

CHAPTER 1: WHY IT'S GENIUS TO BE GENEROUS

Participant's Guide

Introduction

- Generosity is not something that comes very naturally to most of us. In fact, the opposite is generally true - we would usually rather accumulate than give.
- If we are really honest, there is a certain amount of fear that is associated with giving. Once we give away money, we cannot get it back. And we may need it down the road.

Question 1: When you were growing up, how would you describe your family's view of money and generosity?

Question 2: How would you say your upbringing has influenced your current views of money?

Lesson Passage

Luke 12:13-21

Big Idea

Imitating God and living generously provide far more security than material possessions.



HOW DOES GOD FEEL ABOUT MONEY AND POSSESSIONS?

Read Luke 12:13-21

- 1 Timothy 6:10 says, “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.”
- Jesus had a lot to say about money.

Question 1: This farmer’s first reaction to his financial gain was to build a bigger barn. Why do you think Jesus said this was a bad idea?

Question 2: What would have been a “wise” thing for this farmer to do with his abundance?

WHY TRUSTING IN MONEY IS UNWISE

- Earthly treasures disappear very easily: The stock market can crash, the house can flood, a job can be cut and our possessions can be stolen. Nothing is perfectly secure; it's all vulnerable.

Question 1: How do you think the American view of money and possessions compares to God's view of money and possessions?

Questions 2: If you really decided to trust your future to God over your money, what changes would you make in life?

Question 3: What are some practical ways that we can start storing up treasure in heaven instead of accumulating possessions here on earth?

WHY GENEROSITY IS GENIUS

- 1) Generosity is genius because it changes our lives.
- 2) Generosity is genius because it connects us with others.
- 3) Generosity is genius because it helps us invest in what matters.
- 4) Generosity is genius because it frees our hearts.

Final Thought

Generosity is a gateway to intimacy with God. If we really want to know God more and if we really want to become more like Him, we will start thinking more generously and less selfishly.

Additional Bible references for consideration:

Deuteronomy 8:18; Proverbs 23:4-5;
Proverbs 30:8-9;
Ecclesiastes 5:10-15; Matthew 19:27-29;
Mark 10:17-31;

CHAPTER 2: THE PRINCIPLE WITH SECRET POWER

Participant's Guide

Introduction

- We are not the owners of our possessions.
- God has given us all we need to meet our needs and for most of us (maybe all of us), He has given us even more than we need. He has allowed us to be stewards – or managers – of His resources.

Question 1: How does it feel to say that God owns everything... even the money in my bank account?

Question 2: Can you think of any Scripture that indicates God is the owner of all things?

Lesson Passage

Luke 12:13-21

Big Idea

Imitating God and living generously provide far more security than material possessions.



THE OWNERSHIP OF GOD

- In Luke 15, Jesus tells a series of stories that portray God as the owner of all things: The Lost Sheep, The Lost Coin, The Lost Son.

- In Luke 16, Jesus tells another story to illustrate how we should think of ourselves as the managers of God's property.

Read Luke 16:1-13

Question 1: In spite of the previous financial decisions you have made, how can you start planning for the future with God today?

Question 2: What are some examples that you can think of where people served Money over God? And what are some examples of people serving God over Money?

Additional Bible references for consideration:

Genesis 2:15-20; Genesis 39:1-6; Psalm
24:1; Haggai 2:8;
Daniel 1:8-21; Romans 11:36;

CAN GOD TRUST YOU?

- God is the owner of all things and we are trusted by God to take care of His property.
- If we are faithful in the small things – handling money for example – we will be entrusted with greater things. But if we are not good managers with the small things, we will not be good managers of God’s more important possessions.

Question 1: What are some things that God has entrusted to you and asked you to manage for a period of time?

THREE QUESTIONS SMART STEWARDS ASK

- 1) Am I using the money entrusted to me in accordance with God’s (the Owner’s) wishes?
- 2) Am I carefully keeping account of where the Owner’s funds are going?
- 3) Am I becoming best friends with the Owner by the way I manage His resources?

Final Thought

Your life will be dramatically transformed when you realize, deep down, that everything belongs to God and He trusts you to use His resources well. The resources that have been entrusted to you are your opportunity to join God in His mission.

