



# Annual Review

## Discussion paper

### The parable of the sower- Luke 8.4-15

The Lucan version of the parable of the sower can be of great encouragement to church leaders considering an annual review. The sowing and reaping of the seed is used as a metaphor for the word of God and can be used as an approach to our distribution of the word as biblical teaching on money. The Lucan version verse 14 has a clear reference to the seed falling amongst the thorns stating for “those who hear, but as they go on their way they are *choked by life’s worries, riches and pleasures*, and they do not mature”. It is that signal which underlies this discussion paper on faithfulness which is designed to enable a leadership group or PCC undertake a prayerful discussion on the parable and the lessons that can be drawn from it in relation to their approach to the word as it applies to teaching on money and giving.

Read through the passage out loud once carefully and slowly before starting the discussion.

### The sowing of the seed (v5)

The parable starts with the sowing of the seed which the farmer would do every year. Without an annual sowing there would not be an annual reaping. This basic agricultural fact is often missed when we talk about finance - sometimes we expect to reap where we have not sown! The church’s liturgical year gives us a lot of scope for an annual sowing of the word on how Christians handle money and the following list gives some suggestions. But the basic fact is that just like the farmer we cannot expect to reap where we do not sow.

1. Epiphany - *with accounts preparation*
2. Lent - *abstinence, devotion, preparation and mission giving*
3. Easter - *rejoicing and celebration, thanks offering, annual general meeting - vision*
4. Pentecost - *birthday celebrations, and hospitality,*
5. Harvest - *review and renewal of giving*
6. Christmas - *incarnation and counter cultural celebrations*
7. Patronal Festival - *celebration and rededication*

The shorthand of the parable does not include the preparation that the farmer would naturally undertake. Even in the basic agrarian culture of 2000 years ago there would be preparation of the ground before the sowing of the seed. Over the years some of the stones would be removed from the ground, thorns would be cleared, and the soil improved.

*Q How would we in this church prepare the ground and sow each year?*

### **As he was scattering the seed, some fell on the path; it was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up (v5)**

The story sees the seed that falls on the paths as wasted, devoured by birds after being trampled. We now know that birds form an important part of the fertilization process. They eat seeds but their bodies do not digest them fully and through their flight disseminate seed far and wide.

*Q What paths might we cross in preaching about money - issues or people? How might we have an impact beyond our boundaries?*



### Some fell on rock, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture (v6)

From stony ground to stony faces! Teaching on money can feel like hard work to stony faces in some churches! Jesus spoke about money and possessions so much and yet many churches shy away from such teaching because it “might upset people”. Yet if we omit this biblical teaching then we do a disservice to the gospel, and our congregations - running the risk of being either fearful or patronising. Jesus’ approach to money was quite radical, and never produced anxiety amongst the poor - only the rich young man!

We also know that stone is eventually broken up by a mixture of plants and the weather. As seeds send down roots they expand cracks caused by heat and cold and eventually the stone yields to the gentle but constant annual pressure of the seasons. Persistence does pay off!

The explanation of those who fall away in verse 13 is often true when people are over enthusiastic at the beginning then are unable to sustain their commitment or to overcome adversity which causes them to doubt their faith. The need for nurture of both new Christians and new regular givers is a sensitive pastoral issue. The gentle tone of Giving in Grace in relation to the issue of proportionate giving and tithing is designed to try and help people foster a habit of commitment before a habit of proportionality which appears to be more like the meat of the teaching than mother’s milk!

Where are our stony places? A look at the evaluation of Giving in Grace may give some clues. How do we care for and support new members and those in adversity?

### Other seed fell among the thorns which grew up with it and choked the plants (v7)

Within the diocese of Liverpool - as in many dioceses there are generally higher levels of giving amongst the poorer parishes than those with more prosperous members - with a few rare exceptions. There is something about the comfort and false security that wealth brings that can blind us to the need to trust God in material things as well as the things we commonly trust to God such as those we love.

The allegory of trees covered in ivy is a good one - like the plants choked by the thorns. The ivy shields the trees from the wind and cold. It looks far more attractive in the winter than the bare bark and branches of the healthy trees, and yet all the time the ivy is slowly destroying the tree. We need to hold tightly to God and lightly to our possessions rather than the other way around! We cannot worship i.e. give worth to Mammon and God.

How do we individually feel about such hard teaching? – lifestyle?

What are the thorns we customarily encounter?

How do we cut away the thorns to release people from their hold? For example are we doing anything about personal debt?

### Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown (v8)

In the Giving in Grace programme some of the crops were very impressive. What was there to celebrate in our church? The parable makes no mention of the sustenance needed to produce a good crop: rainfall to feed the seed, a well fertilised





soil to nourish it, sun to ripen it, and a guard to prevent it being trampled. What do we see as our regular nurture and feeding programme for our givers, is the sun equivalent to our vision or articulated appreciation of those who contribute? What about feeding of information regularly as well as the biblical teaching on money and possessions?

This parable is a treasure chest worth exploring but it will challenge members of the leadership group as well. Even when applied to money this parable challenges our stewardship of the Word and our need to till, reap, water, weed, and protect in order to reap.

### Closing questions

1. Have you maximised learning from the Giving in Grace programme by completing an evaluation document?
2. Are there key areas of financial stewardship that the church still needs to address?
3. What might be a food focal point in the local church's liturgical year for holding an annual Stewardship Sunday?

