

Giving Study Sheet

Aim: A series of sheets to prompt group discussion around giving. This discussion may primarily lead to individual action. It should not lead necessarily to action within the group. The discussion may lead to different ways of doing things in the life of the church.

Text: Matthew 6:1 – 4

¹Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

²So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honoured by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. ³But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. (New International Version)

¹Make certain you do not perform your religious duties in public so that people will see what you do. If you do these things publicly, you will not have any reward from your Father in heaven.

²So when you give something to a needy person, do not make a big show of it, as the hypocrites do in the houses of worship and on the streets. They do it so that people will praise them. I assure you, they have already been paid in full. ³But when you help a needy person, do it in such a way that even your closest friend will not know about it. ⁴Then it will be a private matter. And your Father, who sees what you do in private, will reward you. (Good News Bible, Today's English Version.)

Reflection

In the NIV, this passage is headed 'Giving to the Needy'. It is interesting to note that the needy are not defined. The matter is further complicated by the exhortation not to speak about what you do. This is coupled with a warning that those who do announce 'with trumpets' may not have wholly altruistic and pure motives. Were there 'cash for honours' scandals at that time?!

Jesus was alert to the possibility that a combination of secrecy and non-defined need may lead to inactivity or even people claiming to be doing something which they were not actually doing. Indeed this is what is recounted in the Acts of the Apostles when the events surrounding Ananias and Sapphira are recounted. The final sentence of the passage is quite important. (Acts 5:1-11)

Over the years, the Church has been very good at identifying 'the needy' – even before the need had been identified or spoken of. Hospitals, schools, hospices all have grown from initial action by groups of Christians. In 2013/14, we see the growth of food banks which are, again, driven in many places by Christian concern and compassion. Many local churches host drop in events for young people, older adults, those who are lonely and those with addiction problems. Giving to the needy does not have to be complicated.

Giving to the needy does require unconditional giving. That is, giving of the money and the responsibility for its use. An alternative is to become engaged with the recipient and be generous with time and expertise as well as money.

St Ignatius of Loyola sums it up beautifully:

Teach us, good Lord, to serve you as you deserve;
to give and not to count the cost;
to fight and not to heed the wounds;
to toil and not to seek for rest;
to labour and not to ask for any reward,
save that of knowing that we do your will.

Discussion Points

These are suggestions – address as many or as few as your group wishes to do. There are no right or wrong answers.

- What do you consider the most obvious areas of need in your community?
- How does your Church respond to these?
- Does your giving, to and through the Church, enhance or inhibit the Church response to need?
- How does your Church (or you) engage with a cause beyond just giving money?
- How do you feel about no-one knowing of your actions for the needy? Or what another is doing? Does this make sense in 2015?

Concluding thought

Giving to the Needy is not an alternative to giving to the Church. The Old Testament prophet Malachi talks about tithes **and** offerings. At the time that Jesus was speaking, the hearers would have been contributing their temple tax as well as paying taxes levied by the Roman authorities. We are not being asked to exceed that – merely to come somewhere close to matching it.

Music

Brightest and best are the sons of the morning (Reginald Heber)
Hidden Treasurer (Ken Bible)
O Jesus, I have promised
I will offer up my life (Matt Redman)

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