



Abundant Generosity



Study Guide

Abundant Generosity Study Guide

Introduction

I have never written a bible study guide on Christian Giving before. One reason is that I don't find it easy to ask people to give their time, talents, spiritual gifts and money. Another reason is that in my church tradition, the amount of time and money we give to God's work is not talked about very much. Today's direct mail and email newsletters can overwhelm us with requests for money from many worthy organisations. Sadly, there are also examples of bad theology and exploitative practice where preachers promise people that God will bless them with prosperity if only they give more, or the TV evangelist promises to pray for them if they send in money. However, I have come to appreciate that giving our time, talents and money generously is a discipleship issue that reflects our spiritual maturity and the depth of our relationship with our generous God. So this is a discipleship series that seeks to develop our appreciation of God's abundant generosity to us, so we can be generous to others.

The four weeks look at:

1. **God's Abundant Generosity** – God is generous to us prompting us to be generous and good stewards of what God has given us.
2. **God has given us Time** - Being generous with our time and using our time well
3. **God has given us Spiritual Gifts** – Being generous with our gifts and using them to serve others
4. **God has given us Money** – Being generous with our money and using it wisely

As you go into the studies can I encourage you about several things?

- Pray as you begin, expecting God to speak to you through the Bible and through the other members of the group.
- I have included a Psalm at the start of each study to help create an atmosphere of worship and appreciation for who God is and what God has done.
- Our model of group bible study is “mutual discovery together”. The leader isn't the teacher - the Word of God is the teacher, and we all discover things together. Leaders: Please ask the questions, and then let others speak!
- Some questions are Observation (what does the Bible say) or Explanation (what does it mean). We need those things, but make sure each week you get on to Application questions (how the Bible applies to our lives today).
Make it personal!

Abundant Generosity Week 1

God is Abundantly Generous

Worship God by reading this Psalm aloud:

(Ps 36:5-9) ⁵Your love, O LORD, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies. ⁶Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your justice like the great deep. O LORD, you preserve both man and beast. ⁷How priceless is your unfailing love! Both high and low among people find refuge in the shadow of your wings. ⁸They feast on the abundance of your house; you give them drink from your river of delights. ⁹For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.

God as creator: Genesis 1

1. What is one of your favourite outdoor places and why? (beach, or mountains, or ...)
2. What does Genesis 1 tell us about God's nature? For example, count how many times the word "good" occurs in Genesis 1.
3. How does it feel that God has given us this creation to look after and enjoy?

God as Saviour: (Eph 2:8-10) ⁸For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— ⁹not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

(Eph 3:16) ¹⁶I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being,

4. What is the gift of God in these verses?
5. What other things has God given us?



God's call to be Generous:

(Luke 12:32-34) ³²“Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. ³³Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. ³⁴For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Abundant Generosity Week 1

God is Abundantly Generous

God's Call to be Generous cont'd

(1 Tim 6:17-19) ¹⁷Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. ¹⁸Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. ¹⁹In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

6. What is there in your family history that tends to make you careful with money and save money rather than spend it? What are the positives and negatives of such thinking?
7. What is there in your family history that tends to make it easy for you to spend money and be generous to others? What are the positives and negatives of such thinking?
8. Talk about ways that you could try to be more generous with your time, talents or money.
9. What are some of the things that stop you giving to others?

(Phil 4:14-19) ¹⁴Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. ¹⁵Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; ¹⁶for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need. ¹⁷Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. ¹⁸I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. ¹⁹And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

10. Thank God for the wonderful promise in Phil 4:19. What do you need right now? Verse 19 begins with "And..." which links the promise to what the Philippians had done earlier. What had they done?



