

## 'THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP – 2010 LENT NOTES FROM THE LEPROSY MISSION

### WEEK FOUR: THE COST OF GIVING

Any mention of giving and our thoughts immediately go to money. However, giving is not just about our finances but also our time; in this study we shall briefly explore both. However, if you feel that there is too much information for one session then just choose ONE topic to look at. You may wish to miss out one of the other topics in the Lenten study and do both of these over two sessions instead – the choice is yours.

#### Finance

Why give?

As Christians there are principles which prompt our giving.

Bible passages

<b>Genesis 1: 26</b>	Reminds us we are responsible for God's world
<b>Deuteronomy 26: 12</b>	Speaks about tithing and giving
<b>1 Peter 4: 10</b>	We are to be stewards of God's gifts which are for all
<b>Romans 15: 27</b>	We should use our material blessings to help others
<b>1 Timothy 6: 17</b>	God asks the rich to be generous
<b>Philippians 4: 14</b>	Learn to give and receive in partnership

We give freely because God freely gave us His grace.

**2 Corinthians 8 & 9** gives certain principles of Christian giving which are summarised by John RW Stott in an exposition he gave at All Souls Church, Langham Place, London.

Briefly; they are that giving:

- Is an expression of God's grace
- Is a gift of the Spirit
- Inspired by Christ's death
- Should be proportionate to our wealth
- Should be carefully supervised
- Should promote thanksgiving to God

The Leprosy Mission, like many other organisations, is a registered charity. The word 'charity' comes from the Greek word 'charis' – a word often used to describe God's acts of love, grace and forgiveness. Charity is often linked with compassion which is seen as one of the marks of a Christian – see **Colossians 3:12**.

It is true that compassion is not exclusive to Christians and many non-Christians are very generous in their giving. However, God does specifically call His people to be generous. God loves a cheerful giver. One definition of compassion is 'inclining one to help' (*Oxford Dictionary*).



#### DISCUSS:

Do we just give on a whim or out of a genuine concern?

Part of Christian giving is the belief that some of the wrongs of this world – poverty, oppression, hunger – can be righted and we work to do what we can to alleviate them. The Christian hope of eternal life – that one day there will be no more tears – is also part of the equation.



**DISCUSS:**

If Christians are called to give should we therefore give to any and every cause?

We all make choices in our giving as it would be impractical to give to everything (there are 190,000 registered charities in the UK). There are criteria that we can use to help us decide so that as Christians we can give responsibly. When looking at which charity to support perhaps the following points could be a guide to us.

1. Is there partnership between donors and recipients? Do charities just give 'handouts', which may only have a short term benefit, or do they try and help in the long term, e.g. through loan schemes which encourage people to be independent and self-sufficient? (Sometimes, however, short-term help, as in the case of a natural disaster, is both necessary and helpful).
2. Do some charities exploit donors by playing on their emotions? How far should a charity go to elicit a financial response? What images are ok to use in fundraising campaigns?
3. Do charities encourage self-reliance amongst those they help? Are beneficiaries involved in the decision-making process about the type of help that is required?
4. Does our own agenda dictate what we give? Do we attach certain 'strings' to the aid we give – perhaps, for example, wanting visible acknowledgment in the form of a plaque, or written acknowledgement in a newsletter or magazine?
5. Do some countries give to other countries because they have another motive, e.g. oil or some political agenda?
6. Do we have the right motives. Do we give because of guilt, pity or because we are going to get something out of it? Or do we simply give out of a genuine concern, not expecting anything in return?

Giving can be a learning experience for both giver and receiver.

As we remember God's good gifts to us let us be thankful and share His blessings. Short prayers could be said at this point to give thanks for our blessings.

**PRAYER**

*Father God, giver of all good things, help us to be willing to share with open hearts, not expecting any reward save that of knowing that we do Your will. Amen*

**Time**

**Psalm 90: 12** says 'So teach us to number our days. That we may gain a heart of wisdom'

Do we consider our time as part of our giving to God? How do we use the time God has given to us?

The timetable that was given out in Week Three and completed during the week should now be used as part of the following discussion.

Time is something we all have regardless of who we are. Time spent at work and in the home with our family are two of the biggest calls upon our time.

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Where do God and spiritual priorities feature in our daily/weekly/monthly scheme of things? If everything we have is a gift of God, then does not our time also belong to Him? We need to balance how we use our time. Jesus Himself found time to be with God, to relax, rest and to be with His disciples.

As an exercise on the stewardship of time, a weekly timetable is provided (page 4) where a number of areas are listed that could occupy a person's time. Each member of the group was asked to complete it during the previous week.

It is obviously just an exercise and based on an average week. There are times in our lives when things are not 'normal' and our routine is disrupted, e.g. when on holiday. It is only intended to make us think about our use of time and is for our own personal use. It may help people to think how difficult it is to 'pigeon hole' our time and that circumstances often dictate what we do in any given week or month. Not everyone lives their life in such a disciplined and ordered way and some people would not want to. Most people would say that experience has taught them that they have to be flexible and cannot be rigid in their use of time.



ACTIVITIES	SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
<b>UNDER EACH DAY PUT NUMBER OF HOURS OR MINUTES TAKEN UP WITH THE FOLLOWING</b>							
Employment							
Duties at home: meals, cleaning, washing etc							
Recreational time with family							
Resting: sleep, naps etc							
Recreation and social life: clubs, eating out, visiting friends							
Watching TV/surfing the internet							
Travel to/from work							
Christian service: charity work, serving on church committees							
Devotional life: personal study, prayer, church services							
Other							



**DISCUSS:**

Do we feel that we spend enough of our time with God? If not what are the barriers to this? Why do we find it so difficult to set aside time for this? How will we benefit from creating this discipline in our lives?

Why is it important to spend time with God?

- to give thanks and praise Him for who He is and for His blessings
- to know His will for our lives
- to grow and develop our understanding of our relationship with Him
- to have fellowship with other Christians
- to receive help and guidance in times of doubt or uncertainty
- to gain strength, peace and comfort at difficult times in our lives

How can we spend time with God?

Through:

- prayer
- study of His word, or Christian literature
- worship - by oneself, with others
- meditation - being quiet and still
- enjoying His creation - a walk
- fellowship with other believers
- setting aside specific time - a retreat
- listening to music

May God help us to manage our time wisely to His honour and glory.

The group could spend a few moments in silent time with God and then close by sharing the Grace.

**Some useful quotations:**

**John Wesley** (1703-1791 founder of Methodism) 'Make all you can, save all you can, give all you can'

**Amy Carmichael** (an Irish-born missionary in India) 'You can give without loving, but you cannot love without giving'

**John Henry Jowett** (1841-1923 English Congregational preacher) 'The real measure of our wealth is how much we'd be worth if we lost all of our money'

**Henri Boulard** (an Egyptian Jesuit) 'Never say that you have no time. On the whole it is those who are busiest who can make time for yet more, and those who have more leisure time who refuse to do something when one asks. What we lack is not time, but heart'

**Anonymous:** 'He who loses silver or gold can find more to replace it, but he who loses time cannot find more'

**Suggested hymns/songs:**

*Take time to be holy, speak oft with thy Lord* (WD Longstaff 1822-94)

*Take my life and let it be* (Frances Ridley Havergal 1836-79)

*Give thanks with a grateful heart* (Henry Smith 1978 Integrity's Hosanna Music)