

MIND YOUR OWN BUSINESS – WEEKS 1 - 3

DAILY THOUGHTS AND SMALL GROUP GUIDE
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Mind Your Own Business

Week 1

Day 1

*And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.
Philippians 4:19*

Money. It's something that we all want (or want more of) and yet it is something that we rarely talk about. We don't discuss our salaries. It is impolite to talk about how much you spent on your house or car. It's even a sign of weakness to ask for it when you have too little to go around. We are self-conscious about our bank accounts, we are jealous of other people's possessions, we spend more than we have and buy more than we need. We avoid conversations about money, no matter how much it dominates our thoughts and our motivations. "Just mind your own business," we might say when the conversation turns toward money. It is interesting to note that Jesus didn't suffer from this sort of cautious regard when it comes to money. Jesus talks about money all the time.

There often seems to be the impression that churches are concerned about money but Jesus wasn't. Yet, as we look at the life of Jesus, we see that he spoke about money over and over again. Jesus talks about taxes, working for your wages, storing treasure, greed, and even counting the cost before an endeavor. One time he pulls money out of the mouth of a fish to pay a tax! (Now that's a pond where I'd like to go fishing.) One of the first things that we need to understand is that although we are hung up about money, Jesus wasn't. We avoid conversations about money, Jesus didn't. Money can make us uncomfortable; Jesus suffered from no such embarrassment.

This actually should be very comforting. Money is something that we worry about, that we work for and fight over. Money keeps us awake at night and gets us up early. It's nice to know that Jesus is not oblivious to money nor does he turn a blind eye to what it means in our lives. Jesus is not unaware of money; he is not ignorant or uninformed about how the world we live in works.

The next three weeks of devotionals will focus on money. This might be an uncomfortable subject or a sensitive spot to some of us. Yet, it is vital that we understand what Jesus said about money, how he reacted to money, and what it means for us today.

God knows and cares about your life. God cares about the things that hurt you, that distract you, that worry you, and that pull you far from Him. This includes money.

What is your general response to a conversation about money? Nervous? Uncomfortable? Self-conscious? How do you feel about the fact that Jesus knows and cares about money?

Mind Your Own Business

Week 1

Day 2

As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

"Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.'"

"Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy."

Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.

Mark 10:16-22

A rich young man comes to Jesus. It's hard to know exactly what he is looking for or what he expects from this meeting. Maybe he was advised that this 'teacher' was someone whose advice he should seek. Maybe he was just accustomed to being respected because of his wealth and wanted to get his ego stroked by someone like Jesus. Maybe he knew that something was missing in his life. Whatever the case, a rich young man comes to Jesus.

"What must I do to get eternal life?" the young man asks. What task must I accomplish, what deed must I finish, and what thing must I buy to have everything? This is at the heart of the question. This young man is used to buying whatever he needs or wants. He is a mover and a shaker in the world. Now he wants to know what's the next step.

"Follow the commandments," Jesus replies.

"Which ones," the young man asks. Does this sound like a negotiation to you? Is he trying to find out where he can cut corners, is he just trying to show off or is he really unsure about what commandments Jesus is referring to? This young man should have known the commandments. He would have been taught these things in school since he was a small child. He should have known what was expected of him. But still he asks, "Which ones?"

"Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother,' and 'love your neighbor as yourself.'" Jesus here spells out some of the commandments with which this young man would have known. Yet, notice which ones that Jesus addresses. Jesus refers to commandments that are about our interactions with other people. Jesus knows that we can

sometime let money and possessions get in the way of our relationships. Sometimes it's more difficult to love our neighbor like ourselves when our neighbor is richer or poorer than we are.

But this young man assures Jesus that he has kept all these commandments since he was a boy (which seems unlikely, but we'll take his word for it). There must be something else missing in this young man's life that he senses because he continues and asks, "What do I lack?"

The Bible says that Jesus looked at the young man and loved him. "If you want to be perfect, sell your stuff, give it to the poor and come follow me." The young man doesn't answer, he just turns and walks away, which, in the end, is the only answer that matters.

Jesus knew what money and possessions had become for this young man. They had become a barrier. This is why it is so hard to believe that this young man loved his neighbor like himself, because his money and his possessions were a barrier to his love. It was a barrier that kept him from loving other people and it was a barrier to his loving of God.

