

The Meaning of Tough

Wealth and
Power

Leonard Beechy

CLOSER THAN A BROTHER ~ MEN'S SERIES

The Meaning of Tough

Wealth and Power



by Leonard Beechy

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Resources



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THE MEANING OF TOUGH: WEALTH AND POWER
By Leonard Beechy

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Welcome to this study!



When my friends ask me why I'm writing about wealth and power, I tell them it's because I have so much of both. I say it to be funny, but at the beginning of a study like this we should tell the truth, and the truth is, it's no joke.

I'm a white, middle-aged male lodged comfortably in the North American middle class. I'm a public school teacher at the top of the salary schedule and with seniority in my department. I do some college teaching and writing on the side. My wife is also a teacher.

We grew up on neighboring dairy farms in Wayne County, Ohio. Our parents worked like heroes for every dollar as we were growing up, then sold their farms for comfortable retirement incomes. One of our daughters is married, the other is in college. So far, college expenses have been manageable. We're trying to put money aside for retirement. Every year I take a little more interest in the stock market, a fact which thirty years ago would have surprised and worried me.

I like church work, and I have to force myself, sometimes at the urging of my wife or friends, to turn down new responsibilities. At work, I chair our department, and I'm spokesperson for the

If you are the group leader ...

Please see the section, "How to use this booklet" and other notes in the "Leader's Guide" on page 45.

teachers in negotiations for salary and benefits. Just as at church, responsibilities at work tend to accumulate if I'm not careful.

We men in our middle years are typically at the height of our influence and money-making power. After years of struggling to balance the claims of family, church, and career on our time and energy, we find ourselves in a position as never before to offer blessing to all three. We've had years to accumulate experience, competence, and capital, and our lives are full of people and organizations who need them.

So what's the problem? I can think of several.

In the first place, I'm part of a generation that was warned early and often about the dark sides of money and power. The counterculture of our formative years taught us that conventional living—jobs, families, and institutional church—turned us into soulless, cookie-cutter servants of an evil system. Books like Art Gish's *Beyond the Rat Race* and Ron Sider's *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* offered blunt indictments of the destructiveness and self-indulgence of "normal" North American life. The women's and the civil rights movements showed us that the power that seemed our birthright as white males had a sordid history of violence and domination, both in society and in the church. It's no wonder that, for many of us, as our wealth and power increased over the years, so did a vague uneasiness.

And then there is Jesus. As soon as we admit that, globally and historically, we are among the wealthy, Jesus becomes a problem. The Bible has much to say about money, and some of it

is encouraging to wealthy people (Psalm 128; Proverbs 13:21). But Jesus isn't. "How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" he says (Luke 18:24). Money was Jesus' favorite subject, and Christians have to listen to him.

In a global context, we might all be considered wealthy. But there are special problems for those among us who are perceived as wealthy, even by North American standards. Entrepreneurs, successful businesspersons, successful farmers—these persons sometimes bear the brunt of the church's ambivalence about wealth and power. They may experience subtle and not-so-subtle disapproval in sermons, discussions, and church publications. Yet almost everything the church wants to accomplish desperately seeks their competence, their experience, their connections, and their capital.

