



*A four-session
small group
study for growing
disciples*



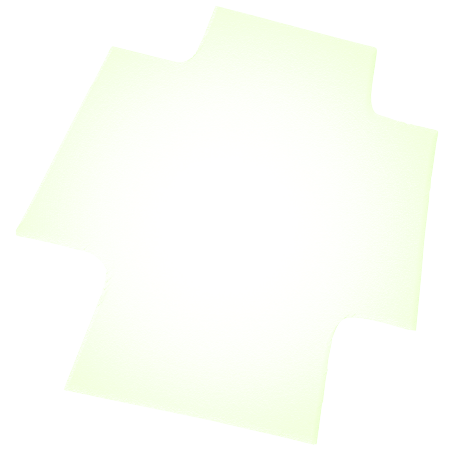
GIVE

Living Faith in Daily Life

a small group Bible study on giving

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GIVE

Living Faith in Daily Life

A small group Bible study on giving

Giving is a mark of discipleship. It is one of the seven faith practices highlighted in the ELCA *Call to Discipleship*.

Giving is part of daily life. In this study we will search out biblical understandings of giving by exploring stories of givers and their gifts. We will ask what acts of giving mean to the givers, the recipients, and the whole human community.

Givers soon recognize that giving really flows from receiving. In the first session of this study we will explore the giving/receiving dynamic.

In the second session we will highlight givers who do not count the cost of giving. We will speak of behaviors that go beyond calculation.

Giving is not always easy. Our human need for control sometimes limits or distorts our giving practices. In the third session we'll examine some common stumbling blocks to giving.

Just as faithfulness is good in and of itself, so is generosity. In the final session we'll explore the spiritual power of generosity.



Writer: Michael Meier
Editors: Diane Monroe, Ted Schroeder
Designer: Sharon Schuster

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This resource and further support materials are available at www.elca.org/dcm/christian_education/resources/

How to use this study

This study will work best in a small group of five to 12 people. Such a group can focus on the Scripture texts and on sharing their own personal experiences. While the content of these sessions is important, the process of telling one's own "giving stories" and encouraging one another is at least as important. Martin Luther reminds us in the Smalcald Articles that God's grace comes not only through word and sacrament but also through the mutual conversation and consolation of the gathered community.¹ Probably of greatest importance is the answer participants might give to these two questions at the end of this study:

- 1) How have my *behaviors* changed as a result of this study?
- 2) What are the positive *outcomes* that flow from these changed behaviors?

One person may lead the group or you might rotate leadership among participants. Suggestions for

¹ Smalcald Articles Part III, Article IV from *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, Fortress Press, 2000, p. 319.



Advance preparations

To facilitate a successful small group experience, attend to the following needs in advance of the first session:

- Order a copy of this study, *Give: Living Faith in Daily Life*, for each participant. (ISBN: 6-0002-1123-6, \$1.25 each, plus shipping.)
- Provide a small notebook for the personal reflections and journal exercises. Remember extra pencils, pens, and Bibles.
- The leader should review this study in advance of the group's gathering to determine which resources to have on hand for each session.
- Plan for refreshments.

the leader are found in small boxes throughout this resource. The leader's task in this course is to teach content, encourage discussion, and direct the group's attention to behaviors and outcomes.

The goal for this course is to create a learning environment that is Christ-centered, biblically based, accepting, conducive to personal sharing, and encourages behaviors that reflect the emphases of each session. Each session of *Give* is divided into three sections:

Gathering

A time to warm up through prayer and personal sharing. Questions set the stage for the theme and encourage personal sharing that builds group identity and fosters supportive relationships. Allow time for laughter and genuine community building.

Growing

A time to study the Bible, reflect through story and exercises, and journal individual and group discoveries.

Going

A time to imagine behaviors that one might put into practice, to pray, and to commit to outcomes that make a difference in the lives of participants and others.

Depending on the length of group conversation, sessions may run between 50 and 90 minutes. Ideal settings for this study include participants' homes, church, or any comfortable room conducive to open, honest sharing.

give

Session 1

Giving Starts with Receiving

Gathering

Let's Get Acquainted

Make sure all feel comfortable and welcome as the study begins. Encourage each person to share one or both of the following. You might start with your own sharing.

