

# SEASONS OF GIVING

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



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# MONEY AND GIVING INTRODUCTION

Money is our greatest taboo! We can talk about our relationships, politics, death and even sex, but if asked about our financial affairs, that is an entirely different matter.

By contrast the Bible has a great deal to say about money – over 200 verses in fact. Jesus talks about money more than anything else, probably because our attitudes and motives can most hinder us to the life that Jesus wants us to lead.

Most days we find ourselves encouraged to hold on to our wealth, persuaded to remember that ‘we deserve it’ or urged to ‘treat ourselves’ to whatever we desire. Even the more noble arguments have got in on the act, reminding us that in these days of austerity and insecurity, it’s wise to cut back our non-essential outgoings.

Make no mistake, the Bible reminds us that God is not against financial prudence any more than He is against feasts and homes and thriving businesses. But a life made up solely of feasting – or chasing security, generating income or guarding it – is a pale imitation of what God had in mind.

That is why we have chosen to draw on the idea of the four seasons. Their interdependence reminds us that a healthy life will be made up of various different elements. For growth, strength and endurance we need balance, and the same is true of our relationship with money: we can easily slip into some unhealthy habits, the sort that limit our potential to use money in the ways that God intended.

Throughout these sessions we will spend time talking, reflecting and exploring practical steps towards a better way of living. What that improvement ends up looking like will vary for each person, and it is our prayer that through these simple sessions, God will reveal to each of us a clearer view of how we can serve and worship Him with these gifts He has given.

# SESSION 1: WHY START WITH AUTUMN?

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## AUTUMN

Autumn is a season associated with change, transition and transformation.

The days become shorter and nature reacts to gradual temperature change with colour and abundance. It's a time of harvesting and the storing of produce for another year – yet it is also a reflective time, as creation begins the process of dying back before winter.

For Christians, autumn is a time of harvest festivals and celebration, a time when we give thanks to God for all His provision and recognise our dependence on Him. Our thanksgiving doesn't just have to stop with our food; we can make an autumn review of our money, possessions and our giving.

## PURPOSE

**In this session you will have the opportunity to:**

- **look at our own 'harvest' and how we make decisions about giving**
- **begin generating your own 'money story'**
- **make connections with the rich young ruler in his meeting with Jesus**
- **go deeper into the roles of money and generosity in our own lives and with others**
- **draw out your own conclusions and take some time to pray through the issues raised**



transition  
reflect season  
**plough** **energy**  
hoard provision  
harvest **hay** God  
**festival** berries  
preparation nature  
grain gold **fall**  
transformation store  
**fruit** food **chilly** brown  
hat & scarf colour  
**change** abundance  
thanksgiving nuts vegetables  
**celebration**

## INTRODUCTION

Money is a huge part of our lives: earning it and spending it, worrying about it or ignoring it altogether, barely pausing to consider God within our finances.

No wonder the Bible devotes over 2,000 verses to the subject.

We should also not be surprised that Jesus spoke a great deal about money. He knew that how we handle money and our practice of generosity either helps us or gets in the way of the abundant life He longs to give. If we want to be true disciples, at some point we must all deal with our attitude to money.

- Jesus talked about money more than He did about Heaven and Hell combined.
- Jesus talked about money more than anything else except the Kingdom of God.
- Eleven of thirty-nine parables talk about money.
- One of every seven verses in the Gospel of Luke talks about money.

## ICEBREAKER / ACTIVITY

### Play 'The Mix & Match Money Game'

Think about these nine questions and either write here, on a photocopied version or use some sticky notes to write your answers on before playing the Mix & Match Money Game.

Question	Your answer
<b>My first buy was...</b>	
<b>I regret buying...</b>	
<b>I wish I could buy...</b>	
<b>I saved up for...</b>	
<b>I always feel guilty buying...</b>	
<b>The most expensive thing I've ever bought was...</b>	
<b>I don't really need to buy...</b>	
<b>I like giving money to...</b>	
<b>I learnt about budgeting and money management from...</b>	



*Instructions for this game are in the leaders' notes at the back of the book under Session 1: Why Start with Autumn?*



*Read Luke 18:18–30*

## MAKING CONNECTIONS

In this passage a wealthy young man who seems to have it all asks Jesus about eternal life.