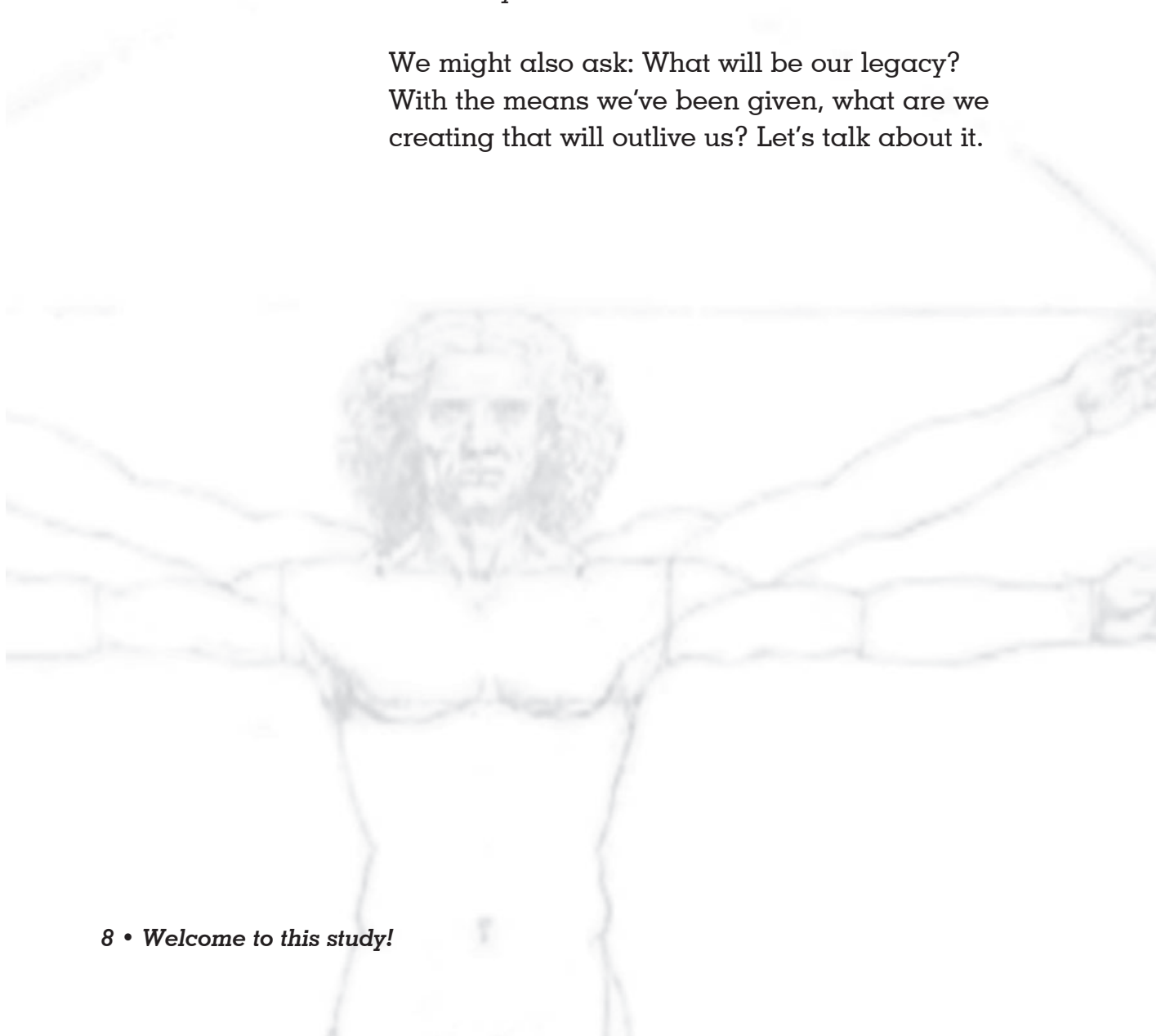
All of which brings us to something else our experience has taught us: Money and power are good things. Despite its threat to our spiritual well-being, money can be a potent force for good, and our use of it an eloquent expression of our loyalty to God's rule. And despite the tendency of power to destroy or dominate, no good thing is accomplished without it.

Recently I visited the farm in Ohio where I grew up. Dad died in 1988, and the farm has changed hands twice since then. Its current owners farm the land and rent the house. The dairy operation is gone: the stalls and barnyard are empty, and in the milk house wall is a hole where they hauled out the bulk tank. The barn and the outbuildings are in various stages of

collapse and disrepair. A grain bin fell over and has been left there.

I had intended to park and spend some time walking around the place, but I drove through without stopping. I felt guilty. Had I taken over the farm, it wouldn't have been exposed to this. Mostly, though, I felt sadness for my father. This had been the scene of almost unimaginable hard work. Dad often told the story of the condition of this farm when he got there, and he could point with pride to what he had made it. Its condition now seemed like a judgment on his life. His legacy would have to be estimated some other way.