This young man would rather have his money without God than God without his money. Money becomes sin when it becomes a barrier to God. Jesus tells this young man to follow him, to give up what he thinks is his security, what he thinks is his future and to make Jesus his security and his future. It is here that money becomes a danger, when it keeps us far from God and far from our neighbors. And we don't need to have much money to build a wall with it. All we need is enough to look at our neighbor as different than we are. All we need is enough to feel secure in ourselves.

Do you look at your neighbors differently because of money, whether you have more than they do or if they have more than you? Has money ever been a barrier to a friendship? Have you ever put your trust in money before you put your trust in God?

Mind Your Own Business

Week 1

Day 3

Then Jesus said to his disciples: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?"

"Consider how the lilies grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well."

Luke 12:22-31

Worry. It's an odd sort of thing, to take time and energy thinking over and fretting on things that might or might not happen. The more you tell yourself not to worry the more your mind fixes firmly in that direction. There might be nothing that we worry over more than money.

Am I going to have enough money to pay all the bills? How am I going to pay for college, or a car, or a house, or retirement? At the end of the month is there going to be any money left?

These are the sorts of questions that steal our peace and keep us nibbling on our fingernails. These are the sorts of questions that we pretend aren't there but that linger underneath everything in our lives. We might wonder if God even cares about these practical issues.

Jesus addresses these sorts of worries head on. Look at the birds, he says. They do not plant farms, they do not shop at Wal-Mart, and they do not store up the food that they find. Yet, God provides food for them. Or think about the flowers. They do not have fashion designers, do not shop at the best stores, and they do not spin the finest fabrics. But look at how beautifully they are dressed. They have a greater brilliance than even the richest king.

So do not worry, Jesus says, because God knows you need food to eat and clothing to wear. God knows what you need. God knows the practical issues of your life. God cares about them and knows the things that you worry about.

But you can almost see the people listening to Jesus shaking their heads. It sounds so good, so desirable. But it also sounds so impractical. After all, we are used to worrying (and, not to brag, we've gotten pretty good at it). If we're not supposed to worry, what *are* we supposed to do.

It almost seems that Jesus expected such reactions because he doesn't just say not to worry but gives something to replace our worry with it.

“But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.”

Don't spend your time and energy and life on worry. Don't throw away minutes of your one and only life on worry. Spend it on seeking God and his kingdom. Use your life chasing after God with a sort of recklessness that almost naturally eliminates worry. Spend your minutes and hours seeking the kingdom of God. Burn your energy and effort hunting out God. Use all of it, all of you, finding and following God.

Let God take care of your worry. Our job is to follow after God and to let God take care of all the rest. This is how you stop worry, not by trying really hard to worry less but by replacing worry with seeking. When we realize that it is not our job to worry, we will find the freedom to seek God fully.

Besides, if we really are following after God with all we have, there won't be much time left to worry anyway.

What role does worry play in your life? Do you find yourself worrying over money? What is one thing you can do in your life to replace worry with seeking God?

Mind Your Own Business
Week 1
Day 4

Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny.

Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on."

Mark 12:41-44

As he looked up, Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. "I tell you the truth," he said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."

Luke 21:1-4

The plate is passed, just as it is every week. From hand to hand it moves down the row in its normal, slow procession. And with each person it grows heavier as money is placed inside. Each and every week this collection takes place, each person putting money in or not as they see fit. Some make a display of their giving, placing in large sums with a sort of understated fanfare. Other sheepishly sneak in their modest amounts, hoping than none saw how little it really was. Others let the plate pass altogether, either defiantly or skeptically passing it on to the next person. And then there are those that find that the plate is really an occasion to worship, an occasion for joy and for celebration.

The same has been true for ages. Even in the days of Jesus a collection was taken to fund the functioning of the temple. One day, Jesus, sitting where the collection was taken in the temple, watched as a variety of people came to give to the temple treasury. Several people placed in large sums of money. Can you picture the scene, a crowd of people milling around in what to us would look more like a marketplace than a church. One after another, people toss in bags full of coins into the collection, each clanging against the stone, the sound reminiscent of a winning slot machine.