1. Share your name and tell a story about a time when you received a gift and you felt thankful and joyful.
2. Describe a time when you were given a gift and you found it difficult to receive it graciously.

Let's Pray

Begin with prayer. Read the following aloud or speak a prayer of your choosing.

Creator God, you give us gifts. Open our hearts to receive those gifts. Teach us to enjoy what you give us so freely. And, when others give us gifts, help us see their deeds as a reflection of your goodness. Help us receive their gifts graciously, too. We pray by the power of the Holy Spirit and in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Growing

Read, or ask a volunteer to read aloud.

Stan and Heather had always been active in church. They came to worship nearly every week and they always had an offering envelope with a gift. They were a quiet couple and had many acquaintances at church, but no close friends at church or anywhere else. Two years ago their life and their habits changed. First, Heather lost her job at the hospital and was out of work for almost eleven months. When she got another job it only paid about half of her previous salary. While Heather was out of work Stan was diagnosed with diabetes. In addition, the company he worked for froze all wages and benefits as part of cost-cutting measures. Though Stan was still able to drive his delivery truck route he found that the work was more demanding, the pay was not keeping up with inflation,

and he was often so tired on the weekend that he wanted to do nothing. In fact, sometimes he slept most of Saturday and Sunday. Yet, once or twice a month Stan and Heather were in church, and when they were there, they always gave their offering.

Stan and Heather worried about money. Stan's medications were expensive. Heather also had some lingering medical conditions and prescription drug expenses. Though their two children, Karen and Richard, had finished high school and were no longer living at home, both of them often needed financial help. Since they were responsible young adults and both of them were taking classes—Karen at the local community college and Richard at a small cosmetology school—and were steadily employed, Stan and Heather felt it was important to help them as much as they could.

As the months went by, Stan and Heather started to fall behind on paying their bills. They tried to spend less on food. They spent almost nothing for entertainment. They stopped buying any new clothes. They told Karen and Richard that they could not help them financially anymore. By being very careful they were able to get by. Then the transmission broke down in Stan's old van. He only used it to commute to the delivery truck terminal, but it was almost a necessity for that purpose. Decent public transportation was not available where they lived. No co-workers lived nearby, so car-pooling seemed to be out of the question. Now, Stan and Heather tried to get to both places of work with one vehicle. Some days Karen or Richard could help them, but often their work or class schedules made that impossible. After three weeks of struggling to get to work, to medical appointments, and grocery shopping with only one vehicle Stan and Heather began to wonder what they were going to do. They were trying to make ends meet and the ends weren't meeting.

One Thursday afternoon Heather was home alone. She had been ill the night before and had taken a sick day. Suddenly two cars drove up and parked outside the house. She looked out and recognized a



man from church getting out of the first car. She didn't really know him well, but she knew his name was Tom Olson and that he owned or managed a modest sized car dealership. He came to the door and when she opened it he greeted her, "Hi Heather. Say, I reckon you and Stan could use another set of wheels. I just happened to have this old blue Ford on the lot and it has fairly low mileage for its age, it has good tires and it should give you several years of service." Heather replied, "There is no way we can buy another car." Tom said, "I'm not selling it. I'm giving it to you. Here's the title and here are the keys. If someday you want to give me a few hundred dollars for it, I'll take it, but meanwhile, it is all yours, it's a gift." Thrusting the title and the keys into her hand, he hustled back to the curb and jumped in the second car and waved to Heather as his employee drove him away.

(This story is based on an actual experience by the author of this study when serving as a pastor in a congregation.)

Discuss the following questions.

1. What are some of the feelings Stan and Heather will experience over the next twenty-four hours?
2. What do you think Stan and Heather will do with this gift? Will they accept it or reject it? On what do you base your opinion?
3. Do you think it is easier for Stan and Heather to give, or to receive? Why?
4. Where is God's hand in this story?

BIBLE FOCUS *Luke 1:26-38*

Read the text aloud. Read verse 38 a second time. Encourage all to share their reactions to the text. Read the discussion starters below and invite response to the questions following each paragraph.

1. This passage describes Mary as one who graciously receives God's gift in her life. "Let it be with me according to your word," she says. Like many others in Scripture, Mary's heart is open to God and God's purposes. Because her heart is open she does not oppose God's will with her own will. To receive God's gifts we must be open to God's will. Our wills must

not stand in the way.

