

Gratitude and Generosity enabling the Mission of your Church



A Stewardship Season – Exploring stewardship themes in the pages of the Bible

Gifts from God

Before we consider what the Bible expects from us it is important to remind ourselves of all that God has given us and continues to give us.

- Our God is a giving
- God. Our God is a generous God.
- Our God blesses us in so many ways as we live our lives.



Genesis 1: 1-31

The first chapter of the Bible , which may be an understanding of creation written down as late as the 5th century BC tells of the creation of the world .People have read this chapter and argued about it. They have had difficulty reconciling this six day account of creation with modern scientific understanding of how the world came to be. The essential truth of this chapter is not the detailed account but the fact that life comes from God – life is a gift from God.

Romans 6:1-11 and John 10:1-18

The New Testament tells of God coming to the world in the person of Jesus to redeem and re- create. The story of Jesus is the story of death and resurrection. The New Testament is about God's gift of new life in Christ.

In the 6th Chapter of Paul's letter to the Church at Rome, baptism is seen to be the sign of sharing in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Adopting the Christian faith and the Christian life is putting life without God to death and taking on new life with God, which Jesus offers to all who will listen to his teaching and respond to his call. In the 10th Chapter of John's gospel this new life (or life as God intended it to be from the beginning) is described as 'fullness of life'

Acts 2 1 -21 and Galatians 5: 16-26

The 2nd Chapter of the Acts of the Apostles tells of the coming of God's Spirit on the day of Pentecost. The 5th chapter of Paul's letter to the Church in Galatia lists the fruits of the Spirit – fruits which become visible in our lives if we allow God's Spirit to live in us and direct what we shall be. God's gift of his Spirit provides us with strength and direction for our lives.

When reading the above passages consider the generosity of God and the extent of his love for all his people.

Giving Time

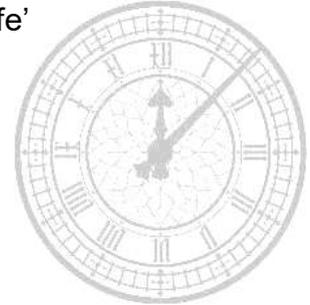
Genesis 1; 14- 19 and Psalm 90: 1 -17

The fourth part of the creation story in Genesis tells of God creating light and dark, day and night – time. Psalm 90 contains many words about God’s anger with the people, but it begins with the affirmation that God is eternal and then reflects on the limited period of time that may be described as ‘the time of our life’

In what ways do we treat time as a gift from God?

In what ways do we fail to treat time as a gift from God?

In what circumstances does time become a very special gift?



Exodus 20:8- 11 and Leviticus 23:1-8

The first five books of the Old Testament are the books of the Law – books which spell out in detail how God’s people were expected to live. The story of creation talks of God making his world in six parts or six days: the seventh part or seventh day was God resting after the completion of his task. Time for rest or Sabbath is a very important part of the balanced life for God’s people. It is highlighted in the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 and as the first of the festivals in Leviticus 23

How important is rest or Sabbath in our lives today?

How do we create rest or Sabbath in the 24-7 world of today?

What do these passages teach us about living a balanced life?

In what ways do rules and regulations detract from a healthy attitude to rest and the Sabbath?

Luke 4:16-21 and Acts 3:1-10

Time for worship is the context of these two passages. Worship is an opportunity to be close to God, to praise God, to be fed by God.

Is worship still the most important part of the life of the Church?

In what ways should the Church be offering more opportunities for worship?

Matthew 10: 34-39 and Luke 9:57-62

A great deal is said today about the importance of family and spending quality time with the family. In the gospels a Jesus says some very harsh things about family and putting himself before family as far as Christian discipleship is concerned.

How do we react to Jesus’ words in these two passages?

How often do we use family commitments as a reason for not doing something for God?

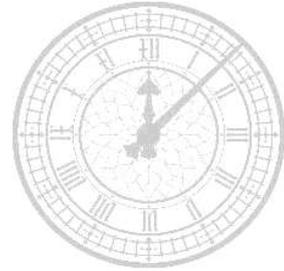
Luke 10:38-42

Jesus's visit to the home of Martha and Mary is one of the most revealing episodes in the Gospels. Jesus called people to action, but he criticises the busy-ness of Martha and praises what might appear to be laziness on the part of Mary. He praises Mary for stopping what she is doing and focusing on him and his words.

In what ways is time for God yet another activity in our busy lives?

How difficult is it for us to stop doing things and be completely receptive to God?

Why would it be helpful to advertise worship as a time out from the busyness of our lives?