Into this scene walks a poor widow. She does not click and clang with a money bag overflowing with coins. Instead she has only two small coins which are almost worthless. That is, they are almost worthless to anyone else. To her, it is all the worth she has. To her these two coins represent everything.

She places these two coins, these two worthless coins that are worth everything to her, into the collection.

Jesus is so impressed with this act of giving that he calls his disciples over to brag about this poor widow.

“Look at her,” Jesus says, “she has done an amazing thing. Look at all these people, giving out of their wealth. All these people give money that they don’t even notice is gone. They give money, but it is not a sacrifice, it is a show of importance. This woman, she has given out of her poverty all she had to give. This is true giving; giving that comes out of the heart.”

Never mistake what God is interested in. God is interested in you more than your money. God is more worried about your heart than the size of the check you write to the church. God wants all of you, your heart and mind and life. If you are willing to give these things than money is given naturally.

In the end, the amount that is given is almost secondary. What God wants is your heart, and one sign that He has it is that we are willing to sacrifice for the things that matter to Him, that we support and care for the kingdom of God. This is the lesson of the widows giving. This is why Jesus brags about her. I hope and pray that he will brag about us in the same way.

How does the story of the widow fit with your understanding of giving? Is it consistent with your experience at church before? What would it look like if your giving was a reflection of your devotion to God?

Mind Your Own Business
Week 1
Day 5

"Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell 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. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Luke 12: 32-34

Did you ever played hide and seek as a child? This classic game is a pretty straight forward one. One person is left behind counting while everyone else scatters to find places to secret themselves away in. Under tables, in closets, and up trees, children have found some creative places to hide. If you want to find all the nooks and crannies of a place, ask a group of children to play hide and seek there. Yet, there was one thing that always made hide and seek a much more difficult game. You could only use the really good hiding places once. You can't hide in the same place over and over again. Some of the first places a person looks when seeking is all the good hiding spaces that have been used in the past. Strangely, this cannot be said about our lives as adults.

Where is your heart? This oddly ambiguous question can be answered in many different ways. First, your heart is most likely located in the upper left quadrant of your chest, merrily beating away as it distributes blood throughout your body. A second way of answering this might be to name some of the people that you love in your life, a wife or husband, a boyfriend or girlfriend, a child or parent. A third way of answering this question might be to talk about your interests, your hobbies or the activities that you are really passionate about. All of these answers are legitimate, but each person might answer differently. So where is your heart?

Jesus is addressing this very issue as he speaks to his disciples about money and worry. And what he says is that if you really want to know where your heart is, check your bank statement. This is meant

literally – check your bank statement. Want to really know what’s important to you? Check what you’re spending your money on. Want to know what things have a priority in your life? See how much you invest in it. Want to know what people and relationships are worth the most to you? Look at which ones you are using your hard earned resources on.

This might not seem like a very moving or stirring thing to realize. This is also probably not very shocking. But, this is a truth of our lives.

It is so easy to talk the talk but the core of our heart is found when we look at what we spend money on. This is the case with Community Christian Church as much as it is with any individual; we spend money on the things that are at the heart of who we are. Where our hearts are needs to be in line with where God’s heart is. Then we will find our resources, our spending and our giving in line with the vision, plan and dream of God.

Where is your heart? If you are looking at what you are spending your money on, where does God and His kingdom fit into the picture?

Mind Your Own Business Week 1 Small Group Guide

Open (Answer 1 or 2 of these questions as time permits):

1. There are tons of reality TV shows with huge grand prizes. Which one of these shows would you be most willing to go on or which one do you think you could win?
2. What would be the first thing you would buy if you won a big jackpot in the lottery?

Think about it:

3. Money is a hot topic in our society. What are some of the prevailing attitudes about money in the United States? Which of these attitudes do you agree with and which ones do you disagree with?
4. How do you decide what you are going to buy and what you’re not going to buy? What are some of the factors that you consider?

Bible: Read Matthew 6: 25-34

5. All of us at some point have worried about money. Most of the time this worry is about meeting the everyday needs of life. What is your reaction to this passage dealing with worry and everyday needs?
6. What role does worry play in your life? What would your life look like if you worried less?
7. Jesus tells us to replace worry with seeking after God. What is your response to replacing worry with looking for God? What could this replacement look like in your life?