Talk about a time when you felt God's call to do something. What was that like? How did you respond?

2. Receiving is a prelude to giving. Until we receive we have little to give and even less understanding of what giving means. But receiving can be difficult. In Mary's case receiving means submitting to the will of another; in this instance, submitting to the will of God. We may resist submission.

Tell about an experience when you did not resist submitting to the plans and purposes of God or another person. What difference does it make if it is a "spiritual gift" or a "material gift" that is being received?

3. Submission of our wills to the plans and purposes of God or another person may be difficult. But receiving gifts may be difficult for other reasons, too. Read John 13:3-10 aloud.

Why do you think Peter is reluctant to receive the gift that Jesus offers?

Some spiritual directors suggest that not only are our hearts and wills resistant to receiving gifts, but that our minds are sometimes resistant as well. Peter seems to have a resistant mind until he trusts the gift that Jesus is giving.

When were you willing to accept a gift once your mind arrived at a level of trust in the purposes of the giver?

4. Read Matthew 8:5-13 aloud. The centurion wants to receive the gift of healing that Jesus offers for his servant who is ill, but he himself thinks he is unworthy for Jesus to "come under his roof."

When have you been reluctant to receive a gift because of your own feelings of unworthiness?

5. Read Matthew 26:6-13 aloud. In this story Jesus receives the gift of the woman graciously. She seeks to honor him and he accepts the honor. When have you acknowledged a gift with acceptance and graciousness?

Session 1 continued

JOURNAL TIME

Journal work may be started during class time and completed later at home. It may be helpful to share some of your journal reflections.

Write down your thoughts and feelings about receiving gifts. Comment on the different kinds of gifts that are easy or difficult for you to receive. Comment on the different givers and how their relationship to you makes it easier or more difficult to receive their gifts. List some insights you have gained from this session.

Going

Final Thoughts

Encourage all to complete the Small Group Covenant. Suggest that participants read the covenant and sign it prayerfully. The covenant is meant to be a statement of intention, seeking God's blessing.

Small Group Covenant

1. I commit to being a part of this group for each of our meetings.
2. I will pray each day for each small group member by name.
3. I will treat all that is shared in the group as confidential.
4. I will invest time each week to pray, reflect, and write on the journal topic.
5. I will do one "action step" this week.

Signed: _____

Date: _____



Action Step: Behaviors I want to change

My receiving behaviors that I would like to change:
(Put an asterisk next to the one behavior you plan to focus on this week.)

Outcomes that I anticipate as a result of the one behavior I plan to focus on this week:

CLOSING PRAYER

Pray, or ask a volunteer to pray, the following prayer aloud or speak another prayer of your choosing.

Creator God, you give us gifts. Open our hearts to receive those gifts. Teach us to enjoy what you give us so freely. And, when others give us gifts, help us see their deeds as a reflection of your goodness. Help us receive their gifts graciously, too. We pray by the power of the Holy Spirit and in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Session 2

Not Counting the Cost

Gathering

Let's Get Acquainted

Make sure all feel welcome and are comfortable as the session begins. Take a few moments for participants to share some of their receiving experiences during the past week or some of their journal entries.

Let's Pray

Begin with prayer. Read the following aloud or speak a prayer of your choosing.

Creator God, you give all gifts and do not count the cost. We thank you for life, for grace, for faith, for hope. Teach us to give not counting the cost. We pray by the power of the Holy Spirit and in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Growing

Read, or ask a volunteer to read, the following aloud.

Sam Williamson started in business working for someone else. After many years he became a manager of a plant in his hometown. He and his wife Bonita lived there many years and raised their children where they themselves had grown up. A new opportunity presented itself. Sam's company announced that they were selling another factory in a larger city some distance away. Sam knew he could get financing from both local and foreign investors to buy the factory. He also believed he could run the factory at a profit. Although no longer young, Sam and Bonita took a big step. They left their hometown and the church they had belonged to for years, moved everything they owned, and took up the new challenge.

A few years later, Sam and Bonita came to talk with the pastor of the church they had joined in the new city. They wanted a second opinion about a plan

they had. "You see," said Sam, "When we first moved we didn't sell our former home. We just rented it out because we thought we might be moving back there."