Abundant Generosity Week 2

God has Given us Time

Worship God by reading this Psalm aloud:

(Ps 145) ¹A psalm of praise. Of David. I will exalt you, my God the King; I will praise your name for ever and ever. ²Every day I will praise you and extol your name for ever and ever. ³Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom. ⁴One generation will commend your works to another; they will tell of your mighty acts. ⁵They will speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty, and I will meditate on your wonderful works. ⁶They will tell of the power of your awesome works, and I will proclaim your great deeds. ⁷They will celebrate your abundant goodness and joyfully sing of your righteousness. ⁸The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. ⁹The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made. ¹⁰All you have made will praise you, O LORD; your saints will extol you. ¹¹They will tell of the glory of your kingdom and speak of your might, ¹²so that all men may know of your mighty acts and the glorious splendor of your kingdom. ¹³Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations. The LORD is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made. ¹⁴The LORD upholds all those who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down. ¹⁵The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time. ¹⁶You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing. ¹⁷The LORD is righteous in all his ways and loving toward all he has made. ¹⁸The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. ¹⁹He fulfills the desires of those who fear him; he hears their cry and saves them. ²⁰The LORD watches over all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy. ²¹My mouth will speak in praise of the LORD. Let every creature praise his holy name for ever and ever.

“I haven’t got time!” Have you ever said that? Yet God gives us all 24 hours a day, 1,440 minutes, 86,400 seconds – no more, no less. What controls the way we use our time? I have spoken to retired people who tell me they are busier now than they have ever been. Our culture seems to value being busy as a good thing. If you ask someone how their day is going, how often do they answer, “Busy”? Next time someone asks you if you are having a busy day, try saying, “I try not to be too busy.” See what response you get.

Charles Hummel was director of faculty ministries for InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. In the 1960s he wrote a booklet called “The Tyranny of the Urgent” which became a classic. After looking at all the demands on Jesus’ time he wrote: “Yet His life was never feverish; He had time for people. He could spend hours talking to one person, such as the Samaritan woman at the well. His life showed a wonderful balance, a sense of timing. When His brothers wanted Him to go to Judea, He replied, “My time has not yet come” (John. 7:6). Jesus did not ruin His gifts by haste.”

Abundant Generosity Week 2

God has Given us Time

Read "A Busy Day in the Life of Jesus" Mark 1:21-39

1. What were some of the pressures Jesus faced that day?
2. Can you think of something you would like to do, or have been asked to do, for yourself, or for others, or with God, which you have put off until you are less busy? When will that day come?
3. What did Jesus do to step back from the busyness? V35
Compare (Lk 5:15-16) ¹⁵Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. ¹⁶But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.
4. What resulted from Jesus' time in prayer? (v37-38)
5. How do you make time for this?
6. The big, hard and exciting priority question is: "What is God calling you to do?"
7. There are a great many needs in the world, but the need in itself isn't a call.
8. What might you have done if the disciples said to you "Everyone is looking for you." (v37)
9. What areas of your life are channelled into pleasing people, or even just pleasing yourself, rather than pleasing God?

Gordon McDonald in his excellent book "Ordering your Private World" gives these 4 laws of 'unseized time'. (Time that is not planned or allocated to important things)

(i) **Unseized time flows towards my weaknesses:**

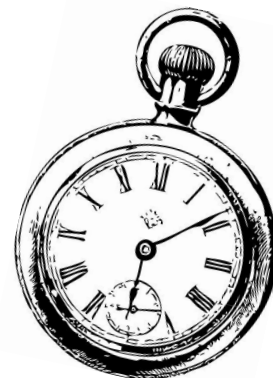
(ii) **Unseized time comes under the influence of dominant people in my world.**

(iii) **Unseized time surrenders to the demands of all emergencies.**

(iv) **Unseized time gets invested in things that gain public acclamation.**

God has generously given us 1,440 minutes every day. Is God calling you to be generous with some of that time for:

- your spouse or family
- your work
- a ministry at church
- a person in need
- a community group
- prayer and enjoying time with God



Abundant Generosity Week 3

God Gives Us Spiritual Gifts

Worship God by reading this Psalm aloud:

(Ps 112) ¹Praise the LORD. Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who finds great delight in his commands. ²His children will be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright will be blessed. ³Wealth and riches are in his house, and his righteousness endures forever. ⁴Even in darkness light dawns for the upright, for the gracious and compassionate and righteous man. ⁵Good will come to him who is generous and lends freely, who conducts his affairs with justice. ⁶Surely he will never be shaken; a righteous man will be remembered forever. ⁷He will have no fear of bad news; his heart is steadfast, trusting in the LORD. ⁸His heart is secure, he will have no fear; in the end he will look in triumph on his foes. ⁹He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor, his righteousness endures forever; his horn will be lifted high in honor. ¹⁰The wicked man will see and be vexed, he will gnash his teeth and waste away; the longings of the wicked will come to nothing.