CHAPTER 3:

WHY GOD PROSPERS GENEROUS PEOPLE

Participant's Guide

Introduction

- Most of our lives are spent working on things that we do pretty well.
- Whether we want to admit it or not, our lives are greatly impacted by the principle of rewards.
- Later today, read Hebrews 11 to see some of God's rewards for the faithful.
- He rewards us as we become more and more accomplished in exercising our faith.

Question 1: Can you think of any other examples from the Bible where God gives earthly rewards to faithful people?

Question 2: How do you feel about working with God in order to receive a reward?

Lesson Passage
Matthew 25:14-30

Big Idea
God prospers me not to raise my standard of living, but to raise my standard of giving.



UNEQUAL REWARDS

Read Matthew 25:14-30

- One of the striking aspects of this story is the way God distributes the talents.
- His rewards are stepping stones that lead to the next level of His plan for our lives.
- 2 Corinthians 9:11 says, “You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.”
- God rewards you when you are faithful...so that you can be generous (love your neighbor as yourself)...so that God will be praised (resulting in your neighbors giving thanks to God).

Question 1: Randy Alcorn states, “God prospers me not to raise my standard of living, but to raise my standard of giving. In light of 2 Corinthians 9:11, what do you think about that statement?”

Question 2: How do you feel about the fact that God does not distribute His rewards equally?

Question 3: What is one way that you can simplify your life to make better use of the rewards God has entrusted to you?

BEATING GENEROSITY'S BIGGEST COMPETITOR

In chapter 3, Chip mentions two ways that we can overcome greed.

- 1) Refuse to chase the wind
- 2) Refuse to view generosity as depriving yourself of something good.

Final Thought

Rewards are not a bad thing. And the Bible does not discourage us from pursuing the rewards of God. However, rewards are not the ultimate prize, either. They are not the goal. Rewards are a resulting part of pursuing the ultimate goal - faithfulness to God and His ways. "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."

Additional Bible references for consideration:

Proverbs 19:17; Matthew 10:8; Luke
10:30-37; Luke 19:1-10;
Acts 4:32-35; Acts 20:35; 2 Corinthians
9:10-11

CHAPTER 4:

HOW GOD MEASURES GENEROSITY

Participant's Guide

Introduction

- It costs something to get the things that you really want.
- When God wanted to win your heart and secure intimacy with you for eternity, it cost Him His Son.
- Today, the desire to follow Christ compels us to “take up [our] cross daily and follow [Christ].” There is a sacrifice involved.

Question 1: What do you think...does God measure generosity by the size of the gift or by the size of the sacrifice? Are there any biblical stories that you can cite as examples?

Question 2: What would “sacrificial” generosity look like for a middle-class American today?

Lesson Passage

1 Chronicles 21

Big Idea

Sacrifice is necessary to get the things we really desire in life.



COUNTING THE COST

Read 1 Chronicles 21:1-28

- God had previously indicated that any time there was a census, a sacrifice - or offering - was required for each person counted.
- The offering would have reminded the people of Israel that they belonged to God and ultimately it would have reminded them that God was the reason for their might, not fighting men.
- It costs something to get the things in life that you really want.

Question 1: What is something a spiritual milestone that you have always wanted to achieve for yourself or your family? What sacrifice do you think is necessary to achieve the proper results?

Question 2: When God calls you to become generous, what perspective do you think He is trying to give you?

MONEY IS ONLY THE BEGINNING

As Chip points out through the Christmas story, God invites us into increasingly deeper levels of generosity. He lists three truths that help us understand how money is only the beginning of generosity.

- 1) Generosity always begins with God.
- 2) Our generosity is the visible expression of our love for God.
- 3) Generous living begins with money and possessions, but it applies to every area of our lives.

Final Thought

Many people understand the concept that Christians need to be careful in the way that they judge others. The reason we need to be careful is because Jesus told us that “in the same way [we] judge others, [we] will be judged.” In other words, our judgment comes back on us to some extent.

In much the same way, Jesus said that we should be careful about the way we handle our time, talents and treasures. He said, “Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”

In the kingdom of God, our generosity also comes back to us. Therefore, the sacrifices that we make to imitate God and to help others are acts that God does not forget. So, our final questions are: “What is it that we really want in life?” And, “Are we willing to make the necessary sacrifices to start living out our dreams?”

Additional Bible references for consideration:

Deuteronomy 15:10; 1 Kings 17:8-16;
Luke 6:27-36;
Luke 21:1-4; 1 John 3:17; James 2:15-16