
Release

SMALL GROUP CURRICULUM

a study of *generosity*

Fellowship
NORTHWEST
ARKANSAS



From our Leadership:

Generosity and our participation in generous living is not predicated solely on the work of an individual believer or on the teaching of the church's leadership, but rather on God's work in our lives. As you participate in the Release curriculum, the teaching, worship services, personal study, and interaction with others over the next four weeks, we hope you will be reminded of God's generous gifts to us.

1 Corinthians 3:6-9 reminds us that though the church and spiritual leaders have the responsibility to sow and cultivate generous living in people's lives, God is the only one who makes things grow.

As leadership of Fellowship Bible Church of Northwest Arkansas, our desire is to be a safe place for you and your group, and for the entire church to come face to face with God's word. We know that His word transforms lives. This is why our church is launching a four week teaching series on the future of Fellowship, a future that will continue to be a place God uses to change lives.

Release is a Capital Campaign; it is also a spiritual adventure into our hearts as individuals and as a church body. We are asking every member and friend of Fellowship to embrace the journey for four weeks in the following ways:

Worship: attend weekly services to learn more about the church and its purpose.

Gather: participate in a small group for four weeks of intentional study.

Pray: Pray through the 'Heart Issues' addressed in this booklet.

Read: engage scriptures and the short articles included in this booklet.

Much like the Draw Near initiative, everyone at Fellowship is participating in this church wide campaign. Our heart and hope is the Release campaign will be another step in the process of drawing us nearer to our Lord. We strongly encourage you to participate fully in this process and then witness what God can do through each of us.

Expectantly!

The Elders and Staff

Fellowship Bible Church of Northwest Arkansas

Introducing

Release

a study of generosity

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fellowship...

greenhouse
launching pad
training center



RELEASE SMALL GROUP CURRICULUM

LESSON ONE // HUMILITY & GRATITUDE

- day 1: strength in humility
- day 2: love in humiltity
- day 3: exaltation in humility
- day 4: thankful for salvation
- day 5: thankful for God's steadfast love

PART 1 :: CONNECT IN WORSHIP

TITLE:

TEXT:

TEACHER:

PART 2 :: CONNECT IN COMMUNITY

TITLE: Issues of the Heart: Humility & Gratitude
TEXT: Philippians 2:1-11 (Humility)
Philippians 4:4-7
1 Thessalonians 5:16-18
Psalm 103 (Gratitude)

INTRO:

Religion is all about behavior. Following Jesus is all about the heart. Look at these scathing quotes from Jesus, directed at the most religious people of the day, the Pharisees:

“What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are so careful to clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside you are filthy—full of greed and self-indulgence! You blind Pharisee! First wash the inside of the cup and the dish, and then the outside will become clean, too. . . the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man ‘unclean.’ For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man ‘unclean’; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him ‘unclean.’” (Matthew 23:25-27 & Matthew 15:18-20 NLT)

Two character traits that need to be cultivated in our hearts are humility and gratitude. Once we see these qualities begin to grow and develop in our lives, we will see other changes that follow.

belong | What’s the one job at your house that you HATE to do? Is it taking out the trash? Cleaning the bathrooms? Who usually ends up doing that job?

grow | **Read Philippians 2:1-11**

This chapter opens with a laundry list of Christian experiences. Which of these experiences resonates with you? Which have you experienced the most: encouragement, comfort, fellowship with the Spirit, or tenderness and compassion? Share with the group.

What does it mean to consider others better than yourself? What is the difference between living humbly and letting someone take advantage of you?

Verse 5 says, “Your attitude should be that of Christ Jesus.” What attitudes of Christ do you see in verses 6-11? Which of these attitudes do you struggle to emulate?

Can humility be faked? Explain your answer.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

According to this passage, what is God’s will for you?

Which of these three commands is the hardest to obey? Always rejoicing, praying without ceasing, or giving thanks in all circumstances? What makes it difficult?

Read Philippians 4:4-7

Notice that our “prayer and petition” (or “supplication”) should be made with thanksgiving. What are some ways that you can make sure giving thanks is part of your prayer life?

How is thankfulness an antidote for anxiety?

What is the connection between humility and a thankful heart?
Which comes first?

A great way to increase HUMILITY and THANKFULNESS is WORSHIP. When we stop and recognize who God is and who we are, and consider that He even takes note of us (Psalm 8:4) much less cares for us so much that He was willing to die for us, our only response is HUMBLE, GRATEFUL WORSHIP. Spend the rest of your time together prayerfully reading Psalm 103 out loud, pausing to pray and thank God. Close your time by asking God to cultivate a humble and grateful heart in you.

serve | Remember that job that you hate to do around the house? Figure out what a person in your family or workplace hates to do and then do it, considering him/her better than yourself.

PART 4 :: CONNECT TO RELEASE

Humility and thankfulness are heart issues, but what is in our heart is ultimately reflected in how we live. In Mark 7:21, Jesus says, “For from within, out of a person’s heart, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, lustful desires, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. All these vile things come from within; they are what defile you.” (NLT) But He also tells us something interesting about our money; our actions follow our hearts, but what do our hearts follow?

