

Good Soil



A place for growth and nurture

Session 3.3: TREASURE

INTRODUCTION: STEWARDSHIP - FAITH IN ACTION

In this series of four sessions, we are thinking about how we put our faith into action. What is our loving response to God? **How can we be good stewards of our *time, talents, treasure and territory*?**

These sessions touch on many issues that may be challenging for us about our lifestyles, habits, attitudes, and use of resources. These are not meant to be demanding or overbearing, but rather designed to gently lead us into a place where we can trust and serve God. Take and use whatever is helpful to you in this material. Most of all, enjoy the time spent sharing and thinking together.

PREPARATION FOR GROUP LEADERS

Please remember to keep in touch with your group and remind them of the date and time of the session. A group activity suggested in this session involves using some cards with words on (which can be provided), and working together to place them in order of value or priority. It will not be easy and there are no right or wrong answers. It is simply a way to reflect on the many different treasures we have – some that can dominate us, and some we take for granted. Team-working, discussion and listening are encouraged. Arguments and fallings-out are entirely unnecessary! It's a bit of fun!

THINKING ABOUT TREASURE (to read at home)

This session's theme is **treasure**.

Jesus said (in the Sermon on the Mount): *'Do not store up for yourselves **treasures on earth**, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves **treasures in heaven**, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. **For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*** (Matthew 6: 19-21, NRSV)

Treasure can mean many things. We can 'treasure' memories, people, places, moments, friendships. We can attach great value to the simple things of life, or non-material joys. We can treasure our relationship with God. These are, of course, the things we should 'treasure'! They are the 'heavenly treasures', if you like, because they will last forever in the eternal life God promises us. In this session, however, we are thinking mainly about the *material things* of our earthly lives: the 'things' we have at our disposal; our treasures on earth. Because when we think about 'stewardship', we need to reflect on how we can use every-*thing* for God's purposes.

Ultimately, this comes down to our attitudes toward money. In a world where money is needed to buy most of life's essentials, and our worldwide system is driven by capitalism, trade and financial markets, money seems to be *the most treasured thing*. Wars are started over it; people are killed or exploited for it; people die for want of it. Governments can make choices between the good of the many or financial gain for a privileged few, and often end up choosing the latter. But can we learn to think differently? What is our *treasure*?

In two of Jesus' shortest parables, he said:

'The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.'

'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.' (Matthew 13: 44-46, NRSV)

STARTING THE SESSION: GROUP ACTIVITY

You should have a pack of cards with various 'treasures' printed on them. If you don't have the cards, here is a list:

Your favourite meal; The flowers in your garden;
Old photos of loved ones; Money saved for a 'rainy day';
Laughing with friends; Your next holiday;
The roof over your head; Health and safety of your loved ones;
Your phone and internet connection; Clean water to drink;
Times of worship and fellowship; Your warm bed.

As a whole group, or in smaller groups of two or three, discuss together the different treasures and decide how you would rank them in order of value or priority. There may be many other treasures you would add to the list, or some that aren't treasures for you at all, but please just play along! Maybe at home later you can make a better list of all your treasures, and thank God as you count your blessings!

A PRAYER

Give us, O God, a vision of your glory,
that we may worship you in spirit and in truth,
and offer the praise of glad and thankful hearts;
through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer taken from *The Methodist Worship Book*, page 211,
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GUIDANCE

Money is a sensitive and complex subject, especially in hard times. In discussing this topic in the group, do not feel under any pressure to talk about your personal finances. We do not want anyone to feel under any obligation to change their pattern of giving, or to feel guilty. Please speak to your minister or a close friend if you feel uncomfortable about anything arising from this session.

READING THE SCRIPTURES AND DIGGING DEEPER

The differences between those who are financially poor and financially rich can be astronomical. Some earn in a week what others would earn in a lifetime. For some, the pain of financial hardship is about not being able to provide for children and loved ones – seeing them suffering is worse than going to bed hungry yourself. Some have never known poverty and were born with inheritance and privilege. But the great leveller is when we die. We will all take with us exactly the same: nothing.

On the other hand, those who are financially poor are often far richer in other ways – spiritually rich, wise, loving, kind... And some who are financially mega-rich can be far from rich in other ways. Somebody once said: ‘Some people are so poor all they have is money.’

Jesus came across people who were financially very poor and those who were wealthy. He treated both with the same love and respect. We will look at two classic encounters from the gospels now:

Reading: Mark 10: 17-23 (New Revised Standard Version)

17 As Jesus was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, ‘Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ 18 Jesus said to him, ‘Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. 19 You know the commandments: “You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honour your father and mother.”’ 20 He said to him, ‘Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.’

21 Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, ‘You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.’ 22 When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

23 Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, ‘How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!’

Reading: Mark 12: 41-44 (New Revised Standard Version)

41 Jesus sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. 42 A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. 43 Then 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. 44 For 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.'

Our two stories are '**The Rich Young Ruler**' and '**The Widow's Mite**' (a mite being a very small thing). The rich man went away sad, even though we are told that Jesus 'loved him' (Mark 10:21), and Jesus was seemingly left feeling disappointed too. The widow, meanwhile, impressed Jesus, and had no idea that she would be remembered for thousands of years as an example of giving our all to God.

Which of these stories do you like the best? Which one challenges you the most? Where do you feel in relation to the two of them?