There are many places in the Bible that show us how God empowers us by his Holy Spirit. Paul's prayer for the Ephesian Christians (and for us) in Eph 3:16 is "that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being." It is the Holy Spirit who draws us to Jesus, makes us aware of our sinfulness and our need for the Saviour, shapes us to be more like Jesus, and gives us spiritual gifts (power and abilities) that we can use to serve others. Some of these spiritual gifts are quite familiar to us like hospitality, teaching, administration, leadership, helps, etc. Others are more obviously supernatural like prophecy, speaking in tongues, miracles, etc. But the common thing with all spiritual gifts is that God generously gives them to us by his Holy Spirit, to enable us to serve others in ways that are much more powerful and wonderful than we could ever do on our own.

Read one of the most well-known Bible passages about spiritual gifts:

(1 Cor 12:1-11) ¹Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant. ²You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. ³Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus be cursed," and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit. ⁴There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. ⁶There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. ⁷Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. ⁸To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, ¹⁰to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.

Abundant Generosity Week 3

God Gives Us Spiritual Gifts

1. Paul warns about the spiritual/religious experience they had before they were Christians isn't the same as the Holy Spirit. (v2) What is a distinguishing sign that the Holy Spirit is at work? (v3)
2. What does it mean to you to declare, "Jesus is Lord?" What about "Jesus is *my* Lord?"
3. Who gives these spiritual gifts and is at work in and through us? (v4-6)
4. What is the purpose of these gifts? (Why are they given?) (v7)
5. Have you ever done a course or questionnaire that helped you identify the spiritual gifts God has given you? Often people close to us can help us recognise them.

Wired2Serve is a course that can help with this....contact the church office 489 6308 or email office@etchurch.co.nz for more information



6. Do you think your gifts are being used at work, in community groups and in Christian ministries? Is there something new or different that you think God may be calling you to do?

Spend some time in prayer, asking for a fresh filling of the Holy Spirit for each person. Praying for the gifts God has for them so they can be fruitful in generously serving others.

(Luke 11:9-13) ⁹“So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ¹⁰For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. ¹¹“Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? ¹²Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? ¹³If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

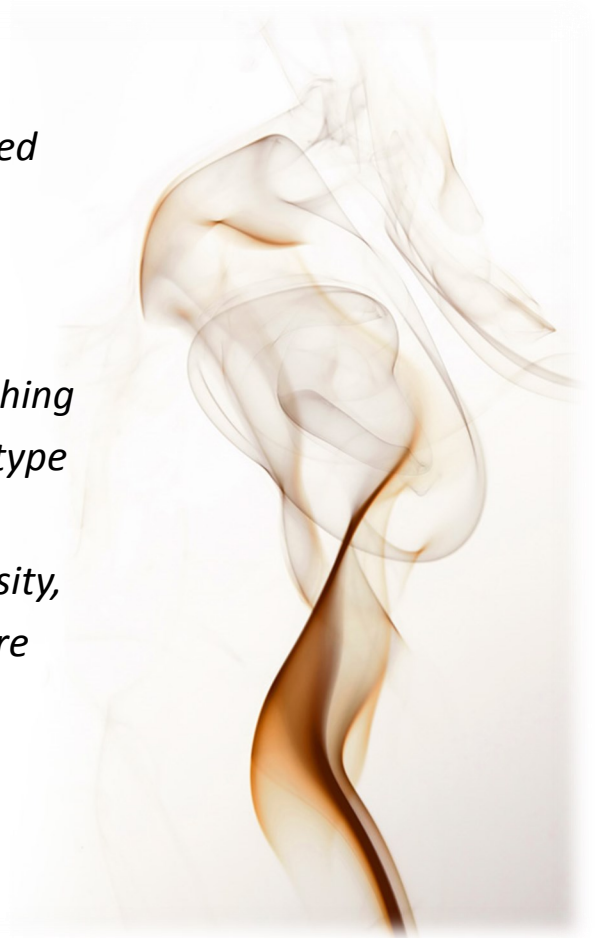
Abundant Generosity Week 3

God Gives Us Spiritual Gifts

How do we pray for the Spirit? There is no defined formula, but some biblical principles are:

- Repent: Turning away from sin and doing anything we know that is wrong. (Acts 2:38)
- Obey: Do what the Lord told us to do. (Acts 5:32)
- Thirst: Thirst for God and God's righteousness (Matt 5:6)
- Ask: (Luke 11:1-13)

We are safe only when the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, only when our intellects are indwelt by the loving Fire that came at Pentecost. For the Holy Spirit is not a luxury, not something added now and again to produce a deluxe type of Christian once in a generation. No, he is for every child of God a vital necessity, and that he fill and indwell his people is more than a languid (faint) hope. It is rather an Inescapable imperative!
(A W Tozer, *The Divine Conquest*, p.103)



Abundant Generosity Week 4

God Gives Us Money

Worship God by reading this Psalm aloud:

(Ps 73:1-26) ¹Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. ²But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. ³For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. ⁴They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. ⁵They are free from the burdens common to man; they are not plagued by human ills. ⁶Therefore pride is their necklace; they clothe themselves with violence. ⁷From their callous hearts comes iniquity; the evil conceits of their minds know no limits. ⁸They scoff, and speak with malice; in their arrogance they threaten oppression. ⁹Their mouths lay claim to heaven, and their tongues take possession of the earth. ¹⁰Therefore their people turn to them and drink up waters in abundance. ¹¹They say, "How can God know? Does the Most High have knowledge?" ¹²This is what the wicked are like— always carefree, they increase in wealth. ¹³Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence. ¹⁴All day long I have been plagued; I have been punished every morning. ¹⁵If I had said, "I will speak thus," I would have betrayed your children. ¹⁶When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me ¹⁷till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny. ¹⁸Surely you place them on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin. ¹⁹How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors! ²⁰As a dream when one awakes, so when you arise, O Lord, you will despise them as fantasies. ²¹When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, ²²I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you. ²³Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. ²⁴You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. ²⁵Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. ²⁶My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

Money can be a touchy subject. We don't want anyone to get the impression that the church just wants their money. And yet the Bible talks a lot about money. Wealth is a generous gift from God and we are to be good stewards of it. But Jesus warns that it can take the place of God if we love money too much.

(Matt 6:24) ²⁴"No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.



Abundant Generosity Week 4

God Gives Us Money

*I used to think, when I was a child, that Christ might have been exaggerating when he warned about the dangers of wealth. Today I know better. I know how very hard it is to be rich and still keep the milk of human kindness. Money has a dangerous way of putting scales on one's eyes, a dangerous way of freezing people's hands, eyes, lips, and hearts. (Ronald Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, p.33)*

*Am I right in saying that materialism is our predominant sin? Even though no Christian would say money is God, I believe we are guilty of worshipping it. I believe that materialism is about to bring the judgement of God in a horrendous form on the West. (John White, *Money Isn't God*, p.15)*

Read 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 with expectancy and curiosity.

This is not a timeless list of "how to" about giving and receiving money. It is from a particular place and time in history. But like all Scripture, there are principles and themes that help us handle rightly the money God trusts us with.

1. What is the model behaviour Paul urges the Corinthians to follow? (2 Cor 8:9)
2. How much did Paul say the Corinthians should give? (2 Cor 8:12 and 9:7)
3. What are the attitudes behind the giving that Paul encourages them to have?
4. How much should we give to God's mission on earth? Although the Old Testament calls God's people to give a tithe (10%) (Malachi 3:6-12)- and this can be a helpful guide for Christians- I believe giving is a principle of Spirit-led generosity, rather than a simple law to be enforced. As soon as we try to make a tithe legalistic, all sorts of questions arise:
 - a. Is it 10% of gross or net income?
 - b. Is the 10% supposed to be the money we give to God's mission through the local church, or does it include the money we give to support missionaries and other Christian projects?
 - c. What happens if your business makes a loss? When we were in a rural parish I remember one farmer saying, if his farm made a loss for the year, and he had to borrow money from the bank for his living expenses, he would borrow an extra 10% so he could tithe to God's mission.
 - d. Who owns the remaining 90%? Everything actually belongs to God, and we are simply stewards of it. Jesus criticised the Pharisees for being obsessed with tithing, yet neglecting the justice and love of God. (Luke 11:42)