We might also ask: What will be our legacy? With the means we've been given, what are we creating that will outlive us? Let's talk about it.



Session 1

Wielding Power, Giving Power



In God's way, the power I have is measured by how much power I can bring out of someone else, not by how much power I wield.


Opening worship

Song: All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name (*HWB 106*).

Reflective Scripture Reading: Perform Philippians 2:5-11. One person reads the Scripture passage aloud, pausing briefly after each phrase, while the group or a designated individual or group follows the body movements as indicated:

Let the same mind be in you that was in
Christ Jesus,
who, though he was in the form of God
(standing, hands raised),
did not regard equality with God as some-
thing to be exploited,
but emptied himself *(lower arms and body
with each phrase)*,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,

Leader: Tips for leading the sessions are given on page 45.



he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross (*arms and head low
to the floor as possible*).

(Pause)

Therefore God also highly exalted him (*ris-
ing with each phrase*)
and gave him the name that is above every
name,
so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue should confess that
(*say together*) Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father (*standing tall,
hands raised*)
And every tongue should confess that
(*say together*) Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Exploring the topic

Let's be clear about this: power is good. God is all-powerful. Jesus is Lord, and all power in heaven and on earth is given to him. Paul describes the gospel as "the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith" (Romans 1:16). Humans also have power, and that's a good thing too. Power is the ability to get something done.

When we were younger, we had less power, except for the kinds that come with physical energy and endurance, or the kinds that come with idealism and spontaneity. On the whole, though, most of us middle-aged adult men have accumulated power as we've grown older. We've "moved up" in our careers. We've grown in competence, experience, and respect. Younger colleagues and family members look to us for

advice and validation in the same way we used to look up to our mentors. We know what we're good at and what we aren't good at, and we're at ease with both.

We may sometimes be frustrated at the limits of our power. Our bodies age, our children do what they want to do, and our retirement funds don't grow fast enough. But most of us have never been more capable of influencing the people and circumstances around us than we are right now.

We've also lived long enough to see power gone wrong. We've seen bad bosses, authoritarian religious leaders, unresponsive bureaucrats, and self-serving politicians. Power misused is the source of the world's worst evils. This brings up a question: How do we use the power we have so that it is a force for good, an extension of the power of God? Jesus was not at all silent on this question. In fact, it is on this issue that he is at his most innovative and surprising—and where we may have the most trouble hearing him.

Read aloud Mark 10:35-37

This is not a shining moment in the careers of James and John, the sons of Zebedee. Jesus had earlier nicknamed them "the sons of thunder" (Mark 3:17), but here is a time when we are

Food for thought 1: How should we imitate Jesus?

There is thus but one realm in which the concept of imitation holds . . . : this is at the concrete social meaning of the cross in relation to enmity and power. Servanthood replaces dominion, forgiveness absorbs hostility.

Thus—and only thus—are we bound by New Testament thought to "be like Jesus."

—John Howard Yoder

likely to join the rest of the disciples in wishing that they'd just pipe down. In Matthew's version of the same story, it is James and John's mother who asks the question (Matthew 20:20), which leads some to think that Matthew was embarrassed about the episode, and wanted to protect the character of these two apostles in the early church.

But while we're disapproving, let's also understand James and John. They had just heard Jesus offer his third and most explicit prediction of his death and resurrection, and like most of us they had heard only what they wanted to hear. Jesus' resurrection, they assumed, was code language for the inauguration of God's rule. Furthermore, they had every reason to believe they would be prominent in that kingdom. Along with Peter, they had been singled out to be present at the raising of Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:37), and at the transfiguration (Mark 9:2). Why should they not expect the places of honor at Jesus' right and left hands when he begins his reign?

Read aloud Mark 10:38-40

Along with Jesus' reply, we can almost hear the sigh of frustration, the groan of effort in trying again to get across this crucial point of message and his mission. Suffering, relinquishing power over others, giving up control of your own destiny—these are not just bumps on the road to power and glory. It is the road. By his "cup" and his "baptism" Jesus refers to the destiny that awaits him, and it is the same destiny that awaits those who are baptized into his following and who drink the "cup" of fellowship with him. We cannot choose power and glory; they are for

God to bestow. We can choose the path of servanthood.