Mind Your Own Business
Week 2
Day 1

Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet.

Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God."

When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. Then the young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him.

About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?" "Yes," she said, "that is the price."

Peter said to her, "How could you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also." At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband.

Acts 5: 1-10

This is a weird story, there's just no getting around it. The early church would often pool their resources in an attempt to help those who were in need. We see this same thing happening in this story in Acts. Yet, this story is different from the others we read in the book of Acts about giving.

A man named Ananias decided to sell his land. You can almost see his thinking process. Everyone else is selling their land or liquidating their assets and giving them to help others. There was a culture forming in the early church, a culture of giving. But Ananias didn't understand what was really taking place here. He wanted to get some recognition. He wanted to get some attention. So Ananias and his wife Sapphira decided to get some gratitude and attention for their generosity. They sell a plot of land and give a portion of money to the church, but they tell them it was the whole amount.

So what's the problem here? Are we required to give all our money to the church? Certainly not. Even the leaders of the early church say this to Ananias. This land was yours before and the money was yours after you sold it. You can do what you want with it, you were not required to give it all to the church. The problem is Ananias wasn't giving to the church because he wanted to use his money to worship God. Ananias wanted to use his money to worship himself.

It is an easy trap to fall into, I think. I think it is easy to want people to be noticed for the good things we do. But that is not why we give money to the church. When we put money in the offering at CCC on Sunday, we are not doing it because it makes us feel good (even though it might). We are not doing it to gain attention or to draw notice to how generous we are. We are doing it because we really want our possessions to bring glory to God. I know it sounds trite. I know it sounds kind of churchy. But in the end, when we give our stuff to God, we are saying that God is more important than our stuff. When we give our stuff to God quietly, without drawing attention to ourselves, then we are saying the real reward for our generosity is not some accolade we gain here, but something more.

In the end, Ananias and Sapphira were giving their money to the church because it served their own purposes. They lied about their giving so they would look better. They were trying to gain status and prestige within the church. They did not examine their hearts before they gave so that they might see their motives were all messed up. May it not be so with us. May we give our stuff to God with clean hearts and with the right motivation; to glorify God and to help his Church. These are the reasons we give.

**Have you ever done something out of the wrong motivations because of money?
What is the difference between giving that pleases God and giving that does not?
What does giving look like in your life?**

Mind Your Own Business

Week 2

Day 2

Read Acts 8:9-23

I have heard it said that everything is for sale, you just have to find the right price. If your house isn't for sale and someone walked to your door and offered you three times what its worth, you'd consider it. If you are really hungry but someone offers you \$50 for your cold-cut from Subway, you'd sell it. Everything's for sale, it's just a matter of finding the right price.

Through the history of the church there have been things that have been identified as heresies. A heresy is something the church has clearly identified as being against the teachings of the Bible but were being practiced in the church. One of these heresies was called Simony.

During the Middle Ages the leadership of the Church became entwined with secular political leadership. Positions in the church, which were becoming positions of real power in the political system, were positions that many people coveted. People began to pay money to the church to get assigned to positions within this emerging system. There were also people who would buy and sell the sacraments (such as communion) and other

services of the church. For example, someone might pay a member of the clergy to do a baptism the Bible would speak against because of the faith of the person being baptized. Both of these are examples of Simony, named after Simon the Magician from Acts 8.

There is an impression sometimes that the offering at church is more like purchasing an item or service than anything else. I don't think we articulate it very clearly, not even in our own minds, but sometimes we hope our money will buy us some kind of favor. Let us be clear, people sometimes give money to the church because they want to buy salvation and the gifts of God. This is certainly not the case for everyone, but this attitude can underlie our giving.

God is not for sale. The gifts of God are not for sale. If you have ever been told differently, let me state it bluntly, you can not use your money to get to heaven. You will notice that Simon the Magician in Acts 8 was someone who believed and was baptized. This was not someone who hadn't heard the teaching and was outside of the community of faith, he was a baptized believer. But there was something missing and he knew it, he did not have the gift of God's Spirit. And Simon wanted to buy it.