The man asked the secrets of eternal life and yet the price was too high. *Why do you think Jesus asked him to give up all his wealth? What was he trying to prove? Or what was he trying to free him from?*

Despite their differences, the hopes or expectations Jesus has of both of them seems to be the same: that they give 100% for God. It seems very difficult, almost impossible, and yet one of them managed it. *Why do you think it was so hard for the rich man? If Jesus had asked a bit less, would he have found it easier to give his treasure away?*

The widow gave her offering in the Temple. *How important is it that our offering is a part of our worship?*

Is there a difference between generous giving and sacrificial giving?

When have you found giving to be a blessing? When have you been blessed by someone else's generosity?

Do you judge a gift by its monetary value, or look for something else? Would you value a gift more if you knew it was given sacrificially?

Finally, Jesus' teachings on money or treasure were all about gaining the Kingdom of heaven or 'treasures in heaven'. *What does this mean to you, and how do we express the eternal value of this to others?*

SOME WESLEYAN WISDOM

John Wesley, the founder and early leader of the Methodist movement (1703-91), could have been a very rich man. It is estimated that the £30,000 he made in his lifetime would have been the equivalent of around £40million today. He made this through selling his many publications and other enterprises. Yet when he died, Wesley left nothing but a few coins of loose change, and his collection of books. Throughout his ministry, he kept only what money he needed to live on, and he lived very simply and humbly. As quickly as he earned it, he gave his money away to the poor or invested it in building charitable projects like orphanages. John Wesley had no children (unlike his brother, Charles) and no other dependents. He taught the Methodist people that they should "**Gain all you can; Save all you can; Give all you can**", and he lived by those words.

Wesley encouraged the Methodists to '**gain all you can**' because he believed that, although money could be used for evil purposes, it could also do immense good, and was better off in the hands of Christians who would use it for God's work and in loving their neighbours. When he said '**save all you can**', he was not thinking about hoarding large amounts in savings accounts, but rather 'saving' as in being prudent, spending less, doing without, not being lavish or extravagant buying things for oneself. This was to enable people to have more money for the third thing: '**give all you can**'.

John Wesley's fundamental belief about money was that **everything, every penny, actually belongs to God**. While Christian and Jewish religion had often taught the importance of **tithing** (that is giving 10% of our income to God's work), Wesley strove to give as much as he

possibly could back to God. He felt very strongly that to keep anything back for himself unnecessarily was 'stealing from God', because every penny spent on himself could have been used to do good, to save souls or to relieve poverty.

Wesley knew that not every situation was clear-cut, and people had different circumstances, but he did provide the Methodists with four financial principles, based on verses of scripture:

First, *"Provide things needful for yourself and your family"* (based on 1 Timothy 5:8). Wesley put the emphasis on asking whether something was really 'needful'.

Second, *"Having food and raiment (clothing), let us be therewith content"* (based on 1 Timothy 6:8). The emphasis here is on being *content* with having the things that we need.

Third, *"Provide things honest in the sight of all people"* (based on Romans 12:17) and *"Owe no one anything"* (based on Romans 13:8). This is about paying what we owe, not staying in debt, and also sensible use of money in business so that a company has what it needs to conduct that business properly.

Fourth, *"As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all, especially unto them who are of the household of faith"* (based on Galatians 6:10). After all of the above were satisfied, anything left over was for helping others and meeting their needs.

Some questions: *Do we think of our money as our own possession, hard-earned and well-deserved, or as belonging to God? Or both?*

How do Wesley's principles work in a time when wages are not sufficient to pay for basic needs, housing, food, and necessary bills?

*How easy is it today to be content with having what we **need**?*

Wesley's teaching was a challenge in the 18th Century and it is just as hard today. But it is worth noting that he lived a very fulfilled life and the fruit of his living (and giving) are still felt around the world today. And there are some who still try to follow these teachings.

In the two short parables earlier, Jesus points towards an enlightenment where we value the *eternal* things far more than earthly wealth. The treasure worth finding above all else, for Jesus, is ‘the Kingdom of heaven’. John Wesley found that treasure and gave his all to share it.

PRAYING TOGETHER

- Thank God for the fellowship you’ve shared together;
- Thank God for the treasures or blessings in your life;
- Pray for those who are struggling to find the money for their essential needs;
- Pray for churches in poor neighbourhoods trying to meet the needs of their communities on very limited resources;
- Ask God for wisdom in how to be good stewards of the treasure and money we have;
- Ask God for the right perspective in thinking about money both sensibly and spiritually;
- You might like to say **the Lord’s Prayer** together.

Some words of a hymn to perhaps use as a prayer:

Take my life, and let it be
consecrated, Lord, to thee;
take my moments and my days,
let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my silver and my gold,
not a mite would I withhold;
take my intellect, and use,
every power as thou shalt choose.

Take my love; my Lord, I pour
at thy feet its treasure-store
take myself, and I will be
ever, only, all for thee.

by **Frances Ridley Havergal** (1836-1879),
Taken from *Singing the Faith*, no. **566**.

SUGGESTED SONGS TO LISTEN TO (or your own choice)

You can find all of these by clicking on the links below or searching on



Be Thou My Vision, sung by Audrey Assad.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Optrm7IF16s>

Offering Song, by The Lads.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BqSSRA-vJq0>

Take My Life and Let it Be, by Reawaken Hymns.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y3gWwGDGgVA>

Be Thou My Vision, sung by Nathan Pacheco.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ihJAJA4ibEs>

COMING NEXT in *GOOD SOIL*:

SESSION 3.4: TERRITORY

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