Giving Talent

Psalm 139:1 -24 and Luke 12: 4-7

These two passages point to the importance of each individual. God does not see us as a part of a crowd of people but as individual men, women and children, each with his /her own characteristics. God knows each of us by name. God knows our strengths and our weaknesses.

In what ways am I similar to other members of my family?

In what ways am I different from other members of my family?

Genesis 25:19-28: 37:1-11 and 41:1-36

Before we consider giving of our talent, we have to recognise what our own particular skills and strengths are, and also recognise the skills and strengths we do not possess. The twin sons of Isaac and Rebekah, Esau and Jacob had a very different characteristics and were talented in different ways. Joseph comes to the notice of Pharaoh because he is able to interpret dreams. His earlier relationship with his older brothers points to certain weaknesses in Joseph.

What skills and strengths do I have?

What skills and strengths do I not have?

Are my skills and strengths people – oriented or more of a practical nature?

Matthew 25: 14-30 and Luke 19:11-27

This parable of Jesus, recorded in Matthew's gospel and Luke's gospel, has traditionally been called the Parable of the Talents. In Matthew it is placed alongside the Parable of the Bridesmaids and the Parable of the Final Judgement: all three are concerned with how we shall account for our lives.

What is our initial reaction to this parable?

What is Jesus saying about wasting God given talent?

What are the benefits of using God-given talent to the full?

Act1: 12-26 and 6:1-7

The first of these passages from the Acts of the Apostles deals with the process of electing a disciple to take the place of Judas Iscariot as one of the twelve apostles. The second passage acknowledges that the twelve apostles could not do everything and tells of the appointment of seven deacons to be responsible for the practical service of the Church?

How important is prayer in recognising the person with the appropriate talent?

How do we relate the importance of prayer to a person's CV?

What are the dangers for the church if a small number of people try to do too many things?

Romans12:3-8 and 1 Corinthians12:1-31

In these two passages Paul reflects on the uniqueness of each individual life and portrays the Church as a community of people with different but complementary talents. He uses the helpful imagery of the human body with its different but complementary parts, to describe the Church. To fulfil its God – given purpose of sharing the gospel through worship, nurture fellowship outreach and service, the Church needs the variety of gifts which the people have to offer. Paul emphasises the fact that these gifts are the gifts of the Spirit- gifts from God.

How Significant is Paul's emphasis that our talents are gifts of the Spirit – gifts from God?

What talents are essential for the work of the Church?

What happened if certain talents are missing?

In what ways can neighbouring congregations share talents?

What talents can I offer for the work of the Church



Giving of Money

Genesis 1:26-31

Genesis 1 presents us with a vivid picture of God creating the world. In this study we are not concerned with how God created the world or with the six days timetable for bringing the world into being.

- We are concerned with God the creator:
- We are concerned with God the giver of life

The final part of Genesis (vs 26 to 31) deals with the creation of humankind, men and women. It speaks of the power God gave to men and women – power over all other living creatures. Before speaking of this power we are told that men and women are created in the image of God – What does this phrase mean?

One interpretation of this phrase is to say that men and women are created to reflect or mirror in some small way the nature of God – the nature of a loving giving God

What human characteristics are essential if we are to reflect the nature of God?

In what ways are we less than the people God intends us to be if we are unwilling to give?

Deuteronomy 26: 1-11

The first part of Deuteronomy is often read at harvest thanksgiving services. It speaks of the harvest in Israel and instructs the farmer to bring some of the first fruits of the harvest to the priest as an offering to God.

In this passage there is a great emphasis on the land of Israel as a gift from God (v1-3). When the priest has received the offering of the first fruits there is a form of words to be spoken to the farmer v (5-10). These words recall specific events in history of Israel – the journey into slavery in Egypt and God leading them out of slavery to freedom in their own land.

The farmer's offering was a response to the gifts from God. The passage also emphasises that this offering was to come from the first fruits of the harvest (vs 2 & 10)

The harvest festival was a community celebration of God's gifts (verse 11). The community celebration was a time for sharing God's Gifts with everyone. The Levites and the foreigners are specifically mentioned in this passage because they had no land to produce a harvest.

In what ways is our offering a response to the gifts of God?

What is a Christian equivalent of the form of words spoken by the Israelites in Deuteronomy 26:5-10?

How do we understand 'First fruits' in relation to our incomes today?

What does this passage teach us about our own priorities?

Genesis 14: 17-20 and 28:18-22;

Leviticus 27: 30-32; Numbers 18: 21-29; Deuteronomy 14: 21-29; Nehemiah 10: 35-39:

The two passages from Genesis point to two examples of tithing (giving a tenth) before this practice was enshrined in the Law.

The other four passages refer to the practice of giving a tithe of the harvest as an obligation under the law.