Abundant Generosity Week 4

God Gives Us Money

5. What is the objective of this gift Paul is asking for? (2 Cor 8:13-14)
6. How do you think we are doing in helping the poor and bringing equality?
7. What are some of the things that make you reluctant to give money away?
8. How does 2 Cor 9:8-11 help you to give generously? What reassurance does it offer?
9. Is anyone comfortable sharing the process they use to decide what to give away?



John Wesley's Story:

John Wesley was a famous 18th Century open air preacher and theologian who, along with his brother Charles, founded the Methodist movement.

While at Oxford, an incident changed his perspective on money. He had just finished paying for some pictures for his room when one of the chambermaids came to his door. It was a cold winter day, and he noticed that she had nothing to protect her except a thin linen gown. He reached into his pocket to give her some money to buy a coat but found he had too little left. Immediately the thought struck him that the Lord was not pleased with the way he had spent his money. He asked himself, Will thy Master say, "Well done, good and faithful steward"? Thou hast adorned thy walls with the money which might have screened this poor creature from the cold! O justice! O mercy! Are not these pictures the blood of this poor maid?

Perhaps as a result of this incident, in 1731 Wesley began to limit his expenses so that he would have more money to give to the poor. He records that one year his income was 30 pounds and his living expenses 28 pounds, so he had 2 pounds to give away. The next year his income doubled, but he still managed to live on 28 pounds, so he had 32 pounds to give to the poor. In the third year, his income jumped to 90 pounds. Instead of letting his expenses rise with his income, he kept them to 28 pounds and gave away 62 pounds. In the fourth year, he received 120 pounds. As before, his expenses were 28 pounds, so his giving rose to 92 pounds.

Wesley felt that the Christian should not merely tithe but give away all extra income once the family and creditors were taken care of. He believed that with increasing income, what should rise is not the Christian's standard of living but the standard of giving.

Responding to God's Abundant Generosity

Our response to God's generous love and grace is to gratefully give our whole selves back to God. Part of your spiritual growth is to prayerfully review how you give of your time, abilities and spiritual gifts, and money to God's mission on earth. We can all contribute something in each of these areas, according to how God has blessed us. On the last Sunday of this series there will be a response form to give each of you an opportunity to review how you are serving and giving. It will help leadership see how helpful the Abundant Generosity series has been and show us how God is answering our prayers to resource His mission through East Taieri Church.

There will be space to indicate if you want to take new steps in giving your time and spiritual gifts to a particular ministry area, and if you want to increase your financial giving.

There are many opportunities for serving God through East Taieri Church. You can see these on our website, and we will list them on the response form at the end of the series.

Our theme for 2017 is Inspire – Lift Up Your Eyes. This includes some big, bold steps toward our vision that:

We will be a thriving church, responding to God's grace and passionately living out our faith, wherever we live, work and play. Together we will work alongside others to develop thriving communities where people feel connected, known, loved and valued.

You can be a part of these bold steps:

- The Ravi Zacharias visit to Dunedin.
 - Inviting people and taking them along.
- The Journey to Easter
 - Helping create a display
 - Hosting during an opening time
- Alpha 2017 – Invite the Nation
 - Inviting Friends
 - Supplying Food
 - Leading a group
 - Helping with set up, technology, music, etc.
- Our Next Fresh Expression – a new way of doing church
 - Joining a team to make this a reality
- Youth Ministry
 - Joining the leadership team
 - Helping mentor a young person
- Parenting Courses
 - Hosting one of our Toolbox courses providing suppers or morning teas
- Children's Holiday Programmes
 - Joining the team
- Missions Trips
 - Joining or supporting those preparing for one of our three planned short term mission trips.
- South Island Ministry Conference 15-18 May (a nationally recognised event)
 - Helping with preparations, set up, welcoming, food, catering, pack down, ...

These will be successful as we pray and give generously of our time, talents and treasure!