*“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”
Luke 12:34*

Humility and gratitude allow us to release the gift of giving with great joy. Pride actually blocks the grace of giving. The ancient prophet Obadiah writes words that are stinging accurate for us today:

The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rocks and make your home on the heights, you who say to yourself, ‘Who can bring me down to the ground?’ Though you soar like the eagle and make your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down,” declares the LORD. Obadiah 3-4

It is easy for us to think that our material prosperity is due to our own efforts, but this is the deception of pride Obadiah warns us about! Moses reminded the Israelites (and us) about the source of their wealth:

But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today. Deuteronomy 8:18

pray | Lord,
reveal to me those
places that I am
harboring pride and
transform them into
places of humble
gratitude. You truly
are all I need, Jesus.
Thank you for giving
me the ability to
produce wealth.
Give me the grace
to use everything
You have given
me for Your glory,
because only You
deserve it.

**GOD'S CREATIVE
PROVISIONS**

**Experiencing God as
Your Provider**

One of the most amazing discoveries you will make as you begin to more faithfully and generously give to God's work at your church and beyond, is that God will begin to show Himself as your provider in unique and creative ways. While I am not an advocate of the prosperity gospel and the health and wealth religion promoted by some TV evangelists, I have seen that people, who honor God in their giving, experience God's blessings in a variety of ways. Since the Bible clearly teaches that God owns everything, He can be very creative in how He goes about providing for your needs.

Scriptures that have shaped my understanding and experience of God's creative provisions include:

- Proverbs 13:22 a sinner's wealth is stored up for the righteous.
- Ecclesiastes 2:26 God gives...to the sinner...the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God.
- Job 27:16-17 evil people may have all the money in the world, and they may store away mounds of clothing. But the righteous will wear that clothing.
- Isaiah 45:3 I will give you the treasures of darkness, riches stored in secret places.

In these verses and in my experience of walking with the Lord, I have seen that He often "transfers the ownership" of specifically needed items without cost or at significant savings to faithful givers.

Many people think that their needs are met through their paycheck, and not necessarily from God. While God may use a person's wages to provide for many needs, God is so much bigger than a paycheck! A company may be your employer, but God is your true provider.

I encourage you to pray and ask God to lead you to His provisions to meet your needs. The Lord may choose to use your current income, savings, increased income, or He may lead you to the very item you need without cost or at a significant savings. Some ways I have seen the Lord creatively provide beyond a regular paycheck include:

Needed items provided through friends, relatives, neighbors, or other Christians. As people move through the different seasons of life, they often have possessions they no longer need. They are often willing to give away or sell items at significant savings to someone they know could use them.

Inheritances, bonuses, and scholarships. I have known people that have been totally surprised by amounts of money they have unexpectedly received from relatives, employers, or educational institutions.

Retail stores and manufacturers. In today's tight retail economy, there are many sales that will allow you to experience 40-90% off through sales, clearance racks, overruns, returns, floor models, and demo merchandise.

Bankruptcies, estate sales, repossessions, and auction. While you have to know the market value ahead of time, these outlets for merchandise, vehicles, housing, etc. can be great sources for God-given provisions.

Government. There are many ways a government program can be used by God to directly benefit someone.

Consignment shops, thrift shops, and garage sales. Often you can get quality or functional merchandise for 50-95% off the retail price through these sources.

As you become more of a faithful and generous giver, be sure to pray about God's provision for your own needs, and don't be surprised at the creative ways He may supply for you!

GOD'S CREATIVE PROVISIONS

Experiencing God as
Your Provider

**EXCEL IN THE
GRACE OF GIVING**

**Crossing lines in the
sand to give
more generously**

The Bible says in 2 Corinthians 8:7, "Just as you excel in everything...see that you also excel in this grace of giving."

I have discovered that the Lord will draw a new line in the sand for each of us to cross over in order to live more generously and to experience Him more fully. Every step of the way, God calls us to consider the resources He has placed in our hands. Then, He invites us to release them for His work and to trust Him to be our provider. At each point, we may find ourselves fearful and want to hold on to what we have instead of letting it go and trusting God with our needs. In my life, these lines in the sand to become more generous have included the following:

Giving more than I thought I could afford to give. As a young man who had recently come to a personal faith in Jesus Christ, I was prompted in my heart during a church service to put a \$20 bill in the offering plate. Prior to that time, I had never given more than a few dollars. As I wrestled with this prompting, I contemplated putting the \$20 bill in and taking out change! Ultimately, with a shaking hand, I gave the \$20 (without taking change) and in the next few days I experienced God's peace and provision in such a way that I did not regret giving that amount.

Giving even while I was in debt. There was a season in my life when my bills had piled up so high that I had more month than I had money! It was during this time that I was prompted in my heart to start giving 10% of my income to the Lord. This didn't make sense to me since I didn't have enough money to pay my bills and take care of my needs every month. But I decided to trust God and cross over this new line in the sand to live and give more generously. The next time I received a paycheck, the first check I wrote (hesitantly) was a check for 10% to the Lord's work. As I continued to do this, I noticed that I was not as foolish with my money, I had a greater trust in God to provide for my needs, and I began to make progress in paying off my debts. I also joined a Crown Financial Ministries Bible study (www.crown.org) and learned

how to prayerfully develop a spending plan to help me get out of debt completely within a few years.

