

Week 4

What is God Calling Me to Give?

Small Group:

Why and what are they:

The purpose of small groups is to grow in the faith, to fellowship with believers, to encourage and be encouraged, and to discern the word of God in our life that we might live with purpose in our quest to be made in the image of God.

Small groups provide

1. Community: “None of us is supposed to live the Christian life alone. We gain strength and help from others
2. Intentionality: Our purpose is to become better disciples of Jesus Christ.
3. Accountability: We need others to ask hard questions about our prayer experience, temptations and struggles, and plans for spiritual growth. ¹

A few rules:

1. **Confidentiality is crucial.** What is said in small groups stays there unless permission is given to share. You want to foster safe places to grow in the faith.
2. **Give:**
 - a. encouragement as often as possible
 - b. advice, once in a great while
 - c. reproof, only when absolutely necessary
 - d. Judgement, NEVER ²



¹ Graybeal/Smith 1999, p. 9

² *ibid.*

Gather:

In person or on Zoom, use this time to catch up with each other. If this is the first time with each other, share names, inquire about one another. Be curious (not nosy)

Share:

Share how you have seen God at work recently. Has he brought peace in the midst of trouble, healing, used you to be generous or kind, or has someone been generous or kind to you, etc.

Prayer:

Use the following prayer or have someone open up in prayer.

Lord Jesus, we bring our life before you this day that we might discover the depths of your love, experience your presence, be encouraged by your Spirit, and be humble enough to hear your word for our life. We come as individuals and community to become the people you have called us to be. Amen

Lesson: What Is God Calling Me To Give?

Recap and Overview

Discipleship involves **CALLING** on God, **LISTENING** when God speaks, and **RESPONDING** to God's direction.

Stewardship is discipleship. Stewardship is about being caretakers of what God has given us in order to enrich our lives, our environment, and the lives around us **to reflect the Kingdom of God**. Our resources are our **time, talent, and fruit of our labor**. Our **life** is our #1 resources. No matter who we are, the amount of talent we have, the circumstances we are born in, our mental and physical capabilities, we all have the **ability and responsibility** to be good stewards of our life.

Together Read: Matthew 6:19-21

19 "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Watch Video: 19 minutes

Self Reflection:

What do you treasure and how is your life centered around gaining that treasure?

Discuss:

If we are not paying attention to what our treasures are, more than likely others will fill in the blank and our lives will end up serving that treasure. It is said that if you want to know what your treasure is, what you truly value, look at your checkbook ledger and calendar.

1. What do you think of that last statement? Do you find it true? Why or why not?

Most of us in the Christian Faith have been taught the principle of giving a tithe, which is 10% of our income. Most of us don't do it. Some think it not possible, some are legitimately broke, some think it a scam. We question its intent and think it legalistic. Yet, giving and generosity are topics that are abundant throughout the scriptures. God is good and he wants good things for us then it must not be a scam and there must be something to giving.

In the video, Rev. Williams quoted the evangelist Tony Campolo saying we don't sing "I surrender 10%" rather we sing "I surrender all". If we believe God to be needy, stingy, miserly, and vindictive, it would make sense to be cautious. But we believe God to be good, generous, and loving.

Some say that they don't give because they don't trust their particular church. My response is, if we are holding back giving from one place are you giving to God elsewhere and if not what then is keeping you from using that money generously in another place?

2. Why do you think we are hesitant in our giving and generosity?

Rev. Williams pointed out to the laws of sacrifice in Leviticus and rightly called us to ask the question, "why would God ask for the best and not the left overs"? Why is scripture about first fruits and grains and the strongest livestock (the main currency then). He goes on to make the connection that if you were ranching and farming you would want the strongest to breed, not the reject cow.

The answer that is repeated over and over is that God wants us to rely on him, to trust in him, in all things.

So giving the best, leads us to not just have a faith based on platitudes and declarations, it leads to the phrase Rev. Williams uses "Practical Trust"

3. What did you think of Rev. Williams' use of "Practical Trust" and how do you see that at work in our lives today? What did you think of Pastor Cory's statement of "you will only see miracles if you live in a way that requires them"

4. What does it look like to trust God and to plan your life around committing it all to God?

What about when you don't have a lot of money? Genesis 1 talks about us being made in the image of God. That we are called to be stewards of creation. That means we are supposed to work in such a way that we are, as Williams said, Co-Governors with God. Working with him to cultivate life until his return. That means we are called to have a

“Contribution Mindset”.

Romans 8, Paul writes:

35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, **39** neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This isn't just to make us feel good, but to say, in Christ, we are more than conquerors. We are contributors, we are agents of God, agents of life.

So no matter our circumstance we are empowered by Jesus to be cultivators. So be intentional about your giving, even if it is a little. ***Working toward the tithe is about liberation, not about a burden of dogma.***

5. What do you think about the idea of tithing and giving as a function of being Co-governors of God. Working with Jesus to achieve places of grace.

We tend to have this idea that because we are embarrassed by our little we will wait until we have a lot and then we will give. Rev. Williams says, “Don't wait to give ‘some’ until you can give ‘more’”.

C.S. Lewis wrote in Mere Christianity, “

“I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare. In other words, if our expenditure on comforts, luxuries, amusements, etc, is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little. If our charities do not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say they are too small. There ought to be things we should like to do and cannot do because our charitable expenditure excludes them.”