The response of the Apostles, the original followers of Jesus, was to make it clear to Simon that his heart was not right with God. Simon was giving for the wrong reasons, he wanted to buy what was not for sale. He had missed that God's gifts are good gifts that can only be giving freely.

Our hearts need to be right as well. If we are giving money to the church it is not to gain the good gifts of God. If this sounds elementary, I assure you it is not. But it is essential. Our gifts to God are not given to receive God's gifts in return. God is not for sale.

What is your mindset when you give money to the church? How is giving to the church different from buying an item or service? What difference does it make why you give money to the church?

Mind Your Own Business

Week 2

Day 3

Now about the collection for God's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.

1 Corinthians 16:1-2

I went out to eat the other day with my wife, and we had a fantastic waiter. He was polite. He was prompt. Our drinks never got lower than half-full and our bottomless chips and salsa were truly bottomless. When we needed something, he was there, willing to help. My wife and I tipped him well for his work.

Unfortunately, this was a rare experience for us. We've eaten out before, and the waiter or waitress was not good. Drinks were left empty for long stretches. They would disappear when we needed something. They were rude or abrupt. I don't even want to talk about the chips and salsa. Needless to say, these did not receive as large of a tip.

When we give money to the church we can sometimes think the same way. What has the church done for me lately? Well, today was a good service. I really liked the sermon, I thought it was funny. And the songs were good today. I thought the coffee was extra tasty this week, and I didn't have to sit behind a pole. I guess with all that in mind, I'll tip them well this week.

Or maybe you didn't like the sermon this week. The songs were not your personal favorites. Maybe the coffee tasted a little off, and you were forced into one of the 'obstructed view' seats. Well, I guess they don't get a very good tip this week.

The problem with tipping is that it's a spontaneous kind of thing based on your personal perceptions at the end of the meal. My wife and I did not have a set amount in mind that we were going to give to our waiter. We didn't go into the restaurant with it already determined whether we were going to be generous or cheap that given day. Everything came down to how happy we were with our service.

Paul, the writer of 1 Corinthians tells us this is not the way we should give to the church. We do not give to the church in a spontaneous act determined by how happy we are or

how well everything went. We are to give an amount that we have set aside beforehand. Giving is not something that we waffle back and forth on because of our own moods. It is something that is set aside before hand according to our incomes. Notice that the giving is according to our incomes. It is something that has been thought about, calculated, and decided upon not on Sunday morning but ahead of time.

We want you to enjoy the services. We want you to think the sermons are relevant and touching. We want the music to be stirring and encouraging. We want the coffee to be top notch. But we do not want your giving to be a reflection of these things. More to the point, God doesn't want your giving to be this way.

What is your attitude toward giving to the church? How does the 'tipping' mindset influence your giving to the church? Do you set aside a predetermined amount of money to give to the church? How might this change the way you give?

Mind Your Own Business
Week 2
Day 4

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

Galatians 6: 9-10

Have you ever run a marathon? Yeah, me neither. There is a certain amount of training that is involved in preparing for a marathon, namely, a whole lot. If it wasn't for all the running that it took, I might be interested in trying to run a marathon. But every time I have run in the past, I get weary of it before too long. I run for several days, excited at the prospect of my new training regimen. Then after a week my energy begins to lag, my trips to run become more of a drudgery than a pleasure. The next step, of course, is to stop taking steps at all, to stop running altogether.

It is easy to grow weary of things that are difficult. Ask anyone who is in or has been in school. Even the best classes, the ones that you enjoy and look forward to, can grow tiring. Or think about anyone who has tried to learn a skill, such as how to play an instrument. It can be fun to *think* about playing an instrument, but it is an entirely different thing to have the patience and discipline to *learn* how to play one.

The same is true with anything that is difficult in life. One thing that can be difficult is doing what is good. We can start off so strong, excited at the prospect of doing what is good, what is right. We can be thrilled at the onset, but before too long we begin to grow fatigued.

Paul, the writer of Galatians, wants to encourage us. He knows how difficult doing good can be. He suffered much for doing good and had plenty of chances to stop. Paul was arrested, beaten, and mocked. He was shipwrecked, abandoned, and persecuted. Paul knew what it meant to grow weary. But Paul never gave up doing what was good.