"And now," chimed in Bonita, "it is clear to us that we will be staying here. So we need to sell the house."

"But there is a problem." Sam continued, "No, it is not that the house won't sell, as a matter of fact, that house in that community will probably sell the day we list it. The problem is that there are many things that are wrong with the house—things that an inspector would probably never discover. We have a list of twenty-three things we always intended to fix, but never found the time."

"We would hire somebody to fix these things," said Bonita, "But good help is hard to find and we don't want a sloppy job."

"It's the water system and the sewage hook-up and there are some structural problems and lots of minor things, too," Sam added. "It will take about \$30,000 to correct all these things."

"So," Bonita said, "We thought at first that we should just list the house at \$30,000 less than its market value to be fair to the new owners."

"But the problem with that idea," Sam explained, "is that it will lower the value of the nearby properties. That is not fair to our old neighbors."

"What we've decided," concluded Bonita, "is to sell the house at a fair market price and then rebate the new owners the \$30,000 that it will take to fix everything up the way it should be." "After we sell it," said Sam, "We are going to go to the buyers and give them a check for \$30,000 and urge them to invest it in fixing the house up, first-class!"

"What do you think, Pastor?" Bonita asked.
(This story is based on an actual experience by the author of this study when serving as a pastor in a congregation.)

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Session 2 *continued*

Discuss the following questions.

1. If you were the pastor, how would you respond to Sam and Bonita?
2. How is it that some people, like Sam and Bonita, have such a deep sense of fairness and generosity? What do you suppose is the source of this kind of behavior?
3. At the time of this story, Sam and Bonita were well established in their life. Would they have been as generous if they were young and just getting started? In other words, is their behavior related more to circumstance than to character?
4. What do you think is the relationship between daily generosity and giving to God's work through the church? What level of giving do you think Sam and Bonita practiced in their congregation?
5. Where is God's hand in this story?

BIBLE FOCUS *Luke 10:29-37*

Read the text aloud. Encourage all to share their reactions to the text. Read the discussion starters below and invite response to the questions following each paragraph.

1. This passage is the familiar story of the Good Samaritan. Jesus says, "He was moved with pity." In other words, his compassionate heart was stirred. As a result he gave generously to the man in need. He gave himself. He himself tended the wounds of the man. He loaded him on his own animal and walked beside it. He personally took him to an inn and took care of him. He gave his time. Whatever plans he had were put aside to spend the better part of two days taking care of a stranger. He gave of his substance—oil and wine would have been part of his "lunchbox," the animal was his transportation, and the two denarii are sometimes described as a day's wages. This is a story of generous giving of self, time, and possessions.

How might you tell this story in a modern context? How might you put yourself in the story?

2. A compassionate heart can motivate generous giving. That seems to have been the motivation of the Good Samaritan.

When have you given yourself, your time, or your possessions because you were motivated by compassion? Was it easier to give yourself? Your time? Your money or possessions? Why?

3. The Good Samaritan seems to be content with his gift and seems not to need a particular response from the man he helped.

When you were able to give generously from your compassionate heart, did it matter to you how the recipient(s) responded to your gift? Why or why not? Do you find it easier to give to people you can relate to first-hand or easier to give to people who live at a distance and whom you know about through information sources such as the ELCA World Hunger Appeal? Why?

4. Read Luke 19:1-10 aloud. What were the motivations behind the generosity of Zacchaeus? When have you been motivated in a similar manner and given in a similar way?

5. Read Mark 6:34-44 aloud. Jesus had compassion for the crowd. And, perhaps, his compassion and generosity evoked similar feelings from others. People today tell us that in addition to being motivated by compassion they also often give because they have a desire to make a difference in the community. They share "bread and fish" because they care about the gathered community and they want others to imitate their generous behavior.

When have you been motivated to give because you cared about the welfare of the community and you wanted your example of generosity to encourage others to give to the community? When has the generosity of someone else—their example—moved you to give?

6. Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-7 aloud. St. Paul is encouraging the Corinthians to give generously to a collection of money for the church in Jerusalem (see 1 Corinthians 16:1-4). He appeals to their leadership in

other areas (verse 7) and asks them to be leaders in generosity. He gives them the example of the Macedonians whose generosity, he says, has been more than exemplary (verses 1-4). He emphasizes that the Macedonians were generous even when undergoing "a severe ordeal of affliction" and says that "their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity." He says that their generosity springs from the fact that "they gave themselves first to the Lord."