It's a powerful story and it raises some important issues about discipleship, as well as – thanks to Jesus' answer – money. It is fair to assume that the young leader's relationship with money was at least partly to blame for his spiritual restlessness.

Certainly his wealth, or perhaps his attitude towards wealth, was a stumbling block to his discipleship. After all, he is the only recorded person in the Gospels to turn down a direct invitation to follow Jesus. Or, to put it another way, the only time the Gospels describe a man turning away from Jesus' open arms – the writers are at pains to show us that his attitude to money was partly to blame.

## VITAL QUESTIONS

- The rich young ruler asked Jesus an important question about what he needed to do in the future. Why do you think Jesus asked him to review his past? Do we find it easier to leave our money and possessions out of the equation when we come before God?
- The rich ruler was obviously very wealthy, but was it his 'wealth' or his attitude towards his wealth that prevented him from following Jesus?
- It is often much easier to work on storing up and making sure we have enough for ourselves instead of trusting God for the future. Like the rich young ruler, how readily do we try to keep things to ourselves and to protect



*There are some downloadable game templates and some short inspiring videos to go with this study at: [stewardship.org.uk/seasons](http://stewardship.org.uk/seasons)*

our security rather than looking to share what we have?

- ‘What is impossible with men is possible with God’ says verse 27. How can we seek God’s help towards making a change in our thinking about money and sharing with others?

## GOING DEEPER

Matthew’s Gospel also describes this encounter with Jesus and here the rich ruler is also described as young (Matthew 19:16–26). Thus the two texts together indicate a young man who probably has inherited both power and wealth.

- The ruler, very helpfully for us, asks the important, essential question: ‘What must I do to inherit eternal life?’ As wonderful as this essential question is ultimately for us – the readers, listeners, and hopefully doers of the Word – for this certain rich ruler, it is a problematic question.

The ruler’s question, ‘Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ defines his heart’s stated desire, ‘what MUST I do...’ The ruler desires a list of actions and performances to gain the ultimate wealth.

Looking deeply at the ruler’s question, let us ask the ruler a deeper question.

- How does the ruler want to gain eternal life?
- What do you think is the nature, the blessing, of an inheritance?

If you could leave only one thing/quality to one person, write on a card what you would leave. Describe it/and who would you leave it to. Now flip the card. Ask why you would leave this quality/thing to this particular person.

Now let’s move back to the rich ruler. The rich ruler sees eternal life as an inheritance.

- How is seeing eternal life as an inheritance different from seeing it as a gift?

Jesus' evaluation: 'You still lack one thing.' Jesus commands: (Note the directive verbs) 'Sell everything you have and give to the poor.' Then 'you will have treasure in heaven.'

Our rich ruler is wordless because his wealth, power and riches on earth is what he chooses at this moment.

- Why is the rich ruler wordless here?

In conclusion, he can't respond because he probably cannot live with giving what he really sees as his life – his accumulated wealth, possessions and things – away to the poor. In reality he sees heaven as another 'thing' that can be inherited through his own work or another's.

## IN SUMMARY: MONEY AND ME

**We may not all have as much wealth as the rich young ruler, but no doubt we can all recognise where money and possessions can be a preoccupation that prevents us from being effective disciples of Jesus.**

### *action*

What three things in your money story would you like to rewrite? What can you do in the next 24 hours, one week and one month to go about making these changes?