It seems that when we are most tired and most weary we turn our eyes inward. We focus on ourselves. It is more so when we grow weary of doing good.

So I also want to encourage you. This isn't about money, not really. It's about generosity and kindness. It's about using the opportunities that we have to help those around us. It's about working through the weariness that will someday place its long fingers on each of us.

The thing is this, if you talk to someone who has trained for a marathon, who has passed all their classes, who has learned how to play an instrument, they will all tell you that the effort was worth it. All of them will tell you there were moments when they wanted to quit. But they didn't. And it was worth the effort.

I want to encourage you to keep doing what is good and right because it's worth it. It will be hard sometimes, but if we continue, we will become more and more the people we were made to be. Never miss an opportunity to do what is good and to be generous to those around us.

Have you ever grown weary of doing what is good? How does doing good, especially when we are growing weary, help us to become the type of people God wants us to be?

Mind Your Own Business

Week 2

Day 5

And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. 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. 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 we urged Titus, since he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. 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.

2 Corinthians 8: 1-7

Have you ever had someone compliment you in front of others? It can bring a mixture of emotions, both embarrassing and pleasing. But more than the compliment itself is the person that gives it. If it is a person that I respect, admire and look up to that gives the kind word, the compliment can be a balm to the soul. In 2 Corinthians, Paul, the author of the letter, is bragging on people whom he hopes will become an example to others.

“I want you to know about some people who are doing it right,” Paul is saying. “I want you to know about a church that has touched my heart and I hope touches yours.” And of all the things that Paul could brag about, of all the qualities that churches seek to attain, Paul picks out generosity.

“They were in a difficult spot, suffering gross maltreatment. And what was their response? They were overflowing with joy, with the sort of joy that is simply contagious. Even though they were poor in the extreme, their joy welled up into generosity. They gave all they could afford and even more. They begged us to allow them to take part in the work that was taking place, pleaded to be allowed to be of service to other believers. And I want you to know about them.” Can you almost feel Paul’s excitement as he writes this? “These are amazing people,” Paul is saying, “let them encourage you.”

“And I know,” Paul writes, summarizing his point, “that you excel in many things. You are faithful, you are refined in speech and have the best education. You are honest and

sincere in your lives. Your lives are marked with love, especially love for us. There is one thing you should be sure that you are straining for, one thing that you should put effort into attaining and it is this, that you are generous. Be sure you excel in the grace of giving.”

What about us? What about you? What sort of letter would Paul write about us as a church, about you as a person? Could he brag about us, using us as examples to help encourage others? Or maybe we need the encouragement. Wherever you are in life, let this be an encouragement to either begin to cultivate a life of giving or to encourage us to continue in such a life.

What role does giving play in your life? What would it look like to live a life that excels in the grace of giving? What would a church look like that was full of such people?

**Mind Your Own Business
Week 2
Small Group Guide**

Open (Answer 1 or 2 of these questions as time permits):

1. What is the best gift you have ever received?

2. What is the best gift you have ever given?

Think about it:

3. What are some characterizes of someone who is generous?

4. In what ways is it difficult to be generous in our culture?

Bible: Read 2 Corinthians 8: 1-7

5. What role does giving play in your life?

6. What would it look like to live a life that excels in the grace of giving? What would a church look like that was full of such people?
7. What sort of letter would Paul write about you (as an individual) and CCC (as a church)? Would he be able to boast about your generosity? In what areas of giving would he likely need to encourage you?

Mind Your Own Business
Week 3
Day 1

Then he (Jesus) said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

Luke 12:15

It comes at us from all angles. We read about it in magazines. We see it on TV. Our neighbors and coworkers talk about it. It's almost as if we're surrounded. Greed is all around us. Yet, as much as we might believe that this is a new phenomenon, it is not.

Jesus warns his followers to be on guard against greed. The Greek word that used is here for greed is *pleonexia*, which means an insatiable desire for more. This doesn't limit itself to wanting more money or possessions alone, but refers to any uncontrolled desire for more. It's easy sometimes to point the finger at others in the realm of greed and miss that all of us are susceptible to its touch. Jesus warns us to be on guard.

