

# SEASONS OF GIVING

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*Two short courses for small groups,  
taking a look at generosity, money and giving*



stewardship<sup>®</sup>

# WHY SEASONS OF GIVING?

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## **Introduction by Michael O'Neill, CEO of Stewardship**

Life throws far more at us than just four seasons. Birth and death become the bookends to a wild array of experiences – some good, some difficult, some unexpected and some deeply unwelcome. Yet in every season, whether good or bad, God is with us and we are not alone. At each and every turn we have the potential to know and serve God better by living generous lives.

Generosity is at the heart of the Christian faith. It sparked Creation, fuelled Salvation and is intrinsic to any understanding of the Trinity. The choice to share and live selflessly for the benefit of others is one of the defining characteristics of the Christian life. It combats social problems, strengthens community and draws us closer to God. In every season of life, the decision to embrace a generous world-view will benefit not only others, but ourselves as well.

*Seasons of Giving* is a great opportunity to be re-inspired by the value of generosity, from time and talents to money and possessions. We are going to explore the many ways in which our resources – from time and talents to money and possessions – can be better used for God. Our aim is not to ladle on the guilt or leave you feeling overwhelmed, but instead to leave you equipped and encouraged to face whatever life throws at you with a God-inspired generous heart.

These two short Bible study courses are designed to help groups consider the challenges and opportunities in life by drawing inspiration from scripture, listening to God and each other and through prayer. *Seasons of Giving* is

not a shortcut to a stress-free life. Instead it helps us re-examine some of the foundations on which our lives rest, looking again at our priorities and assumptions. In a 'me first' culture where greed and self-interest are seen by some as positive character traits, we believe that many of us can benefit from getting back to what really matters in life...

This is nothing new. After all, as beings created in the image of an ever-giving God, generosity's part of our DNA.

**'There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven.'** Ecclesiastes 3:1

# HOW THE COURSE WORKS

*Seasons of Giving* is divided into two separate four-week courses. The first section looks primarily at time and talents and the second examines money and giving. They can be run one after the other making eight weeks, or as two stand-alone four-week studies. Both courses work best when run on a weekly or fortnightly basis, and each session should last between one hour and 90 minutes. Group leaders need to read through the material in advance and select from various optional activities and questions. Some photocopying may be needed, particularly if you would like larger versions of the 'word clouds' and the group activities.

## WHEN YOU SEE THESE ICONS:



**A passage has been chosen and a member of your group or yourself should read it out.**

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**Wherever you see this, refer to the leaders' notes at the back for additional guidance and instructions.**

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**This indicates that there are more resources on line to back this particular study. Resources include short interviews with participants who have a 'generosity' or 'money story' to tell (lasting 2 – 3 minutes), or downloadable resources including templates for the activities. Go to: [stewardship.org.uk/seasons](http://stewardship.org.uk/seasons)**

# SEASONS OF GIVING OVERVIEW

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## PART 1: TIME AND TALENTS

### **SESSION 1: TIME TO GROW**

*generosity and a change of heart*

The course begins by drawing inspiration from the story of Jonah and by considering how both God and Jesus are our models of generosity. We seek to identify the barriers that stop us from living fulfilled lives.

### **SESSION 2: TIME TO GIVE**

*generosity and our gifts and talents*

We continue our look at generosity by focusing this session on the Old Testament character of Abigail. We look at her role as a generous hostess and a steward over her household. We then consider how our own gifts and talents can be used in God's service.

### **SESSION 3: TIME TO SHARE**

*generosity and too much stuff*

It is easy to put our trust in our wealth and possessions, in what we can see and own and to try to accumulate these for ourselves. So the third session focuses on the life of Barnabas, one of the early church leaders. We learn how giving together is a key to Christian discipleship.

## **SESSION 4: TIME TO LIVE**

### *generosity and a called life*

The course ends by celebrating Jesus' invitation to live a 'called life that is truly life'. We make connections with the character of Mary, the mother of Jesus, and then go deeper into what it means to live a life of integrity and trustworthiness.

## **LIVING STORIES – GENEROSITY AND ME**

We are all 'living stories' in progress. As you go through the sessions, you will have the opportunity to consider your own 'living story', to look back and review, to assess and to reflect on what actions you have taken towards living a transformed and generous life. You can also consider how your actions in future can develop your story further.

## **PART 2: MONEY AND GIVING**

### **SESSION 1: AUTUMN**

#### *Look at our own 'harvest' and how we make decisions about giving*

Traditionally autumn has been seen as a time of thanksgiving – an opportunity to look back at God's provision and respond accordingly. So we start here, with an exploration of Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler and an opportunity to recognise our own motives.

### **SESSION 2: WINTER**

#### *How can we resist the temptation to hoard, especially in times of austerity?*

What's so hard about winter? Coldness and a hardness of heart can lead to a tight grip on our money and possessions. In times of 'austerity' do we believe that generosity can set us free from the captivity of money? We turn to the Bible and study the rich farmer who built bigger barns.

### SESSION 3: SPRING

*Where are the signs of new growth within our attitude to generosity?*

Do we need a new attitude towards giving? We ask whether generosity can be considered a hallmark of our faith, drawing on the way Zacchaeus changed his behaviour and actions after meeting Jesus.

### SESSION 4: SUMMER

*To be content and to worship God with everything that we have*

Should we be surprised when we see things blossom and grow, or do we remember the hard work required to prepare for summer? Generosity takes time, practice, commitment and as we find out – great sacrifice. We look deeply into Jesus' encounter with the widow at the temple.

### MONEY STORIES – MONEY AND ME

As the sessions progress you will have the opportunity to develop your own money story, to look back and review, to assess and reflect on your attitudes to money and to consider ways you might take action towards living a transformed and generous life.

### USEFUL RESOURCES

If you need to plan your budget try: [stewardship.org.uk](http://stewardship.org.uk)

If you need help with debt, contact CAP Debt Advice: [capuk.org](http://capuk.org)

Alpha's Money Course: [themoneycourse.org](http://themoneycourse.org)



Isaiah 32:7 **‘The scoundrel’s methods are wicked; he makes up evil schemes to destroy the poor with lies, even when the plea of the needy is just. But generous people plan to do what is generous, and they stand firm in their generosity.’** NIV and New Living Translation (NLT)

**Generosity is about relationships: relationships with our neighbours; the poor; our community; our family; our God. Our resources, our time and talent and monies, work as a unit when we give with an understanding of the true depth of these relationships. In the following sessions we will study real people, from the widow of the widow's mite to Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector of Jericho, to Mary, the mother of Jesus. All are first generous to God, and then to man, and then, finally and especially, to the poor.**