Giving a large gift that was worth half a year's salary. As a young couple, my wife and I were prompted to sacrificially give a gift from our savings account to help a Christian ministry. At the time, this five-figure gift was worth more than a half a year's salary. As we prayed and discussed this giving opportunity, we decided to write a list of all the things we would be giving up if we gave this gift. We prayed and decided that this was a new line in the sand that God was calling us to cross. Again, with a bit of a shaking hand, I wrote the check. A few years later, we found the list we had written and we were amazed to discover that God had graciously and unexpectedly provided for every item on the list that we thought we had given up. Through this experience we learned that you can never out give God. Another time, the Lord led us to give another gift that was equal to a year's salary.

Giving increased offerings by "Counting Our Blessings". For years, we would sit down on Sunday nights with a pencil and notebook and list the ways God had provided for us over the last seven days (e.g., my main income, my wife's substitute teaching income, unexpected financial income/gifts, discounts on purchases, hospitality/help we experienced, and more). Based on what we recorded, we would give 10% of my expected salary to our church and give 10% or more of the other financial blessings to other Christian causes and needs.

Giving more by limiting our lifestyle. There was a season in our lives when we were making more than we ever dreamed possible. During this time, we felt God's new line in the sand for us was to limit our lifestyle spending so we could increase our giving. We decided that we would limit our lifestyle spending to a specific annual amount and that ALL monies received over this amount would be given 100% to the Lord's work. To do this, we opened up two

EXCEL IN THE
GRACE OF GIVING

Crossing lines in the
sand to give
more generously

EXCEL IN THE
GRACE OF GIVING

*Crossing lines in the
sand to give
more generously*

different checking accounts. The first check book was for our living expenses (a set amount each month) and the other check book was for our increased giving. God ultimately used this decision and allowed us to not only increase our giving, but also for me to accept a senior Pastor position at a salary that was 65% less than we were making.

Giving more by giving higher percentages of our income.

From this booklet, you see that I believe that giving 10% to the Lord's work is the starting blocks and not the finish line of faithful biblical giving. In my own life and in the lives of generous people I've known, I've learned that by giving 10%, it is much easier to obey God's promptings and learn to give higher percentages of income and assets to the Lord's work in the future.

What about you? What "line in the sand" is God calling you to cross at this time in order for you to live a more generous life and excel in the grace of giving?

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RELEASE SMALL GROUP CURRICULUM

LESSON TWO // GRACE & GENEROSITY

- day 1: the grace given us
- day 2: a right response to grace
- day 3: generous God; generous people
- day 4: a caution label on blessings
- day 5: blessed for a reason

PART 1 :: CONNECT IN WORSHIP

TITLE:
TEXT:
TEACH

PART 2 :: CONNECT IN COMMUNITY

TITLE: The Motivation and the Result: Grace and Generosity

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 8:1-9

INTRO:

2 Corinthians 8-9 is the story of 2 different churches. One is in Corinth; one is in Macedonia. One is wealthy; one is poor. One is spiritually stagnant; one is spiritually vibrant. Both were planted (released) by Paul; what was the difference? The Macedonian church had something deep down—something in their heart—that set them apart. This is something God wants us to have and cultivate as well.

belong | Share one thought you had about the “Connect to Release” this past week. What struck you about the issues of humility and gratitude we covered last week?

What’s the most unusual gift you’ve ever received? Or... if none comes to mind, tell about a time when you received a special gift that really surprised you.

grow | Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-9

Paul begins this chapter by commending the Macedonian church for something... and encouraging the Corinthian church to do the same. What’s the quality that the Macedonians have that’s so admirable? Read through the passage and identify the things Paul celebrates in them.

Look at 8:2—“*Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.*”

Tell about a time you witnessed someone giving during a time when “they could least afford it.” What did this sacrifice demonstrate was within them? What did their sacrificial example produce in your heart?

Look at 8:3-4—*“For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints.”*

These are 2 words you don’t often see together—giving and privilege! What do you think caused the Macedonians to see giving financially as a privilege?

The Macedonians “urgently pleaded for the privilege” of giving... they begged for the offering plate to be passed! How did they develop this “get-to” attitude, instead of a “have-to”?

What happens to us when we slip into “have-to” mentality? What are some reasons we lose sight of the Macedonian supernatural perspective about giving & generosity?

Look at 8:5—*“And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God’s will.”*

So at the heart of their generosity was a “giving themselves first to the Lord and then to us...” How does having our hearts rooted in Christ’s generous and sacrificial grace make a difference in our level of generosity?

What happens to our generosity when we lose sight of the abundance of God’s grace?

Hard question—what does the level of your generosity say about your view of God’s grace?

Why do you suppose Jesus said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35)?

What are some of the blessings that come from generous living?
Be specific... practical... and real. (The blessings can be tangible or intangible, immediate or delayed.)

Read 8:7—“But just as you excel in everything — in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us--see that you also excel in this grace of giving.”

Does it surprise you that Paul ranks generosity up there with our faith, speech, knowledge, zeal...? What does this tell us about the priority of giving? And why is it so important?