But how? How do we keep on guard against greed?

Jesus tells us to *horate*. Horate is a Greek word that is translated here as "watch out" but it can be understood a little differently. Normally when we think of "watch out" we think of looking outward for an invader, for something or someone who isn't welcome. The Greek word horate can also mean something else as well, to observe oneself. It doesn't mean

only looking outward but also inward. While we are keeping guard against all sorts of greed we need to look keenly inward at ourselves.

What does this all mean for your life? If you were to take an inventory of your life, an internal audit you might say, would you find greed hiding within you? In the end, the number of possessions we own does not measure our lives. This is why such an internal check is vital. Consider this the light on your dashboard telling you to get your engine checked. Take some time today to examine yourself, looking for any hints of greed.

Do you have any hints of greed in your life?

Mind Your Own Business
Week 3
Day 2

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 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. As it is written:

"He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever."

This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

2 Corinthians 9: 6-9, 12-15

There's just no way around it, Paul, the writer of this letter, is fundraising. The members of the church in Jerusalem are starving. Paul is unashamedly asking for money from the

church at Corinth to supply for this need. Yet, one thing that you'll notice is that Paul's theology and faith doesn't change while he is fundraising, it is the same. Everything is still about God, about living lives that are marked by thanksgiving and joy, and generously serving others.

Perhaps you've heard the phrase "God loves a cheerful giver," but maybe you get the impression that he'd take a grouchy one too. Paul is saying that this isn't the case. God wants people to give out of the joy of our hearts. The Greek word used here for "cheerful" is *hilarion* from which we get the word hilarious. While we might not normally think of giving money to church as hilarious, it paints a picture as to the mindset of someone who pleases God in his or her giving.

The point is this, we should be giving in such a way that we rejoice at the prospect of worshipping God in a tangible way. It doesn't matter how much we have or how little. What matters to God is that we worship him with our money in a cheerful (almost hilarious) way. The money that we give not only supplies for the needs of others but also shows our thanksgiving to God.

It is through the gifts that we give that others see and feel the grace of God. The good gifts God supplies are often made more real and tangible by the generosity and kindness of Christians. Through this giving we live out the love of God, are obedient to the gospel of Jesus, and share our generosity with others.

Are you a cheerful giver when you give your offering to God? What would it look like for your giving to become more of an act of worship?

Mind Your Own Business

Week 3

Day 3

The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters.

Psalm 24: 1-2

Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, O LORD, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all.

1 Chronicles 29:11

There is one perspective we need to avoid in our lives. It's an easy one to fall into if we're not paying attention, but that only makes it more dangerous. It's a perception that pervades our society, is touted by celebrities, and has become the American way. It is the perception that we are self-made people, and that we've earned everything we have.

The Bible speaks to this. We might want to believe we've earned everything we have and everything we are, but the Bible tells us something different. We have to begin with the perspective that everything was created by and belongs to God. God created everything (including money and economies and possessions in general). Everything belongs to God. So if God created everything and everything belongs to God, what can we give him that he doesn't already own? What do you give a God who has everything? What would it mean for our giving if we began with this perspective?

You see, the thing is this: God's bank account isn't larger after the offering than it was before it. God is not richer because of our giving. Don't get me wrong, in order for the church to function it needs the money we give. But God is not wealthier because of it.

I hope we never forget that God already owns the things we offer him as an act of sacrifice and worship. We must remember everything we are and everything we have and everything we give belongs to God. We merely have it on loan.

Our perspective on this is crucial. If we truly believe God owns everything, then it changes the way we think about our possessions, our bodies, our relationships, and our generosity.

How would the perspective that God owns everything change the way you give?

Mind Your Own Business

Week 3

Day 4

Ever since the time of your forefathers you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you," says the LORD Almighty.

"But you ask, 'How are we to return?'

"Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me.

"But you ask, 'How do we rob you?'

"In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse—the whole nation of you—because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it. I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit," says the LORD Almighty. "Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land," says the LORD Almighty.