### *prayer*

**Gracious God, we thank you for your abundant provision in nature. Thank you that you are our role model in your generosity and bountifulness. As we reflect on our money stories, help us to take steps towards a better future, to ask ourselves questions and to be prepared for change.**

**Transform us in heart and mind, that we might become effective servants of your Son and our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.**

# PART 2:

# LEADERS' NOTES

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## LEADERS' NOTES

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### SESSION 1: AUTUMN

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#### PREPARATION IN ADVANCE

- Enlarge and photocopy the word cloud
- Photocopy sufficient numbers of the 'Mix & Match Money Game' templates so there will be one for each group member
- there are more resources/videos and game templates on line at [stewardship.org.uk/seasons](http://stewardship.org.uk/seasons)

#### OPENING ACTIVITY

Display the word cloud and allow group members to reflect on the words used and to share the thoughts or stories anyone may have about the season under discussion.

#### ICEBREAKER / ACTIVITY: 'MIX & MATCH MONEY GAME'

Although this activity has been designed to be light-hearted and fun, for some groups sensitivity and tactful leading may be needed. Talking about money can be quite difficult. People's attitudes, opinions, habits and worries may come to light here.

Hand out the photocopied sheets. Ask each person in the group to fill in the nine unfinished statements in the boxes provided. Once complete, ask the group members to cut out their answers. Each member then takes it in turn to place **all** their answers in the middle of the group. Together, everyone tries to work out which answer matches which question.

Are they surprised by any? How do they feel about some of their answers? As you share:

- Think about how these simple statements help us take the first steps towards mapping our 'money story'.
- Encourage people that understanding how we relate to money allows us to move towards more positive ways of using it.
- As people listen to each other, ask them to think whether they hear anything that inspires them – any way of relating to money that they would like to emulate themselves.
- **The 'answers' and 'surprises' this game reveals are the starting point for each individual's 'money story'.**

#### MAKING CONNECTIONS

Introduce and read the Bible passage (Luke 18:18–30).

## VITAL QUESTIONS

By asking the rich young ruler to review his life, Jesus was forcing him to recognise that he must have total reliance on God, who alone can give eternal life. The commandments Jesus mentions in His answer prohibit wrong actions and attitudes against others – our concern for others is important as we seek to follow Jesus. By giving up his wealth the ruler would have removed the one obstacle that stopped him from trusting Jesus, but Jesus recognises it is often not an easy step – we too need the help of the Holy Spirit to transform us and to enable us to depend upon the Lord.

## GOING DEEPER

It is not apparent from this passage that Jesus is telling all Christians to give up their wealth, it is for those who have the same spiritual problem as the rich young ruler. What must take precedence for all is to seek ‘treasure in heaven’. Salvation cannot be earned through what we do, but by believing in Jesus and acknowledging God’s grace. Jesus is not seeking to find fault with the young ruler or with us, but He earnestly welcomes us to be transformed into His generosity and likeness.

The rich young ruler asks an essential question: ‘What must I do to inherit eternal life?’

All essential questions must be carefully constructed with chosen language that illustrates two ‘essences’. First, an essential question reflects the essence of a person’s desire. Second, the language of the questions reveals the essence of a person’s character.

Let’s examine the Essential Question (‘EQ’) of this ruler to see how his: a) desire and b)

character’s essence are revealed and then reflected. And let’s start at the core of any question, its verb.

Ultimately, he sees eternal life as an inheritance.

The ruler’s question reveals the essence of his heart: eternal life is an outcome of my, or someone in my family’s, work that can be ‘inherited’. The ruler’s answer to Jesus is that he has kept the stated commandments since he was a boy (pointing to his character). Jesus gives a loving, direct answer to this ruler on how he can gain eternal life. It is also a command based on Jesus’ evaluation of his character.

Part of the answer is in the final portrait of this ruler, which is one of sadness. ‘When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was very wealthy.’ The ruler does not speak, but (importantly) he also does not leave the presence of Jesus. How do we know this? In the next verse (24), at the very moment, the scripture states, ‘Jesus looked at him.’ Our Lord gives him a moment, a brief moment, to look into heaven’s/eternal life’s face – yet our rich ruler does not respond – why?