That phrase “this grace of giving” is a great summary of teaching on generosity found in 2 Cor 8:1-9. The Macedonians had received this grace... and therefore they released it.

Grace and giving are connected in the spiritual life... for at the root of both of them is generosity. God is sacrificially generous with His grace. We who receive it are sacrificially generous with our resources as well. Therefore, a great way to increase the generosity factor in our own lives is to focus on the grace of God. The reverse is also true. A great way to access our understanding of God’s grace is to look at the level of our generosity.

CLOSING:

Take some time as a group to vocalize the grace of God given to us. Through group prayer, fill in this sentence—

“God, thank you for:

Give it plenty of time and be specific and diverse in thanking God for His abundant blessings on your life.

serve | Take this week to do some self-examination of your current level of generosity. What does it say about your understanding and practice of “the grace of giving”?

day 4

a caution

label on

blessings

1 Timothy 6:6-10

A vertical line with a decorative flourish at the top, followed by 18 horizontal lines for writing.

- > notice the text |
- > engage the truth |
- > apply to life |
- > respond to God |

PART 4 :: CONNECT TO RELEASE

PRINCIPLES FOR BIBLICAL GIVING (from 2 Corinthians 8-9)

The example of Macedonia's giving (and Corinth's lack of it) gives some practical how-to's of biblical giving. Work through these principles before your next small group meeting.

pray | Lord Jesus, thank You for the abundance of Your grace in my life. I see it spiritually, physically, relationally, materially, ... I want this grace to transform me. I know it shows in my generosity. Lord, reveal to me what You want me to see about my level of generosity. Where have I been miserly and tight-fisted... with my time, energy, finances...? Where do You want me to increase my generosity? By faith, and by Your grace, I will obey. Amen.

GIVE WILLINGLY:

2 Corinthians 8:3-4 NIV

3 For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, 4 they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints.

2 Corinthians 9:7 NIV

7 Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

GIVE GENEROUSLY:

2 Corinthians 9:6-8 NIV

6 Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. 7 Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

GIVE FAITHFULLY:

2 Corinthians 9:10-11 NIV

10 Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. 11 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.

GIVE REGULARLY:

2 Corinthians 8:10-11 NIV

10 And here is my advice about what is best for you in this matter: Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. 11 Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means.

A few years ago, I heard a man named Steve from California speak at a Christian conference. He told the story about how he and his wife became millionaire givers!

Steve owned a small business and made about \$50,000 a year. He went to a Campus Crusade for Christ conference and heard Dr. Bill Bright challenge everyone in the audience to each give a \$1,000,000 to the Lord's work. After the message, he went up to Dr. Bright and asked, "Obviously, you didn't really mean that my wife and I should be included in the people that will give a million dollars to the Lord's work?" Dr. Bright asked, "How much did you make last year?" Steve said, "\$50,000." Dr. Bright asked Steve how much he gave to the Lord last year. Steve said "\$15,000." Steve thought Dr. Bright would be impressed that he gave more than 25% of his income to the Lord's work. Dr. Bright said, "Well, next year, trust God to allow you to give \$50,000." But Steve said, "That's my entire salary!" Dr. Bright said, "Trust God and if He provides you with the funds, give \$50,000!"

Steve went home and amazingly his little business did well and He and his young family lived on their \$50,000 salary and they gave \$50,000 to the Lord's work! The next year, by faith, they pledged to themselves and the Lord that they would continue to live on \$50,000 but would seek to give \$100,000 to the Lord's work if God provided it. Amazingly, through some unbelievable circumstances and a great testing of their faith, they were able to give \$100,000 that year.

Each year, they continued to live on their basic salary and give their extra income to the Lord's work. And believe it or not, within five years, they had given over a million dollars to the Lord! Sometimes God gives us more income not to increase our standard of living, but to increase our standard of giving.

THE AMAZING
STORY OF A
MILLIONAIRE
GIVER

**JUST LIKE IN
MONOPOLY, IT ALL
GOES BACK IN THE BOX**

***“Naked I came from
my mother’s womb,
and naked I
will depart.”
Job 1:21***

When Charles B. Darrow proposed a new board game called Monopoly to Parker Brothers in 1934, the all-knowing executives rejected it due to “52 design errors”! But Darrow, a true believer, started printing and selling the game himself. The rest is history.

John Ortberg writes of growing up with a grandmother who was a ruthless competitor at Monopoly. She played against her grandchildren and won nearly every time.

But one day young John managed to win. As most kids will do, he made the most of his rare victory; he raked all the play money, tokens and markers toward himself and gloated arrogantly in his triumph.

The grandmother smiled and said, “Just remember, John— it all goes back in the box. All the money, all the hotels and motels and game tokens; at the end of the game, it all goes back in the box!” Source: Men of integrity Magazine,

Realize that everything you have, must go back in the box! You have to leave everything to someone. Isn't it wise to give during your lifetime to the Someone who gave you everything you have? And remember: A shroud has no pockets. And although you can't take it with you, you can send it on ahead!

