

Just for Thought

Evaluate your approach to determining your involvement in financial support of missions. If the important thing is obedience, how do you know when you are there? Scripture gives principles, but not specifics for every individual and that makes it tough. Do you begin with prayer? Do you expect God to provide any guidance? Are you spending time with God in order to hear His voice? (See John 10:27) **Finding God's will is work, but it is worth the effort!**

Life Challenges

1. Take steps to begin developing the spiritual discipline of giving. If you are not tithing or even giving regularly, spend time in prayer about your starting place. Remember that God doesn't expect what He doesn't provide! The greatest journey begins with one step. Find joy in that one step and don't be discouraged that you haven't "arrived".
2. If you are already tithing or giving regularly, pray about a one-time gift to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering which is going on now. For more information, please visit imb.org/lottiatwork and imb.org/offering.

Homework

Family-Time Ideas: Spend some time with your family and brainstorm ways your family can support missions financially. Maybe there is something you can do as a family to support missions. Talk with your family about missions and why it is important to be involved in supporting the work.

* Westwood will continue to support the Lottie Moon Offering for International Missions and the Annie Armstrong Offering for North American Missions. Beginning in 2010, we will do this primarily through your gifts to our annual Missions Celebration Offering. However, if you would like to continue the tradition of supporting these efforts by making special offerings during the Christmas and Easter seasons, please do so. Gifts received that are designated as such will be forwarded directly to these entities.

Answers - Blanks from "Truths to Remember":

1. blessed
2. obedient
3. steps
4. partnerships
5. tithe



Learner Notes for ABS & Home Group Study

One Mission: Give 2

December 13-18

westwood.org/groups

Starting Point

Don't worry; even though this lesson is about giving, we will not be taking an offering today. That was last week and next week! Seriously, giving is a spiritual discipline that blesses us more than it blesses others. It is a discipline because it involves denying some of the things that we desire, placing a higher value on God's kingdom. 2 Corinthians 8:7 tells us to "excel in the grace of giving." So whether it is giving to the church, supporting a friend on a mission trip, or giving to someone in need, we as believers need to practice the discipline of giving. It is an act of faith that grows our faith as we trust God and see Him work in our lives to provide.

Beginning questions: 1. Why is it difficult to give freely of our resources?
2. Why is giving an act of faith?

Scripture

2 Corinthians 9:6-8, 10-11

⁶Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. ⁷Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

⁸And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

¹⁰Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

Philippians 1:3-5

³I thank my God every time I remember you. ⁴In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy ⁵because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now...

Focus

This year and early next year Westwood is being given the opportunity to invest in missions. In November, the first \$100,000 from the first fruits of our One Mission Campaign is earmarked for missions. Beginning in 2010, we will be able to give to missions through an annual Missions Celebration Offering that will be held in conjunction with Westwood's annual One Mission Celebration. That event is a missions conference at Westwood each February through which we'll host many missionaries as we identify ways to partner with them. The third opportunity is that we are currently receiving our annual Lottie Moon Offering for International Missions that supports 5,500 missionaries across the globe. After this year, it will be rolled into the Missions Celebration Offering where we will continue to support those missionaries.*

Some of you who are new to Westwood may ask, "Who is Lottie Moon?" She was a single woman that God called to serve in China in the 1800's. She ministered to the spiritually lost and poor of China for 37 years, enduring hardship and danger. Lottie often went without food herself so that others could live, and she eventually died of starvation. Southern Baptists honor her commitment by naming the annual offering for missions after her.

During World War II, it was said to take 10 people in support of every one man fighting on the front lines. It would be impractical to expect the soldier to provide his own food, equipment, bullets, etc. The same can be said about our missionaries. With each of us being one of the ten in the background, the missionary is free to focus fully on the task at hand—reaching and discipling people. We believe that for the success of the mission, the role of the ten in the background is indispensable. Let's own our support role and do it well!

When we step out in faith to support God's work, there are a number of ways God uses to provide. We love to hear the stories about how people make a pledge and then money comes from unexpected places to replace it. Other ways to step out in faith are to focus on being better stewards of the money that already flows through our personal budget, such as cutting out some luxuries. Another way is to find new ideas to support missions. One family did a yard sale as a family project and gave the money to missions.

Matthew 6:21 reminds us that "where our treasure is, there your heart will be also." The most important factor in giving is our heart. The key is found in 2 Cor. 8:5, "they gave themselves first to the Lord." When God has our heart, everything else will follow, meaning Jesus is Lord of all, not that Jesus takes it all. Everything falls into perspective when we realize that Jesus gave it all for us!

Truths to Remember

1. We are blessed to be a blessing. We are to be a funnel of God's blessing into this world. (Gen. 12:2-3, 2 Cor. 5:18)
2. It doesn't matter how much you give to special offerings, only that you are obedient. You may not be able to give as you desire or even as you once were able.
3. God honors even small steps that we take toward faithfulness to Him. Often, He provides clarity of His will for our participation when we take steps of obedience.
4. Missions partnerships are not only Scriptural, but an effective means for a church to support a work through prayer, personal participation and financial support.
5. Honoring God with a tithe should be our goal as Christ-followers. Although Jesus indicates that many other things are important as well, he reiterates the Old Testament principle of the tithe in Matthew 23:23.

Questions for Discussion

1. Do any of you have a story of making a faith commitment and God providing in a supernatural way following the commitment?
2. The focus section outlined three ways God can use us to make a higher commitment to giving: a) supernatural provision, b) better stewardship, and c) creative means (a job or yard sale). Which of these would you most likely rely on if God leads you to increase your giving?
3. Do you believe it is important for the pastor and group leaders to challenge people in the area of financial stewardship? Why or why not?
4. These missions lessons focus on praying, giving and going. To what degree are all three of these elements necessary in our obedience to Christ?
5. Have you ever considered how much you spend on our own family for Christmas compared to how much we give to the author of Christmas? What conclusions do we draw from that evaluation?