When have you been motivated to give because of your relationship to God—having given yourself first to the Lord? When have you been particularly generous even though you were undergoing affliction, trials, and maybe even extreme poverty? Do you think it is easier for most people to give when things are very difficult in their lives or when things are going well and life is smooth and comfortable? Explain your answer.

JOURNAL TIME

Journal time may be started during class time and completed later at home. It may be helpful to share some of your journal reflections.

Write down your thoughts and feelings about giving. Comment on the ways you are motivated to give. Tell a story of a giver whom you have known who particularly impressed you with her/his generosity. List some insights you have gained from this session.

Going

Final Thoughts

We can grow in generosity just as we can grow in faithfulness. To become more generous it may be necessary for us to let God fill our hearts with love, to submit our wills to the will of God and to let God fill our minds with trust. This is because what often stands in the way of generosity is selfishness instead of love, willfulness instead of submission, and fear instead of trust.

Action Step: Behaviors I want to change

My giving behaviors that I would like to change:
(Put an asterisk next to the one behavior you plan to focus on this week.)

Outcomes that I anticipate as a result of the one behavior I plan to focus on this week:

CLOSING PRAYER

Pray, or ask a volunteer to pray, the following prayer aloud or speak another prayer of your choosing.

Creator God, you give all gifts and do not count the cost. We thank you for life, for grace, for faith, for hope. Teach us to give not counting the cost. We pray by the power of the Holy Spirit and in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Session 3

The Great Struggle Between Generosity and Greed

Gathering

Let's Get Acquainted

Make sure all feel welcome and are comfortable as the session begins. Take a few moments for participants to share some of their experiences with giving during the past week or some of their journal entries.

Let's Pray

Begin with prayer. Ask a volunteer to read the following aloud or speak a prayer of their own choosing.

Creator God, we often struggle with your call to generosity. Sometimes we are so selfish we just don't want our hearts to be moved by your love. Sometimes we seek to control everything so much that we can't submit to your will. Sometimes we are so filled with fear that our minds refuse to trust you. Sometimes greed keeps us away from you. Forgive us, O God, and renew us so that we may delight in your love, seek to do your will, and live our lives trusting in your goodness. Accomplish this in our lives, O God, so that we may be generous as you are generous. We pray by the power of the Holy Spirit and in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Growing

Read, or ask a volunteer to read, the following aloud.

Troy and Kimberly were ecstatic. They had both been selected to attend a special summer program in Library Science at a prestigious pre-doctoral summer program "back east."

Sunday, at the coffee hour after church, they shared their good news with several friends and asked if anyone knew someone who might house-sit for them during the summer.

Two weeks later when everyone was again gathered in the fellowship hall for coffee, Bev, the church

secretary, rushed up to them. "Guess what?" she said, "I had a telephone call from these two girls." She handed Kimberly a piece of paper. "They have been selected for the special Parks and Recreation internship program here this summer. I learned they are from out of state and go to a Lutheran college." "There is a problem, however," she added, "they can't afford to pay rent and are looking for some place they could house-sit."

"Thanks so much," Kimberly said enthusiastically. "We'll give them a call. Do they have any references?" "Oh, I almost forgot," Bev replied, "it's the campus pastor and his number is on the bottom of that paper."

On their way home from church Kimberly began to talk about this stroke of good luck. Troy was silent for quite some time. Finally he said, "Kim, don't you think we should have somebody house-sit who will pay rent? After all, we're not made of money."

"No, we aren't," she replied, "but when we first looked at this summer plan we said our budget could handle a house-sitter who couldn't pay and these girls need a place to stay. Has something changed?"

"Well, not really," Troy replied. "It's just that it seems like we ought to make some money if people are going to live in our house. I mean, we can always use more money."

"But, Troy," Kimberly said, "we have been blessed with a gift; this whole summer is a gift. Why can't we share? Why can't we be a gift to others?"

Troy said, "Well, I'll think about it."

On Wednesday evening, Troy came home from work and burst into the living room. "Guess what, Hon," he said, "this guy who comes to the library every week says he has a friend whose brother is going to be here this summer and this guy needs a place for his family to stay. And..." Troy added emphatically, "he can pay rent."