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LESSON THREE // OBEDIENCE

day 1: faith and obedience

day 2: obedience because of the gospel

day 3: obedience without faith is worthless

day 4: obedience is blessed

day 5: i will obey with all my heart

PART 1 :: CONNECT IN WORSHIP

TITLE:
TEXT:
TEACHER:

PART 2 :: CONNECT IN COMMUNITY

TITLE: Our Response: Obedience
TEXT: 1 Samuel 15:22
John 14:15,21
John 15:14-15

INTRO:

In Session One, we discussed the heart issues of humility and gratitude. Everything flows from the heart (Proverbs 4:23). Then in Session Two we addressed our motivation, which is the limitless grace of Christ, and the result of our changed heart, which is generosity. Tonight we ask the “so what?” question. If we are humble and grateful because of the grace of God that has given us a generous spirit, how do we respond? The answer is that we respond with humble, grateful, grace-filled and generous obedience.

One act of obedience is better than one hundred sermons.

-Dietrich Bonhoeffer

The Bible recognizes no faith that does not lead to obedience, nor does it recognize any obedience that does not spring from faith.

-A. W. Tozer

belong | What motivated you to behave as a child? Was it fear of punishment or hope of rewards? Were you a child who generally followed the rules or were prone to bend and break a rule here and there? Did your parents or teachers have any especially effective “attention getters” to modify your behavior?

grow | In 1 Samuel 15 Saul, the King of Israel, defied God by not utterly destroying the Amalekites as God had commanded him. When the prophet Samuel rebukes him for his disobedience, Saul responds that he was planning to sacrifice the animals he disobediently kept to the LORD. God’s response, spoken through Samuel, is found in verse 22.

Read 1 Samuel 15:22

What is the difference between sacrifice and obedience?

Which follows the other? Why is one more important to God than the other?

Have you ever tried to substitute “sacrifice” in one area of your life for “obedience” in another? Have you ever been caught hiding a sinful motivation behind a spiritual front? If appropriate, share some things about those experiences with your group.

In the New Testament, Jesus redefines what obedience means.

Read John 14:15-21

What commandments is Jesus instructing us to keep? Spend some time in your group reviewing some of the commandments that Jesus gives His followers. (A few might include Matthew 5:44, Matthew 6:33-34, Luke 14:12-14, Luke 9:37-38.)

Based on John 14:21, what are some results Jesus promises us if we keep His commands?

Read John 15:14-15

Do you view yourself more as a servant of God or a friend of God? What do these verses say about that relationship? How can you cultivate a friendship with God that leads to obedience?

How does the shift from servant to friendship with God affect your view of obedience?

Religion says “I obey, therefore I am forgiven.” The gospel says, “I am forgiven, therefore I obey.” –Tim Keller

How does the Good News of Jesus Christ free you to be joyfully obedient?

How does the Good News of Jesus Christ free you to be joyfully obedient? Spend some time as a group discussing this question. Pray for each other for ever-increasing obedience to, and friendship with, Jesus.

serve | This week, look for an opportunity to serve someone else and take it. . .but check your motive! Prayerfully make sure that you are responding with grateful obedience to Jesus and not from a sense of duty or obligation. Then enjoy the freedom of obediently serving to the glory of God!



day 5

I will obey
with all
my heart

Psalm 119:33-40

A vertical line with a decorative flourish at the top, followed by 15 horizontal lines for writing.

- > notice the text |
- > engage the truth |
- > apply to life |
- > respond to God |

PART 4 :: CONNECT TO RELEASE

Once we realize that our freedom in Christ means freedom to joyfully obey His commands, it changes how we view many activities such as service, evangelism and giving. Like our other acts of obedience to the commands of Christ, our giving should be from a joyful and grateful heart, not from a sense of compulsion or obligation. Look what Paul writes to the Corinthian believers in 1 Corinthians 9:6b-7:

“ . . . Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

And when we release this grace of giving, not reluctantly or under compulsion, but from our hearts, look what the Scripture promises us will happen:

“And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.”
-2 Corinthians 9:8

God gives us sufficiency in “all things at all times!” That’s a pretty sweeping statement, isn’t it? What this means for us is that if God lays it on our heart to do something or give a certain amount, He will provide for what He has asked us to do. And the blessings don’t stop there. Paul continues in verses 12-14:

For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission flowing from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. (NASB)

God is glorified in your life by the giving and is glorified by the recipient of the gift. Our submission to God results in a cycle of His glory being increased and magnified! Why is this so satisfying to a child of God? Because increasing His glory is what we were made to do! (Isaiah 43:7) Will we be like David and recognize that for God to be glorified, it has to cost us something?

I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God that cost me nothing. - 2 Samuel 24:24b (ESV)

Whether it is time, talent, or treasure, our obedience to God will come at a cost, but the investment in eternity will result in the satisfaction of doing what we were made to do.

pray | Lord, I
pray that You would
forgive me for
offering You
obedience that
costs me nothing.
Because my
salvation cost You
everything I will
joyfully and
gratefully respond
by giving myself to
You. May my
datebook, my
checkbook, and my
very life reflect that
YOU, Jesus, are my
Lord and Master.

As materialism and consumerism have continually infiltrated our lives in recent decades, many people have drifted from any biblical moorings concerning their Christian giving. Here are 10 biblically-based reasons to make giving 10% or more of your income your highest financial priority in life.