Jesus confirms that James and John will indeed share in his “cup” and his “baptism.” We know this to be true of James; he will be beheaded on the orders of Herod Agrippa (Acts 12:2). John’s fate is less certain. However, if popular tradition is correct in identifying him with the author of Revelation, then he likely died in exile on the island of Patmos.

Read aloud Mark 10:41-45

Jesus uses the disciples’ indignation with James and John as a teachable moment. He recognizes the source of their anger: They want the same things that James and John were asking for. What they want is very human, very understandable, and according to Jesus, very wrong.

Food for thought 2: Power on the job

As a teacher, I am given a certain amount of power to use for making sure my students learn. There is coercive power available to me: I can hand out detentions, send for the principal, phone the parents. In rare cases, those options are necessary. The real decisions about power, though, are the ones I make every day as I plan lessons.

It’s often easiest to simply dispense information. I give, the students receive, and if they refuse to receive, I make sure I win the struggle. Alternatively, I can choose approaches that give students choices, put them in charge of how they get and present information, get them moving and talking to each other. The first approach makes me the active per-

son in the classroom. The students remain passive and powerless. The second approach distributes power—and multiplies many times the total amount of power released in the classroom.

Most of us have experienced managers at work who drain power from the workplace through domination and coercion. Many of us have also experienced managers who energized the workplace through trust, encouragement, resourcing, and listening. Those in management positions must make daily decisions about how they will use the power they have. What have been your experiences on the giving and receiving end of these decisions?

In the world, he says, power is expressed in domination. Rulers “lord it over them” and “their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you.”

To follow Jesus is to be a “servant” (v. 43) and a “slave” (v. 44). This does not mean giving up our talent, drive, and energy. Rather, it means to place our own talent, drive, and energy completely in the service of empowering someone else. Our model here is Jesus, who in the words of the church’s first hymns, emptied himself of his heavenly status in order to bestow power on those who believed in him (John 1:12).

We’ve all seen glimpses of this kind of power. Good basketball players are often said to make their teammates better. They make the right passes at the right times to the right people in the right spots. Good bosses energize their employees by giving them the greatest freedom and resources in their best areas. Jesus’ words and life teach a notion of power that is not power-over but empowering-to.

Food for thought 3: Where are all the men?

The work of God among men today—and so, the work of the church—is not to feminize our masculinity, but to redeem it. . . . Toughness, for example, is essential in the effort to bring God’s kingdom to this broken earth as it is in heaven. . . . Jesus was tough when he stood up to the Pharisees, to the mob about to stone the adulteress, to the Gerasene demoniac, and even to the hysterical crowd of relatives who gathered after the death of the synagogue president’s daughter (Matthew 9:23-25).

Toughness submitted to Jesus and exercised for God’s purposes is an essential Christian virtue. Too often, however, Christians allow the inference that toughness itself is a sin by failing to portray and affirm a redeemed toughness in God’s service. This is what drives men away from the church, for it seems to condemn manliness as a sin.

—*Gordon Dalbey in Healing the Masculine Soul*

Talking it through

1. Responding to the Christ-hymn of Philippians 2:5-11

Scholars think there are several early Christian hymns or fragments of hymns embedded in the New Testament. The prologue to John's Gospel (John 1:1-18) may be one example of a hymn with some commentary attached. 1 Timothy 3:16 may be also an example of a hymn fragment.

The hymn of Philippians is the best example of all. Like other Christ-hymns, it presents a U-shaped path of Jesus—being with God at the beginning, lowering and emptying himself into human flesh and the cross, then being raised from death to life, returning to the authority and power of being at God's "right hand" and worshiped as Lord.

In the larger group, discuss: What use does Paul make of the hymn, as he introduces it? What actions are attributed to Jesus in the hymn, and which are attributed to God? Reading further, to Philippians 2:12-13, which actions are attributed to us and which to God?

