

STUDY GUIDE FOR THE WEEK OF: March 13, 2008

THE NEXT CHAPTER

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WEEK 7 OF THE SERIES

“CORE VALUE: GENEROSITY”

Scripture

1 Thessalonians 2:8: “So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us.”

2 Corinthians 8:7: “Now as you excel in everything—in faith, speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in our love for you—so we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking.”

Mark 12: 41-44: “⁴¹Jesus sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. ⁴²A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. ⁴³Then he called his disciples and said to them, ‘Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. ⁴⁴For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.’”

Study Notes

Generosity is defined first as “liberality in giving or willingness to give,” but secondly as “nobility of thought or behavior; magnanimity.” Put another way, it is freely giving our time, treasure, and talents and through that practice we are transformed. Bidwell Presbyterian’s core values statement describes **Extravagant Generosity** this way:

Grace is the outpouring of God’s unlimited goodness, and generosity is our heartfelt response to God’s gifts. Generosity involves a stewardship of all that we are and have. We therefore commit to using our gifts of time, money, skills—our whole lives—in service to God and those around us.

Each of these Scriptures addresses the topic in different ways. When Paul is writing to the Thessalonian community, he describes our sharing all that he had and was for them, in other words **our lives** (the Greek words literally mean “our souls”) in order that they may experience the fullness of the gospel. In 2 Corinthians, Paul wants people to excel not just faith, speech, and knowledge,” but in giving to the mission of Christ. Why does God call us to this task? Because it is a blessing to do so.

Finally, Jesus watches the **widow** (always a representative in the Bible of the poorest and most vulnerable member of society); she gives **two small copper coins** (Greek *lepton*, one of the least valuable coins in the 1st century). Jesus sees hers as an act of generosity. Hers is a gift that matters to God far more than the contributions from those who give a great deal, but only from their excess. So when do we give enough? I like the great 20th century Christian writer, C.S. Lewis’s take on giving: “I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare... If our charities do not at all pinch or hamper us... they are too small. There ought to be things we should like to do and cannot do because our charitable expenditures excludes them.”

Questions For Further Reflection

1. What does the word “generosity” mean to you? Do you see examples in your life of truly generous people? How does God’s grace make a difference in the way people give?
2. In the two passages from Paul’s letters, he encourages the Christian community to give for the sake of the church’s mission. What does that look like? In what ways are you, or those you know, involved in giving to the mission of the church?
3. The widow’s gift (traditionally “the widow’s mite”) is challenging. It leads us to give beyond our excess. How would this example lead you to be more generous? Is tithing (giving away 10% of what you earn) a good step for you? What other actions are you willing to take? How would this transform you into a more generous person?