- 1. It is a proven pattern of giving done by Christ followers for many generations. In 1899, a bibliography was compiled of books related to systematic Christian giving. There were over 500 books listed in this bibliography from over 100 years ago, and yet many Christians today do not understand the importance of faithful giving. Scriptures: Genesis 14:17-20, 28:16-22, Leviticus 27:30, Proverbs 3:9-10, Malachi 3:7-15, Matthew 23:23*
- 2. It will help you reverence God more in your life. If you showed me your check book records, I would be able to quickly tell you who or what you feel is important. By giving the best of what you have been given to God, you are expressing your allegiance to Him and you will grow in your respect for the Lord and His working in your life. Scriptures: Deuteronomy 14:23, Malachi 1:6-8*
- 3. It will bring God's wisdom and order to your finances. If I get dressed in the morning and get the first button out of place on my shirt, all the rest of the buttons will be messed up. When it comes to finances, the first button to get in place is your giving. When you get this area in order, everything else follows. Giving is also the only known antidote for "affluenza" (the desire for more things) that permeates our world today. Scriptures: Matthew 6:19-21, 24-34; Luke 12:16-21, I Timothy 6:6-10, 17-19; Ecclesiastes 5:10*

**10 BIBLICAL REASONS
TO GIVE 10%
OR MORE
OF YOUR INCOME
TO THE LORD'S WORK**

10 BIBLICAL REASONS
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4. It will serve as a practical reminder that God is the Owner of everything in your life. By faithfully giving the Lord 10% or more of all you ever receive, you are actively acknowledging His ownership in your life. As someone once told me, "God owns it all and God loans it all." We are not owners, only temporary possessors and managers of what God entrusts to us during our lifetime. Scriptures: I Chronicles 29:11-18, Psalm 24:1-2, 50:10-12, Haggai 2:8
5. It will allow you to experience God's creative provisions. One of the most amazing things about learning to faithfully give to the Lord is the joy so many people have experienced in receiving unexpected blessings in their lives. When you acknowledge God's ownership through your generous giving, you begin to experience His creative provisions in amazing ways. Scriptures: I Kings 17, Proverbs 3:9-10, Malachi 3:7-15, Haggai 1:4-11, 2:15-19; Luke 6:38, Deuteronomy 28, Philippians 4:15-19, Mark 12:41-44
6. It will encourage your spiritual growth and trust in God. There will be times when you will decide to be a faithful giver of what is in your hand, even when you have no idea how you will make it through the coming day, week, or month. But by going ahead and giving to God, your trust in the Lord will grow and you will grow in your ability to see Him provide. Scriptures: Deuteronomy 14:23, Proverbs 3:5-6, Malachi 3:8-10, Haggai 1:4-11, 2:15-19; 2 Corinthians 8:5
7. It will ensure you of treasure in heaven. Jesus encourages you to store up treasure in heaven. The only way to do this is to live generously now. Someone once said, "We can't take it with us, but we can send it on ahead." Scriptures: I Timothy 6:18-19, Matthew 6:19-21, Hebrews 6:10, Ill John 8, I Samuel 30:22
8. It will strengthen the work of Fellowship. Many churches struggle for lack of finances. However, when people in our congregation gain a vision for being faithful givers to God at our church, the whole spirit of our church begins to change -- needs are met, people are cared for, more outreach begins to take place, and long-awaited needs and dreams start to

happen. God-given momentum builds as people honor the Lord through their giving at Fellowship. Scriptures: Acts 2:42-47, 4:32; 2 Corinthians 9:12, 13

9. It will help provide the means to keep Fellowship's staff and missionaries in full-time Christian service as well as equipping so many more. It has always been God's plan that His servants are taken care of by His people. Across America and the world, many pastors and missionaries are struggling financially or are even leaving the ministry because of a lack of adequate finances. Your faithful giving can make sure this doesn't happen among those connected to our church. Scriptures: I Corinthians 9:9-11, 14; I Timothy 5:17-18, III John 5-8, Philippians 4:15-19, Galatians 6:6, Luke 8:3, II Kings 4:8-10

10. It will help complete our indebtedness for building projects, renovations, and improvements. It has been exciting for Fellowship's ministry to grow and facilities to be improved or expanded. But for our vision to succeed, large extraordinary gifts are needed. The Fellowship Foundation, our capital needs and money for improvements only happen with special gifts that are "above and beyond" our normal giving. Scriptures: 2 Chronicles 24:4-14, exodus 35,36; II Kings 12:2-16, Ezra 1:4-6, I Chronicles 29:2-19

10 BIBLICAL REASONS
TO GIVE 10%
OR MORE
OF YOUR INCOME
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**PRACTICAL ADVICE
ABOUT GIVING**

Here is some practical advice for people who have questions, doubts or fears about giving to the Lord's work at Fellowship.

If you are NOT a Christian: Don't worry about giving to God. Instead, realize and accept what God wants to give to you—complete forgiveness, a brand new start, the power to be good and to do good for others, help for your problems, the ability to forgive and a home in heaven. If you recognize your need for these things, pray and invite Jesus Christ to bring these things into your life.

