understood wealth as a sign of God's favor.

Jesus approached the issue of money from a variety of perspectives and in many instances pointed to the joy of "heavenly treasures." The Parable of the Rich Fool (*Lk 12:16-21*), challenged their need to *hoard wealth* and put their *primary trust* in earthly things. The story of the Poor Woman's Contribution (*Mk 12: 41-44*), in the temple shook their conscience on the very *motivation* for and *level of their generosity*. Jesus' parables on the "treasure buried in the field" or the "pearl of great price" (*Mt 13:44-49*), reinforced his teachings that the kingdom is the *most important investment* for humankind. Jesus' wisdom on *generosity and accountability* for the poor is reflected in the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (*Lk 16:19-31*), and his warning against *greed* in the story of a brother *sharing* his inheritance (*Lk 12:13-15*). Wrapped around all these important statements is Jesus' stewardship message in The Parable of the Ten Gold Coins (*Lk19:11-26*), and The Parable of the Talents (*Mt 25:45-51*). Everything they have belongs to God. One day the Master will return and ask each individual for an accounting of the use of what has been on loan to them. What will they have done with the treasure in their care?

Quotation for Reflection

"Stewards are generous people. They feel an obligation to return a portion to the Church and other charities. They refuse to be co-opted by a culture of greed and live a life of hoarding. A tough question has to be asked: Can a person claim to be a disciple of the Lord if they are not sharing generously of their financial resources?"

*Bishop Robert F. Morneau,
(Auxiliary Bishop Emeritus, Diocese of Green Bay)*



Stewardship of Sharing in a Culture of Consumerism

Jesus' hope and direction for his followers became a reality following the Pentecost event. With the help of the Holy Spirit, the early disciples were identified by their commitment to and trust in Jesus and each other. They placed a priority on the breaking of bread, prayers, teachings of the apostles and sharing of material wealth. Out of their joy and generosity came an increase in membership (*Acts 2:44-47*). As the Church grew, the early disciples continually warned of an extraordinary attachment to money and the effect it had on discipleship. We remember Paul's famous words to Timothy: "For we brought nothing into the world, just as we will not be able to take anything out of it. For the love of money is the root of all evils, and some people in desire of it have strayed from the faith . . ." (*1Tim 6:7-10*).

Our world certainly has changed over the past 2000 years. We are bombarded with messages of materialism and consumerism that point to "things" being the source of our joy. Yet, the voice of Jesus continues to be heard through scripture and our Church Teachings. In our generation, we hear from the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops: "The life of a Christian steward, lived in imitation of the life of Christ, is challenging, even difficult in many ways; but both here and hereafter it is charged with intense joy." Our Bishops challenge and encourage sharing with needy individuals, families, the Church and charitable organizations as a way of expressing our joyful gratitude to God and tending to our souls. (*Stewardship: A Disciple's Response*)

In a time and culture where we are often defined by our possessions and overall net worth, it is especially challenging to place our full trust in God when considering generous sharing. Pope Francis states: *May the Lord help us overcome the temptations of wealth, vanity and pride which seek to destroy the truth of the Gospel*, (tweeted Feb. 14, 2016). How is it possible for disciples of Jesus not to be swept away in this current climate of consumerism? How can we dare to give the first 3%, 5%, 10% or even more of our income back to God?

Not unlike the early followers, the answer is an intentional decision that chooses Christ as the source of our contentment and happiness. It is joyful generosity that reflects an understanding that our material wealth is temporarily on loan to us and is to be used in service to God. The answer is bountiful sharing calculated by understanding our blessings not in comparison with others, but by overwhelming humility and appreciation. We are indebted and grateful for life, for salvation through Jesus, and for others. Working to integrate the answers into our lives is important. For in the end, the question will be the same for us. What will we have done with the treasures placed in our care?

Questions for Reflection:

What was a key ingredient leading to the generosity of the early disciples? * How might our stewardship of sharing reflect our relationship with God? * What are some human traits that hinder us from being generous stewards. . . offering first fruits back to God? * What is the joy that could come from being financially generous? * What would be one thing you would be willing to do to become a better steward of your material wealth?

Notes:

I would never have been able to tithe the first million dollars I ever made if I had not tithed my first salary which was \$1.50 per week.

*John D. Rockefeller, Sr. (1839-1937)
(American Industrialist and Philanthropist)*

FROM THE HEART OF POPE FRANCIS (Optional)

- Lord Help us to live the virtue of generosity, to love without limits. *(tweeted April 6, 2015)*
- The Lord put it clearly; you cannot serve to masters. You have to choose between God and money. *(tweeted Dec. 18, 2014)*
- The martyrs teach us that wealth, prestige and honor have little importance: Christ is the only true treasure, *(tweeted Aug. 15, 2014)*
- The Lord loves a cheerful giver. May we learn to be generous in giving, free from the love of material possessions. *(tweeted July 19, 2014)*
- Christian love is loving without counting the cost. This is the lesson of the Good Samaritan, this is the lesson of Jesus. *(tweeted March 18, 2014)*
- The time has come for new messengers of Christ to be even more generous, more joyful, more holy. *(tweeted Nov. 30, 2015)*
- A Christian who is too attached to riches has lost his way. *(tweeted Aug. 25, 2015)*



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LIVING LIKE JESUS: (21 minutes)

Take Action

Consider how your prayer, reflection and sharing in Session 5 might have inspired you to step out in faith this week. Share ideas that reflect your personal situation or consider one of the simple ideas below.

- Be aware of your finances by prayerfully reflecting where your treasure is being spent each month.
- Calculate what your charitable giving actually is. Contemplate increasing your charitable giving.
- Reflect upon those things that you keep in storage. Could someone else benefit from them?
- Make a list of what you think might keep you from being more generous.
- If you need help in becoming a better steward of your finances, seek help with a local agency.
- Go on line and view *The Story of Stuff* (www.thestoryofstuff.com) Discuss with family/friends.

Commitment:

- In light of this, what commitment will I make for the week(s) ahead?

Additional Scripture Passages:

Leviticus 27:30-32

Mark 12:41-44

Deuteronomy 14:22,29

Acts 20:35

Deuteronomy 16:16-17

1 Timothy 6:7-10

Malachi 3:8-10

1 John 3:17-18

Wrap Up: (1 minute)

Date for Session 6 _____

Closing Prayer (Together)

Creator God and Generous Master, you have blessed your people with resources needed for our survival and happiness. Your generosity is beyond our imagination and we are grateful. Creator God, you sent your Son to model stewardship and to guide us in sharing the many material gifts placed in our care. Help us to stay close to Him and his message of generous sharing as we strive to reject a culture of consumerism and abundantly return what you have given us. Lord, we want to be your disciples. We ask this not only this day, but each day of our lives. Amen.

The tenth commandment forbids greed...it requires that envy be banished from the human heart.

(Catechism of the Catholic Church, nos. 2536 and 2538)