Malachi 3:7-12

Are we robbing God? It's an odd question, I'll admit, but one that's worth investigating. While this passage speaks directly about the tithes and offerings given to the church, it also speaks about something broader as well. Are we robbing God? If we think all the earth is ours to do with as we please, then I'm afraid the answer is 'yes,' we are robbing God. If we think that we own our possessions and our lives, then the answer is 'yes.' If we live as if God has no right to our stuff, then the answer is 'yes.'

This is becoming an uncomfortable conversation, isn't it?

Yet, here we find not only a conversation we might want to avoid but also an amazing challenge. This is the only passage in the Bible where God invites us to put him to the test. If we can break our own stranglehold on our possessions, if we acknowledge that God owns everything, and if we can learn to honor and praise God through our giving then God has a promise for us: God will bless us beyond what we can imagine.

Let me make it clear that this is not a formula for becoming rich. This is not a means of turning your 10 dollars into 10 million dollars. The blessings God has to offer are often less concrete and much more important than money. Blessings from God mean that we begin to live our lives within the love and grace of God, and it begins to change everything. When we live within God's blessings, life becomes a sweet gift instead of a daily drudgery. It's a hard thing to explain, but just ask anyone who has known the blessings of God and they'll agree, it makes all the difference.

The word tithe simply means tenth or $1/10^{\text{th}}$, and it refers to God's desire that one tenth of our possessions be given to God's purposes. This is not some kind of 'temple tax' or church obligation but is something we do cheerfully for the work of God. Tithing is a joy, a privilege, and an act of obedience toward God. And God has blessings waiting for those who are obedient to him.

What are some reasons people don't give a tithe to church? What does this promise from God about tithing mean for you?

Mind Your Own Business

Week 3

Day 5

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

John 3:16

If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?

1 John 3:17

John 3:16 might be the best-known portion of the Bible. It's read in church, there are inspirational posters with it printed on it, and you can even see it held up on a sign during sporting events. Yet, this passage might not strike you as having anything to do with money. Since it doesn't say anything specific about money, maybe it's easy to miss that this passage actually has something to say about our giving to God.

This verse makes the unmistakable connection between God's love and God's giving. The very nature of love is to give. Parents give to their children, not because it benefits the parent to do so but because of love. Husbands and wives give to each other not for their own gain but because of love. God gave his son to die for us, not because we earned it or because it benefited him, but because of love. The Bible tells us that God is love (1 John 4:8). It is who he is. Because God is love, God gives.

When the love of God is in us, we give the same way he does. In fact, we are invited to give specifically because God has first given to us.

What does it mean, then, if we are not giving, if we are not generous? What does it mean if we see other people in need but we don't help, even though we have the means to do so? What if our lives are not marked by generous giving? If we have the means to help but do not, how can the love of God be in us?

It is a difficult thing to hear, a hard and painful truth, but it is a truth. If we do not live with the same generosity that God has for people, then we need the love of God to dwell in us more.

In what ways can the love of God dwell in you more?

**Mind Your Own Business
Week 3
Small Group Guide**

Open (Answer 1 or 2 of these questions as time permits):

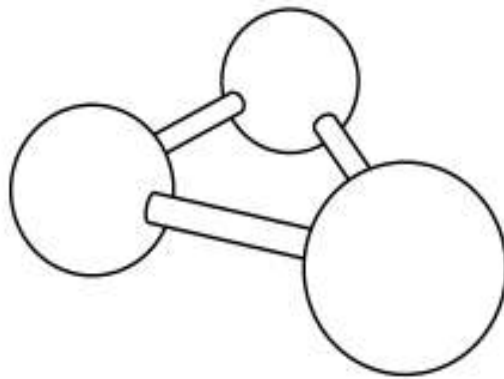
1. What possession would you say is your ‘pride and joy?’
2. Have you ever had anything stolen from you? What was that experience like?

Think about it:

3. Why do you think it is so difficult to have the perspective that everything belongs to God?
4. What are some reasons you think people resist giving money to church?

Bible: Read Malachi 3:7-12, Psalm 24: 1-2, 1 Chronicles 29:11

5. How would the perspective that God owns everything change the way you give?
6. How would the viewpoint of a tithe as a privilege and a joy differ from seeing it as an obligation or a kind of ‘temple tax?’ How do you normally view tithing?
7. What does the promise from God about tithing mean for you?



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