2. Talk about power.

In twos, take turns identifying the "powers" that you possess. (Power might be defined as anything in your personality, position, talents, skills, possessions, or characteristics that allows us to influence people, circumstances, or events.) Keep a written list of your own powers, and help your partner identify his.

When each of you has completed your list, continue by discussing which of the powers has

potential to do harm: by dominating, by keeping someone else from exercising the same gift, or by drawing power away from others.

Now look over the lists again, discussing ways that the powers listed can be used to energize the powers of others. How might your powers be used to initiate, invite, encourage, draw in, affirm?

In the larger group, share reflections and discoveries (not necessarily the specifics of your lists). In addition, discuss this problem: Men who are oriented toward doing rather than talking are sometimes alienated from churches. How can their powers be released for the mission of the church?

Closing

Holding the lists in open hands, dedicate all these powers to God for the release of the power in others. Ask that the Holy Spirit would transform and enlarge them to become the very power of God for the redemption of the world. If you like, use the following:

God of power and strength, you created the world and you continue to sustain it daily through your Spirit. You have also given us power to be stewards of your earth. You have given us the talents and resources we have named today. Keep us from using these for selfish gain or to dominate others. Help us to have the mind of Christ, who gave himself in service for our salvation and as our example. Help us to use our power to serve and empower others, for the sake of your kingdom. Amen.

Session 2

Wealth: The Power to Blind, the Power to Bless



The power of money to blind and bind us is so strong that only the transforming power of God's generosity can release us to bless others and build what is eternal.

Opening worship

Litany: from Matthew 13

All: The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed

Reader 1: that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.

All: The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in the field,

Reader 2: which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

Leader: Tips for leading the sessions are given on page 45.

All: The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls;

Reader 3: on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

All: Let anyone with ears listen!

Song: "Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God" (HWB 324).

Exploring the topic

My wife and I had just finished deciding how much we were going to give to help a family member with some traveling expenses. The decision was quick and easy, and when it was over I remarked to my wife, "You know, we don't care much about money, do we?" I said it with some satisfaction, as though we had achieved some new level of spiritual enlightenment. As soon as it was out of my mouth, though, I realized it was wrong. My wife recognized it too. "That's just because we have more than we used to. We can afford not to care."

She was right. We're at a stage of life and employment that it's not hard for us to pick up the check at the restaurant, send a hundred dollars here and there above our regular giving

Food for thought 1: Frozen by money

I used to think, when I was a child, that Christ might have been exaggerating when he warned about the dangers of wealth. Today I know better. I know how very hard it is to be rich and still keep the milk of human kindness. Money has a dangerous

way of putting scales on one's eyes, a dangerous way of freezing people's hands, eyes, lips and hearts.

—Dom Helder Camara, *Brazilian archbishop*

at church, or give a couple of thousand to our church's renovation project. Money is not something we fight about. In general, we can buy what we want, and our wants are on the modest side of the North American middle class.

The truth is, I do care about money. I cared about it last fall when we had to reroof our house, and I cared about it this summer when we bought a car. I watch my retirement funds with helpless fascination as the stock market shrinks and swells them.

I care about following Jesus, too, and for all of my life that has made me uneasy. When I read the Bible, when I read books on the subject by people I respect, when I'm in prayer—these are the times I am nagged by a double suspicion: that I should care much more about money and that I should care much less.

In Matthew's Gospel the Sermon on the Mount occupies a dramatic place. It follows the story of his birth (chapters 1-2), baptism (chapter 3), and his temptation and calling of disciples (chapter 4). With all this in place, and with crowds gathered as a result of the first round of miraculous healings, Jesus delivers his inaugural address. Just as Moses brought the Law down from the mountain at Sinai, Jesus sits on the mountain and presents in digest form the essential teaching of the kingdom of God.