"But do you know him?" Kimberly said, "I called the campus pastor and he says those two girls are really reliable, really decent. He was sure they would take good care of our place. What do you know about this guy at the library?"

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"It's not the guy at the library, it's the brother of his friend and I don't think we should throw away several hundred dollars a month just so some college kids can have a free ride this summer;" Troy said sharply. Kimberly shook her head and left the room.

After church on the last Sunday in July, Bev came to the coffee fellowship and motioned to a few of Troy and Kimberly's friends. "Have any of you seen those people who are house-sitting for Troy and Kimberly?" "Well," Bev continued, "Troy called last night and asked if the people had been in church. They had told him they planned to come here to church this summer. But, of course, we haven't seen them. Troy is concerned because their rent check bounced and he has heard from neighbors that often the lights are on all night and there is a lot of noise coming from the house. Troy and Kimberly are supposed to stay another month, but they are concerned. The people who are house-sitting never answer the phone. I drove by their place this morning on the way to church and their garage door is open but there is no vehicle and no sign of life."

(This story is based on an actual experience by the author of this study when serving as a pastor in a congregation.)

Discuss the following questions.

1. What do you suppose Troy and Kimberly will discover when they arrive home? Why might they not stay to the end of their academic program?
2. What do you suppose happened to the two girls and their plans for the summer?
3. Why do you suppose Troy was unwilling to "share the gift" as Kimberly wanted him to?
4. Was Troy greedy or just practical? Did the girls "deserve" to stay in Troy and Kimberly's house more than the family they rented it to?
5. Where is God's hand in this story?

BIBLE FOCUS Acts 4:32-5:11

Read the text aloud. Encourage all to share their reactions to the text. Read the discussion starters below and invite response to the questions following each paragraph.

1. This passage may seem to be a "hard" passage—people dropping dead when they are accused of withholding money from the church! But, the context is the early Christian community where the love of Christ so moved faithful people that they chose to have all things in common and to hold nothing back. When Ananias and Sapphira pretended to share all the proceeds of the property they had sold, Peter asked, "Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?" How does this story make you feel?
2. The question for us is whether our behaviors show us to be tellers of the truth or liars. Ananias and Sapphira had a desire to be seen as generous participants in the life of the Christian community, but they were motivated by other desires—greed, or fear, or the desire to control. In fact, these strong desires often keep us from being generous.

What are other desires that prevent people from being generous even when they would like others to think they are generous?

3. Most of us can identify with Ananias and Sapphira in their struggle with competing desires.

If you are comfortable in sharing, tell about a time you had a chance to be generous, and you chose not to be. Did you want people to still think of you as a generous person? Why? How did you feel about this attempt at deception?

4. Read Luke 12:13-21 aloud. Someone in the crowd asked Jesus to help him in his inheritance claims. Jesus refused and spoke a warning against greed. Then he told a story about a man who gave all his attention to the abundance of his possessions. The end of the story is not pleasant and Jesus adds "So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God." It is clear that Jesus sees greed as a force that can destroy one's relationship to God.

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Session 3 *continued*

In what ways have you had to struggle with the vice of greed? Where have you found strength to resist this vice? How would you help another person resist greed and grow in generosity?

JOURNAL TIME

Journal time may be started during class time and completed later at home. It may be helpful to share some of your journal reflections.

Write down your thoughts and feelings about temptations you have faced that would draw you away from generosity. Comment on how you have resisted those temptations.

Going

Final Thoughts

Most of us agree that drug abuse, sexual promiscuity and violent behavior are serious sins. But in our experience greed and the lack of generosity may not be as easily recognized as serious sins. This may be a time for us to examine our own behaviors with a critical eye. Our generous God may be calling us toward greater generosity and away from greed, fear, and our desire to control.

Action Step: Behaviors I want to change

My behaviors that tend toward greediness that I would like to change: *(Put an asterisk next to the one behavior you plan to focus on this week.)*

Outcomes that I anticipate as a result of the one behavior I plan to focus on this week:

CLOSING PRAYER

Pray, or ask a volunteer to pray, the following prayer aloud or speak another prayer of your choosing.