6. What do you think of this quote? Do you think giving should pinch us a little? Is the trust and miracle waiting in the ‘pinching’? How might living differently than our consumer culture be a witness to those around us?

Thomas Jefferson wrote and we have interpreted the American Dream as Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. We have often come to define this as Fame, wealth, power. Yet, the Kingdom of God defined by Jesus is often in conflict with this pursuit or at least how it's been interpreted so often as fame, power, and wealth.

Ecclesiastes 5:10

Whoever loves money never has enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income. This too is meaningless.

Jesus tells us in Matthew 6, not to lay up treasures on earth.

7. How does giving and tithing help us re-orient our lives around God?

Rev. Williams quoted Pastor Andy Stanley of the mega church, Northpoint, in Atlanta, as saying "Giving is something God wants FOR you, not FROM you."

Pastor Guy connected giving with being close to the heart of God. When asked "Why God cares" he said, "My soul has a need to give".

What is God calling me to give? Is about asking a question of "How can I imitate the image of God?" How can I be immersed in the heart of God.

In order to know how to be like God we have to understand God's character and then imitate it. Rev. Williams quoted John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that He GAVE"

With the understanding that our giving begins where we are. Such as the Widow's mite in Luke 21, where the woman with little means gave in faith what she was able, and the rich men, although they gave more money, gave less in comparison to her faith and sacrifice,

8. What do you think of Pastor William's statement "We are not going to get close to the heart of God unless we are joining where God's heart is as a giver"

This coming Sunday we are asking people to join one another in our annual Stewardship Sunday in which we offer our pledges for the upcoming year. These pledges, while they help us tremendously in budgeting, are important for that but even more importantly about helping us be intentional about Cultivating a Contribution Mindset. Using percentage giving as the starting point and working our way toward a tithe is a practical benchmark to help guide us in this spiritual discipline of Practical Trust.

9. How can you use this as a way of practicing the image of God? Is it difficult to put this in practice? How can we help and encourage each one of us to live into this practical trust?

Rev. Williams reminds us that God's desire is to

1. Save Us
2. Redeem Us
3. Restore Us

The churches call is to create a community that embraces this mission. Ultimately fitting into what scripture points to as being the meaning of life:

Growing in Christ Likeness, being fully restored in the image of God. All three of our questions are leading us to ask how we can live into that restoration.

9. **Discuss this idea of the meaning of Life and how it clashes with what the world tells us. How do these three questions open your life to hearing that? Does the idea of giving stop with money? What are ways you can live Practical Trust?**
10. **You all will receive pledge cards in the mail lat this week. We'd like you to pray over them and talk with your family and see if God is calling you to a new kind of Practical Trust this year. Together we will learn new ways to be a light in this community a beacon of hope, and how to spread the good news of our Living King, Jesus Christ!**

Read Timothy 6:6-12

6 But godliness with contentment is great gain. **7** For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. **8** But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. **9** Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. **10** For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

11 But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. **12** Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

Take 5 minutes to Read silently through this verse a couple of times. Write down at least 3 observations. What words 'jumped out' at you? What sentence spoke to you? Did anything seem odd or challenging, or inspiring?

11. **Share with each other some observations you made?**

12. What does pursuing righteousness look like?

We are always saying yes to something that forms our thinking. The question you have to ask yourself is what do you spend the most time on and how is it forming your heart and your mission. Does it allow you to hear God more or less?

13. What are things we say “yes” to that keep us from hearing God? What are the things we say “yes” to that help us hear God

Knowing where God is calling us to be is directly related to us staying connected to Jesus. Keep your eyes clear and your ears open.

Socrates said that the unexamined life is not worth living. Scripture is very clear that we need to bring our life before God

This series is about asking 3 questions of God to help us in our daily examen. Scripture is full of prayers in which the people call upon God especially when they realize that doing things the way they had been doing them wasn't working anymore. We need to follow their example if we want to be renewed and have a transformation of the mind.

The Three Questions:

1. Who are you calling me to be?
2. Where are you calling me to go?
3. What are you calling me to give?

Remember, when the people of scripture walked well with God, they:

1. Called Out to God
2. Listened to God
3. Responded to God

Here are 3 prayers from the book of Psalms I would encourage you to memorize and include them in your daily examen. Have someone, or several someones, look up and read these verses.

Psalm 119:133-136

Psalm 119:105

Psalm 139:23-24

Homework:

1. Reflect on these verses.
2. Take inventory of your habits and if they match your goals
3. Make a commitment to adjust your habits to meet your goals.
For example:
 - a. **Reading scripture more**
 - b. **Praying more**
 - c. **Blessing someone this week**
 - d. **Listen for God's prompting and acting on it**

14. **Some of you shared how we could pray for you and your goals last week, how did it go?**

15. **How can we as a group best pray and support you this week?**
(this is for each person to answer as they are comfortable)

16. **Share any prayer requests in the group**
Remind everyone that what is said in small group is confidential unless permission is given to share. Respect each others privacy and build a safe place in which you each can grow in your faith in mutual encouragement and accountability.

17. **Choose someone to pray for the group**

Next Sunday Bring or Mail in your pledge cards when you receive them. Pray with your family

Footnotes:

Smith, James Bryan. 1999. 'A Spiritual Formation Workbook: Small-group resources for nurturing Christian growth'. HarperCollins Publishers.