For all Christians: always make it a priority to faithfully support the work of our church. Then give special gifts and offerings to other Christian causes, projects, missions or the needy as God leads you.

If you're fearful about giving 10% or more of your income to the Lord, try a 90-day test: In Malachi 3:10 God invites people to "test Him" in the matter of tithing (giving the first 10% of your income to God's work). Therefore, I encourage people to try a 90-day test. Begin giving 10% of your income to the Lord's work and watch and see if God does not begin working in your life in ways you haven't previously experienced. If you regret that decision OR if you feel you never experienced God's divine help in your finances during this time period, then discontinue the test. However, if you experience God's help, joyfully continue giving 10% or more to the Lord's work.

If you want to begin to actively give to God FIRST: Here are four different suggestions to consider:

- 1) Whenever you get any money, set aside 10% or more to give as the Lord directs.*
- 2) Whenever you put a deposit in your checkbook, write out the first check(s) to God's work for 10% or more.*
- 3) If you track your finances through a book-keeping system or computer program, set up a category for church giving and another one for other Christian causes. Then begin to faithfully set aside 10% or more of your income into these accounts.*
- 4) If you like to handle your finances electronically, consider using myFellowship, the electronic giving option from our church, to faithfully give 10% or more to the Lord.*

If you are married to a Christian, but the two of you do not agree on how much you should give to the Lord's work: See if your spouse will read through this material and/or listen to some of the internet messages at www.MAXIMUMgenerosity.org. Then talk and pray together about a mutually agreeable "testing period" concerning your giving 10% or more.

If you are married and your spouse is not a Christian: Identify any money you have freedom to spend (read Luke 8:3) and set aside 10% or more of this money to give to the Lord's work AND/OR show this material to your spouse and see if you can try the 90 day testing period.

If you are deciding whether to give off the gross or the net of your income: Pray and ask God what He wants you to do. If He prompts you in your heart to give off the gross amount, go ahead and do this, trusting Him with the results. If you don't have a peace about this, begin giving 10% off the net amount for a few months and see what happens. After a few months, if you experience God's creative care in your life, then begin to give 10% or more off of your gross income.

If you're wondering about how much to give to your church and how much to give to other places: A good practice I have used is to give 10% of my main source of income to my local church (i.e. my main income goes to support the work of my main source of Christian fellowship and teaching). Then I use 10% or more of all other income sources and unexpected blessings to help fund other Christian needs and opportunities that God brings into my life.

If you have children at home: Help your children set up a place where they can set aside "God's portion" of any money they receive (i.e. allowances, work projects, gifts of money, etc.). Have them give at church, to missions, and/or to help people in need.

If you have "fallen behind" in your giving to God's work: whether knowingly or accidentally, you will never regret the decision to "get right" in this area. Review your financial records from the past several months and pray about "making up" the amount you have missed. One elderly lady in her 90's sent a tithe check to a church office with the note, "I want to be prayed up, paid up, and ready to go!"

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PRACTICAL ADVICE
ABOUT GIVING

RELEASE SMALL GROUP CURRICULUM

LESSON FOUR // REWARDS

- day 1: reap eternal life
- day 2: rewards for endurance (1)
- day 3: rewards for endurance (2)
- day 4: a crown that will last
- day 5: rewards from Jesus

PART 1 :: CONNECT IN WORSHIP

TITLE:
TEXT:
TEACHER:



PART 2 :: CONNECT IN COMMUNITY

TITLE: The End Result: Rewards
TEXT: 1 Corinthians 3:10-15
Revelation 22:7-13
Matthew 6:19-24

INTRO:

In our first three sessions, we have considered the issues of our hearts related to humility and gratitude. We moved on to our motivation (grace) and the result (generosity). Next, we looked at our response to this grace: obedience. In our final session, we ask, “So what is the end result?” The end result of an obedient life is a reward!

God will give to each person according to what He has done.

—Romans 2:6 (NIV)

belong | Have you ever collected a reward? Have you ever returned a wallet or found a pet and been rewarded for it? Is there any situation where you would offer a reward to someone else? What would that situation be and why?

grow | On the subject of eternal rewards, Randy Alcorn wrote the following on his blog, “The Eternal Perspectives” (randyalcorn.blogspot.com):

We have so emphasized the idea of never acting in our own self-interest, that we ignore the continuous appeals of Scripture to be motivated by the fact that following our Lord is not only right, but smart. And sin is not only wrong, but stupid.

How is following the Lord smart? Alcorn goes on to say:

“This isn’t health and wealth gospel—which focuses on short-term pay-offs. In fact, sometimes it may seem like sickness and poverty gospel; yet in the end, God always rewards what has honored Him.”

So what does the Bible say about rewards?

Read 1 Corinthians 3:10-15

What does Paul say is the foundation upon which we build? Why is this foundation so critical?

What do you notice about the building materials Paul compares our works to in verse 12? What are some examples of work that we do in Christ that would be considered gold, silver and precious stones? What is the “Day” referring to in verse 13? (Review 2 Thess. 1:7-10)

It might first appear that the reward mentioned in verse 14 is eternal life, but look at verse 15. What does this tell you about the rewards mentioned in this passage?