Creator God, we often struggle with your call to generosity. Sometimes we are so selfish we just don't want our hearts to be moved by your love. Sometimes we seek to control everything so much that we can't submit to your will. Sometimes we are so filled with fear that our minds refuse to trust you. Sometimes greed keeps us away from you. Forgive us, O God, and renew us so that we may delight in your love, seek to do your will, and live our lives trusting in your goodness. Accomplish this in our lives, O God, so that we may be generous as you are generous. We pray by the power of the Holy Spirit and in the name of Jesus. Amen.



Session 4

The Spiritual Power of Generosity

Gathering

Let's Get Acquainted

Make sure all feel welcome and are comfortable as the session begins. Take a few moments for participants to share some of their experiences with greed and generosity during the past week or some of their journal entries.

Let's Pray

Begin with prayer. Ask a volunteer to read the following aloud or speak a prayer of their own choosing.

Creator God, we seek to grow spiritually. We seek to be more like you. Help us to be more faithful. Help us to be more generous. Help us to be more whole. Help us to put our lives in your hands. We pray by the power of the Holy Spirit and in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Growing

Read or ask a volunteer to read the following.

The congregation council turned to the next item of business. A young woman had asked for time on their agenda to make a request. They called her to the table and invited her to make her presentation.

"My name is Britt'ny Morgan," the young woman began, "and I would like permission from you to sell popcorn in front of First Lutheran Church this summer. In fact, I would also like your endorsement of my project. I am planning to sell popcorn from a small, mobile popcorn stand Thursdays through Sundays this summer and all the proceeds from my sales are going to be divided equally between the World Hunger Appeal and an orphanage in Mexico. I am not asking for your help, though I would accept any help you can give. I am asking for your permission, and if possible, your endorsement of my project."

"Hmm, Miss Morgan," responded Art Johnson, the council president, "tell us more. Where are you from? Where did you get this idea? Why locate in front of First Lutheran?"

"I'm sorry," Britt'ny replied. "I should have given you some background." She looked around the room. "I guess I have met a few of you. Maybe you remember meeting me. I have been to church here the last two Sundays. I just moved here and I am living with my aunt. Why I want to do this is that I have had a really life-changing experience. I know people say that all the time, but this is really true for me. I was always a very selfish person and what happened was, well, it is not easy to talk about." Britt'ny faltered for a moment and then went on, "You see, I was at the University and, and some things happened and I was pretty messed up and anyway, well anyway, to make a long story short I was, like, in total despair and then I happened to go by the campus ministry place and, I don't know, it must have been God or something that made me go in, and anyway I met these people and they were going to Mexico to build a classroom in an orphanage down there and so I asked if I could go along, and I did."

"Anyway," she continued, "it was like I said, it was a life-changing experience. It was really hard work, though. I mean, it was hard physical work because we had to do everything by hand mostly and it was hard, too, getting along with everybody because up until this trip I used to just sort of hang out with people who always treated me as special and it was really hard to get along with some of the people in the group and I really had to learn a lot about working with other people." She paused and took a breath, "But, it was so rewarding to see that we were doing something that made a difference in people's lives, I mean, those kids will really use that classroom. And I saw a lot of poverty when I was there and I just want to raise money for the orphanage and for the World Hunger Appeal because that's what the campus ministry is supporting. And the reason I want to be in

Session 4 *continued*

front of First Lutheran Church with my popcorn wagon is that we are located right here by all the summer tourist events and I think I will do pretty well. I've already bought the mobile stand/wagon, whatever you want to call it, I bought it with my own money and so, that's what I want to do. And, oh yes, something else. I am working Mondays through Wednesdays as an aide at the Southside Elder Care and I earn enough there to pay my aunt for staying at her place, but then I will work my popcorn stand Thursdays through Sundays and also I'm pretty sure that this guy I met in Mexico, Geraldo, and his sister Justine, are going to be able to come up and help me later in the summer. Their parents work at the orphanage."

The council members looked at each other. One of them asked, "Who is your aunt? Does she come to church here?" "Well no," Britt'ny replied, "she's Jewish, but she is very supportive of what I am doing." Another council member asked, "Are you really sure you can do this all summer?" Britt'ny said, "I don't know, but I think so. I really want to do something that matters and maybe this is a small thing, but it is something I can do now and I know that it is good for me spiritually."

