



AGENEROUSLIFE

Exploring generosity and money

for church councils and circuit
meetings

A Generous Life says:

As a discipleship movement shaped for mission, we are engaging with our generous God to: give more time, give more money, know more of what we are doing and can do to change the world.

- **Question** (10 minutes)

How do you see the relationship between God's generosity to you and the way you give to others? How have others helped you financially? Is that God acting through others or people being generous?

- **Going deeper** (5 minutes, if time permits)

How easy is it to talk with other Christians about giving as part of your discipleship? How might you begin to explore discipleship and giving within your church?

2 Corinthians 8:1-15

We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia; for during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means, begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints — and this, not merely as we expected; they gave themselves first to the Lord and, by the will of God, to us, so that we might urge Titus that, as he had already made a beginning, so he should also complete this generous undertaking among you. Now as you excel in everything — in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in our love for you — so we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking.

I do not say this as a command, but I am testing the genuineness of your love against the earnestness of others. For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. And in this matter I am giving my advice: it is appropriate for you who began last year not only to do something but even to

desire to do something — now finish doing it, so that your eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means. For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has — not according to what one does not have. I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. As it is written, 'The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little.'

(NRSV)

Bible study

In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul uses the Macedonian example to encourage the Corinthians to be generous, and connects generosity to Jesus' willingness to give up all for our sake (2 Corinthians 8:9). Jesus "became poor" to make many rich (2 Corinthians 8:9), a reference to Jesus giving up all he had to bring us salvation.

What Paul has to say here is one of many passages in Scripture on the importance of giving money. Laws on tithing (Deuteronomy 14:22-29) and instructions to remember the poor (Proverbs 14:31) shape the prophetic appeal to live generous lives (Isaiah 58:6-9), while Jesus himself taught on generosity (Matthew 5:43-45).

Look at the Bible passage overleaf:

- Are there any parallels between Macedonia and the situation in our churches?
- What does giving ourselves "first to the Lord" mean when it comes to money?
- Paul expects that being generous is not just about character, but also about money. How can we make that true for Methodists today?
- How can we excel in generosity?
- How do we move from talking about standards of living to standards of giving?

Connecting generosity and money

Giving our money is a symbol of the gift of our lives to God, and to others. Our generosity with money is a measure of the giving of ourselves in response to God's great and generous giving.

There are many stories and sayings of John Wesley that speak of generosity. In 1731, Wesley began to manage his expenses in order to have more money to give to the poor. One year his income was £30 pounds and his living expenses £28 pounds, so he had £2 to give away. The next year his income doubled, but he still managed to live on £28 and had £32 to give to the poor. As time went on and his income rose

to £120 he was able to give away £92 in a year. Wesley's principle was that the Christian should not merely tithe but give away all extra income once debts and family needs were taken care of so that, with increasing income, what should rise is not one's standard of living but one's standard of *giving*.

Ideas for reflecting on money

- Spend time looking over your budget and praying about how much you give each month. For reflections on budgeting, see www.methodist.org.uk/deepening-discipleship/spiritual-practices/devotion/resources. For practical help, visit www.stewardship.org.uk.
- To explore issues of stewardship more broadly, work through the *Christian Stewardship Workbook* produced by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. To download, visit www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/me_CTBI_workbook.pdf.
- Find out where the money goes that you give to the Church.

Pray

- For us to be honest when we talk about money.
- For the people, places and projects that the money funds.
- For the Holy Spirit to convict us about proper levels of giving.