

Study Exodus



Session Five

Gladness and Generosity

Exodus: 35:1-21, 36:2-7 (40:34-38)

Aims of the session

- To explore the value and importance of giving in our Christian discipleship
- To continue to develop our money autobiography. This time we explore issues around our own giving, to the church and to other charities.

Last week we saw how the Israelites put off their ornaments as a symbol of repentance for the episode with the golden calf. This week we explore how the people brought their gifts, the gifts they had received in Egypt, to build and decorate the special tent that declared God's presence with his people. Repentance and giving are two sides of the same coin. Both in their different ways put God firmly at the centre of our lives. The decision to give to God as a priority our income each week or month and not the bit that is left over is fundamental to our formation as disciples.

Leader's Preparation

Read the section *The Tent of God's Presence, A Sabbath Rest* and the *Conclusion* from the Introduction. Our buildings are important as places of worship, sacred space but don't let buildings hijack the discussion because the story is about building the Tent of Meeting. Beware also of criticism of the church because it is not like the glad and generous picture in the passage. These people have just danced around a golden calf! Always bring it back to the personal question - the attitude, the experience and the practice of the individual group member.

As an appendix at the end of the study there are two interesting quotes which you might find useful in discussion.



Opening prayer

Bible Reading: Exodus 35:1-21, 36:2-7

Introduction (10 mins)

Ask the group how they feel about charity mailings that arrive with the post. What emotions do provoke? Don't dwell on this and beware especially of very negative comments. Move on quickly to invite people to share about their favourite charity *apart from the church* and say why they support this charity, what got them started.

This simple exercise can open up the wide range of emotions that the idea of giving can produce in us. The stories people tell about favourite charities will probably be personal stories involvement, experience or concern that motivates us most strongly to give. Keep this introduction brisk and to time; it is not a place for members to vent their frustrations!

Optional extra

Tell, with a little elaboration, the story of Queen Victoria below. It contrasts nicely with the picture of the people of Israel bringing the very best that they had to build the Tent of the Lord's Presence because having repented of the golden calf they knew who their God was and that they wanted him with them.

After the death of Prince Albert, Queen Victoria spent a good part of her time at Balmoral Castle in the Scottish Highlands. During a solitary walk, it began to rain. Queen Victoria knocked on the door of a cottage, hoping to be able to borrow an umbrella.

The woman of the house did not recognize the Queen. And the Queen was too reticent to reveal her identity. The housewife was a short-tempered woman and was not pleased by the interruption. She left her visitor on the threshold and returned eventually with a broken umbrella. 'Here you are,' she said briskly – and closed the door.

The next morning, a carriage drew up outside the cottage. The woman opened her door to a liveried footman. He announced: 'Madam, the Queen thanks you and returns the umbrella that you lent to her'.

The woman was ashamed and annoyed when she realized to whom she had been somewhat less than polite. The footman heard her mutter: 'If only I'd known – I'd have given her my best umbrella!'.

Action Scene

Give each group member a copy of the Action Scene.

- Begin by simply asking: *What can you see in the picture?* As people suggest things go back to find it in the bible passage to link the picture and the story. Make a list of the things suggested. They might include: people working together, spices, gold and precious gifts, people bringing talents and abilities
- Ask the group what *words* come to mind when they look at the picture. Some you will have picked up already: *busy, joyful, excited* and so on. Invite the group to write these words on the picture.

Now relate the biblical scene to our own lives and the life of our church. Look at the words suggested and the things the group sees in the picture. Ask how they describe our own personal giving (our time, talents and treasure) and the life of our church. Below are some suggestions but use the words and pictures the group identify.

- *Busy, crowded, people working together, skills being taught to others:* is this reflected in our local church?
- *A range of gifts, gold, spices* etc. Discuss the variety of gifts that were brought
- *Joy, excitement, eagerness:* Is our giving and giving in church a joyful experience?
- *More gifts than are needed?* Is this true for our church?
- *Can you see yourself in the picture?* If you can are you comfortable and happy with where you are? If not, would you like to be in it? What could help you get there?

Finally ask these two questions:

- *How could our response to God become more like that of the Israelites?*
- *Does the picture make you think of any ways we as a church might need to change?*

Money autobiography

Giving questions

- When you think about giving to the church what do you automatically think of?
- What was your attitude to giving five years ago? What questions did you have then? How have things changed in the last five years?
- Is giving to the Church and Christian or other charities a priority for you when you decide on how to spend your money?
- Assuming that you give to church and other charities, how do you decide what to give to which charity? Is the church a top priority as you decide?
- People sometimes say that they give their time and talents', so giving money is not so important. Is this how you feel?
- Do you plan your giving through weekly envelopes? Have you considered a standing order - *but only if that is how you deal with all your other important financial matters?*
- Where would you like to be in your giving this time next year? What changes would you like to see? Has this course helped you to think more clearly and to take some action about giving?

Conclusion

Israel's journey to generosity ended up with them doing something about giving not just thinking about it! It is important that the group should be aware of the need to respond to the things they have discussed. Always make a conscious link with the Giving in Grace literature sent out by the church - the brochure, clergy letter and response form. This is the group's opportunity to respond generously to the invitation to review and renew giving. Our giving to the church makes possible our ministry and mission in our community. It may be appropriate to distribute the response forms to the meeting. Allow some time to read the literature and for reflection and prayer so that group members can consider how to respond to the invitation of the church to review and renew their own financial response to God's generosity to us. If the group has come together well it might be appropriate for response forms to be completed privately at the end of the session.

Closing prayer



Appendix

Henry Drucker - Oxford Philanthropic

Giving, good giving is also difficult. Most of us spend most of our waking time acquiring assets. Trivial giving, giving to gimmicks, putting change in the tin at the newspaper shop, giving to charity via an affinity card — none of these acts diminishes our pool of self regard embodied in our material wealth.

The only way to do that is to give really philanthropically: to carefully and deliberately give in a way which is calculated to have a major effect. This must be — for each of us — a large gift. Such giving is difficult. In this act we disentrall ourselves by overcoming our slavery to possessions. We demonstrate that there are values in the world more important to us than our own selfish aggrandisement. True giving is an act of self-liberation. It becomes one of the major achievements of our life.

Lindsay Boswell, Chief Executive of the Institute of Fundraising

Do fundraisers, who understand the argument more, give a higher percentage than others in the voluntary sector? Are these uncomfortable questions legitimate or just offensive and unhelpful? I suspect that we, the workforce of the sector, don't come out of such questioning smelling of roses. I base such comment on a survey of one – me.

Last night, I presented the accounts at our local church and pointed out that we all needed to average £1 a day for each person on the electoral roll to survive and break even. Last Sunday, as the collection hymn started, I discovered that there was only a £10 note in my wallet and it hurt putting it into the Gift Aid envelope. I only go to the monthly family service and normally put in a £5. I don't have any dedicated committed giving in place, although I volunteer for the Church all the time. It felt like I was doing my bit. What really hurt me was I thought I was and I had managed to fool myself.