After a few more questions a motion was made to allow Britt'ny to sell popcorn in front of the church during the summer months and to endorse her fundraising efforts for the orphanage and the World Hunger Appeal. The motion passed by a vote of seven to five with one abstention.

(This story is based on an actual experience by the author of this study when serving as a pastor in a congregation.)

Discuss the following questions.

1. What do you think will happen to Britt'ny and her project during the summer? What effect will her efforts have on the members of First Lutheran Church? On the community? On her?
2. Why was the trip to Mexico and the work at the orphanage such a life-changing experience for Britt'ny?

3. At that council meeting, would you have voted "yes" or "no"? Why? Would you have abstained from voting? Why?

4. What do you think is the relationship between generosity and spiritual growth?

5. Where is God's hand in this story?

BIBLE FOCUS | *Timothy 6:17-19*

Read the text aloud. Encourage all to share their reactions to the text. Read the discussion starters below and invite response to the questions following each paragraph.

1. This passage has a wonderful play on words—(v. 17) those who...are rich...are not to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides. (v. 18) They are to do good, to be rich in good works... (v. 19) *thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future.* How might you put the passage in your own words?

2. You may not think of yourself as rich, but look at it from a global perspective that recognizes four economic classes—the poorest of the poor (people who don't even have a place to die); the poor (perhaps more than 70 percent of the world's population, people who live day to day with little assurance of continued employment and virtually no accumulation of resources); the wealthy (people who have food, clothing, shelter, access to education and health care, continued employment, or access to "safety nets"); and the wealthiest of the wealthy (the small percentage of global citizens who also have savings accounts, real estate, pension plans, and other sorts of accumulated wealth). Most so-called "middle class" American families are really in one or the other of the last two categories. Most church leaders in North America are in the last category—the wealthiest of the wealthy. If you wonder where you fit, go to www.globalrichlist.com and follow the instructions. You may find yourself in the top 1% globally. What does the designation of being called "wealthy" mean to you?

3. The encouragement in this passage is twofold. First, God is described as the one "who richly provides everything for our enjoyment." Second, those who in the present age are rich are "to do good, to be rich in good works, generous and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so they may take hold of the life that really is life." What is clearly meant here is that generosity can aid us in our spiritual growth. Being generous is good in that it helps us focus on what matters most—the life that really is life.

For you, how is generosity not only emotionally rewarding, but spiritually rewarding as well? How might you gain spiritually from increased generosity?

4. Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-15 aloud. This passage encourages cheerful giving and gives the promise that God is able to provide us with every blessing in abundance. Significantly, it promises, we will be enriched in every way for our generosity (v.11). Generosity produces thanksgiving to God, (v.12) and causes others to long for us and pray for us because of the grace of God given to us, (v.14). Again, we are described as gaining spiritually when we are generous. How does it make you feel to know that your generosity can make a difference, and leave the world a better place?

JOURNAL TIME

Journal time may be started during class time and completed later at home. It may be helpful to share some of your journal reflections.

Write down your thoughts and feelings about the relationship between generosity and spiritual growth. Comment on some of the ways you have grown spiritually through your expression of generosity. Tell a story of someone you know who grew spiritually because of their growth in generosity. List some insights you have gained from this session.

Going

Final thoughts

The Holy Spirit desires us to grow spiritually. How we behave affects how we grow. Generous behaviors help us understand more about God who is the author of all generosity. Just as faithfulness is its own reward, so also generosity is its own reward.

Action Step: Behaviors I want to change

My generosity behaviors that I want to expand:

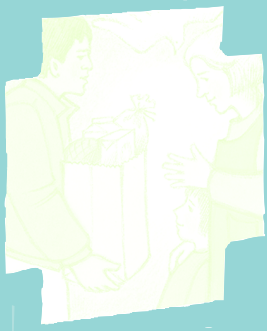
(Put an asterisk by the behavior you plan to focus on this week.)

Outcomes that I anticipate as a result of the one behavior I plan to focus on this week:

CLOSING PRAYER

Pray, or ask a volunteer to pray, the following prayer aloud or speak another prayer of your choosing.

Creator God, we seek to grow spiritually. We seek to be more like you. Help us to be more faithful. Help us to be more generous. Help us to be more whole. Help us to put our lives in your hands. We pray by the power of the Holy Spirit and in the name of Jesus. Amen.



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