Read Revelation 22:7-13

What promises do you see in this short passage?

What do the titles Christ gives Himself in this passage tell you about His ability to deliver the reward He is promising?

Read Matthew 6:19-24

How does Jesus contrast earthly treasures with heavenly treasures?

What are the treasures in heaven to which Jesus refers in verse 20?

How does this passage relate to the heart issues from back in Session 1?

Are you uncomfortable with the idea of serving in view of receiving rewards? Discuss this topic in your group. Consider the reward of hearing the Master say “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

(Matt. 25:23)

serve | This week, look for an opportunity to encourage someone else with the hope of final rewards. Help someone you see laboring for the Kingdom to remember that their future reward will be great.

PART 4 :: CONNECT TO RELEASE

pray | Lord,
forgive me for
clinging to the
perishable rather
than trading it for an
imperishable crown
of righteousness.
Jesus, we long for
the day when we
will hear the trumpet
sound and we will
put on our
immortality. Thank
You for purchasing
that immortality for us
by Your work on the
cross. Help me to be
steadfast, immovable,
and always
abounding in Your
work, knowing that
my labor is not in vain!

Take a look at this famous quote from American Missionary and Christian martyr, Jim Elliot.

“He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”
– Missionary Jim Elliot

What did Jim Elliot hope to gain? The answer is found in one of Paul’s letters. Look what Paul writes to the church at Corinth in 1 Corinthians 15:50:

I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

We are born with perishable flesh; from the moment we are born, we are dying! But Paul has news for us:

Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. (1 Corinthians 15:51-52)

The mystery Paul refers to is that in the moment of the Rapture, we will exchange our dying flesh for a new body that is imperishable. That’s right, our new body will never wear out, get sick or die. He goes on to say, in verse 54, that we will “put on immortality.” We will have traded the old worn-out and dying version for a new, perfected and ever-lasting version.

What these promises mean to us is that when we labor for the Kingdom, when we sacrifice and give of our time, talent and treasure to the cause of Christ, we are parting with the perishable today, but we are exchanging it for something imperishable.

And Paul closes this section of his letter with this word of encouragement:

Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. (1 Corinthians 15:58)

A number of years ago, I discovered a wonderful verse in I Corinthians 16:2, "on the first day of each week let each of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper." At first, I didn't understand how the verse could apply to my life. But my wife and I began a Sunday evening practice of "looking back and writing down" how God provided for us in the previous seven days. Each week, we discovered there were many ways that God provided for us outside of our normal income. We began giving 10% of my main income to our local church and we then started a "Blessings fund" that represented 10% or more of the myriad of blessings God creatively brought into our life week by week.

At the end of the first year, even though my main income only brought in \$15,000, I discovered we had given \$1500 to our local church and an additional \$2500 out of our "Blessings fund" to other Christian causes. This meant that God had blessed us with \$25,000 of blessings during the past year that was over and above my \$15,000 salary!

We did this for several more years and discovered that each year God doubled and tripled what we were able and willing to give to the Lord's work, because we counted our blessings. Here are the lessons we learned and practiced that helped us live a more joyful and generous life:

1. Plan a time each week where you will begin to write down God's provisions from the previous week in a "Blessings notebook."
2. When you meet together, think back over the following areas and write down anything that comes to your remembrance:

Main Income: If you were paid during the week, write down that amount. For us, we gave 10% of this amount to our local church.

Additional Income or Unexpected Cash? Write down any cash gifts, overtime pay, bonuses, second salary, moonlighting, investment returns, sale of any possession, refunds, inheritance, etc.

COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS

**A pathway to
more joyful and
generous giving
and living**

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People's Hospitality? Meals, lodging, or entertainment that others gave to you or paid for the cost.

Special Help or Assistance? Help with car, house, equipment repairs, free babysitting, etc.

Discount or Sale Items? Any money saved on discounted clothing or household items, garage sale/thrift shop savings, discounts on recreational activities, etc.

Purchase of New Possessions? When my wife and I were buying a major item or a luxury item, we sometimes included the cost of these items in our blessings fund in order to give an additional 10% or more to the Lord's work.

1. Write down the financial value for each item or (very important) write down the amount you "would have been willing to spend" for the item. For example: a family member gave me a \$1000 radial arm saw. I would have never been able or willing to afford a \$1000 tool like this, but I might have "been willing to spend" \$200 on a used radial arm saw at a garage sale. So, in this example, I put down the value of the blessing at \$200 (not \$1000). Therefore, I ended up giving an extra \$20 to the Lord's work, not an extra \$100.
2. Add up the value of the total number of blessing items for the week and take 10% or more of the total and decide where to give it or set aside the week's amount in your notebook or put the money in a special place or account and consider this your "blessings fund".
3. Faithfully give your church 10% or more of your main income. Then begin to joyfully and generously use your "Blessings fund" to help support missions, missionaries, special projects and needs, building programs, the needy, Christian workers and organizations.

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Notes



Notes

a four week study

Generosity and our participation in generous living
is not predicated solely on the work of an individual believer
or on the teaching of the church's leadership,
but rather on God's work in our lives.



RECYCLED PAPER

 **Release**