The tithe was taken to the priest as an offering to God. It was used to provide for the Levites (or the priests) who had no land to produce a harvest for themselves. Giving the tithe maintained the house of the Lord and the worship of God.

There was also a provision for the law for an additional tithe every third year – to support widows' orphans and the foreigners who had no land to support themselves.

If the distance was too great to transport the actual crops, an equivalent gift of money could be substituted.

There is very little mention of the tithes in the New Testament (Matt 23: 23 Luke 11:42 and 18:9-14). The first two verses refer to an occasion when Jesus commended the Pharisees for remembering to obey the Law on tithing but this praise is faint compared with his criticism of their failure in more important matters – justice, mercy and faith. In the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, Jesus did not praise the Pharisee who remembered to tithe. His self – righteousness did not compare favourably with the penitence of the tax collector.

Why is it important that giving should be related to income?

Discuss whether it is easier for a rich person or a poor person to tithe

In what ways does a willingness to give bring us nearer to God?

In view of Jesus 'few comments about tithing discuss whether it is right or wrong to think of tithing as the Christian model for giving?

Is tithing a helpful model when we are considering the gifts we intend to make in our Wills?

Leviticus 19: 9-10; Ruth 2: 1-7; Luke 12: 13-21 and 19: 1-10 Acts 2: 37-47

The Law of Moses made provision for the poor. When the harvest of the field or the vineyard was gathered some of the crop was left for the poor to gather. An example of this happening is found in the story of Ruth when the young widow went into the fields belonging to Boaz – to glean what was left after the main harvest had been gathered.

Sharing prosperity with the poor is enshrined in the Law.

The theme of sharing the harvest is found in the New Testament in Jesus' parable of the **Rich Fool**. Jesus told the story of a farmer who enjoyed a very good harvest. It was so good that he had nowhere to store his grain. He decided to build new and larger barns to provide the necessary storage.

Jesus condemned the farmer because he thought of only his own material wealth. If he had been willing to share some of his abundance with those who were less fortunate he would have been rich in the sight of God.

The story of Jesus' meeting with Zacchaeus the tax collector is the story of a man who was greedy. He used his position to exploit people by collecting more taxes than he was supposed to collect. He kept the surplus taxes for himself.

The people of Jericho were shocked when Jesus announced that he wanted to visit Zacchaeus and to eat with him. However this encounter between Jesus and Zacchaeus led the tax collector to repay four fold those whom he had defrauded and to give half of all that he possessed to the poor. The grace of God in Jesus led to a willingness to share.

The passage from Acts presents a picture of life in the early days of the Church. The Holy Spirit had come on the Day of Pentecost and breathed life from God into all who were followers of Jesus.

One of the effects of the coming of the Holy Spirit was the formation of a community of believers. Stimulated by prayer, the apostles' teaching and the fellowship of eating together, the believers were led to share all their material possessions.

Does God coming to us in the person of Jesus and the sharing our human life to the full lead to a willingness to share on our part?

How does our giving to God enable the sharing of the gospel – locally, nationally globally?

When we consider the ways in which our Church spends money in what ways can your Church be called a sharing church?



Luke 18:18-25 and 21:1-4: 2 Corinthians 8 1-15

Here we encounter one of the hard sayings of Jesus (Luke 18:22) the rich man was obviously a good man: he obeyed God's rules in the way he had lived his life. Jesus wanted more. Only if he sold all his possessions and gave the money to the poor would he satisfy Jesus. Jesus did not say this to everyone he met but detected in the rich man a dependence on material wealth which was distancing him from God. The only way forward was sacrificial giving; this would enable the no longer rich man to place his trust in God.

The second passage tell us of Jesus and his disciples watching people presenting their gifts at the temple treasury. The giving of rich is compared with that of a poor widow. The rich people gave more money but Jesus said that the poor widow was giving the most .The two small copper coins were all the poor widow had. She kept nothing back. Her giving was truly sacrificial giving.

Paul encourages generous giving from the Christians in Corinth by holding before them the example of the Christians in Macedonia. The Macedonians Christians were not wealthy, yet they gave generously v2.Their giving was not only generous but sacrificial v3 because they wanted to contribute as much as possible to support the very poor Christians in Jerusalem.

Paul encourages the Christians in Corinth to give generously by referring to the supreme example of generosity and sacrifice – the giving of God in person of Jesus.

How do we measure generosity?

In what ways do we make sacrifices in the course of our daily lives?

Why are we willing to make these sacrifices?

Should our giving to God to support the worship, mission and service of the church go beyond generosity to sacrifice?

In what ways does our giving to god relate to our level of trust in God?



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