Read aloud Matthew 6:19-21

The contrast in this passage is "treasures on earth" and "treasures in heaven." Earthly treasures are transient, susceptible to moths and rust. Wealth in Jesus' day was often preserved

in the form of fine clothing, so that moths could be as serious a threat to the wealthy as thieves. By contrast, in Jewish thought, good deeds were spoken of as treasures deposited with God ("in heaven"). To do good was to increase one's wealth in the sight of God. But Jesus goes further: Our hearts follow our treasure. No doubt the reverse is also true: Our money follows our hearts. As the tongue-in-cheek offering prayer says, "No matter what we say or do, this is what we think of you."

Read aloud Matthew 6:22-23

This saying about eyes may seem out of place in a passage about money. However, the "evil eye" was a common metaphor in Jesus' time for stinginess or jealousy. Jesus may mean something like this: People who approach life with generosity reveal a spirit that is large and bright. The miserly are dark and shrunken within. In the context, to have a "healthy eye" points toward a perception of God's abundance.

Read aloud Matthew 6:24

With emphatic clarity, Jesus states his main theme: We can be oriented toward God or we can be oriented toward wealth. Jesus does not say that we shouldn't be oriented toward both. He states flatly that this is a spiritual and practical impossibility. Some have called Jesus' message here "radical monotheism," an extension of the first commandment, "You shall have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3).

Read aloud Matthew 6:25-34

Having declared the general principle, Jesus develops its implications. The first seven words summarize the message: "Therefore I tell you,

do not worry." God's abundance and care are sufficient for the birds and the lilies; they are therefore "much more" sufficient for us. Worrying will not lengthen our lives even a little. (In fact, as we know today, anxiety may shorten our lives. We can be "worried to death.") The Gentiles "strive for all these things"; shouldn't our lives show some difference if we are children of God, children of God's kingdom?

In the end, we are offered a package deal: If we "strive first" for this kingdom "and its

Food for thought 2: It's all in the giving

When I'm worrying through a writing project, I like to talk to Dr. Stanley Shenk, one of my Bible professors when I was a student at Goshen College. I approached him one day in the locker room of the fitness center where we both work out. I told him that I was working with the issue of wealth.

He thought for a moment, and then offered, "I have some files on this subject, and you'd be welcome . . ."

"Yes, thank you, Stanley," I interrupted, "but the problem isn't information. The problem is my life!"

He chuckled at this, and I went on to share with him some of the guilt I've felt over the years as I've tried to take seriously what the Bible teaches on the subject of riches, compassion, and justice.

"Well," he said at last, "it all has to do with your giving." He went on to share with me his "giving autobiography." He and his wife, Doris, began to tithe when they became Christians, she as a teenager and he at the age

of twenty. They continued this pattern in their marriage. When Stanley was in doctoral studies and Doris could work only part-time, they were forced to take on loans, and dropped their giving to five percent. "We agonized over that one," he said.

When he began teaching at Goshen College and Doris worked in the dean's office, their giving went back to ten percent, then rose to higher figures. At their present stage in life, they must consider new factors: Doris's declining health, and their desire to contribute—as part of their total giving—toward the college education of their thirteen grandchildren.

As he finished, Stanley said, "I'll check my files to see if I can get you some help."

"Really, Stanley," I said, "you've already helped me." Hearing from a respected friend on their struggles of giving and faith is far more helpful and inspiring than agonizing on your own. I recommend it.

righteousness," then "all these things" will be thrown in besides. Just as the birds and lilies are provided for within the system they live in, so our needs are also provided for as we live within the system of God's kingdom.

Talking it through

As a group, discuss your own understandings of Jesus' teaching about money. Some questions to consider:

1. List some of the symptoms of slavery to "mammon," a word Jesus uses to designate money. Are the symptoms different at different times of life?
2. Jesus says, "Do not worry about tomorrow . . . Today's trouble is enough for today" (Matthew 6:34). Do you consider making provision for the future part of "today's trouble"? For example, in an age when the young are no longer assumed to be responsible for the financial needs of aging parents, is planning for retirement a faith-full concern?
3. Read the "food for thought" story about Dr. Stanley Shenk. Do you agree with him that "it's all in your giving"?

In twos, share your own "giving autobiography," being as specific as you are comfortable.

When everyone has shared, allow time in the larger group to discuss any general observations, discoveries, or insights from the dyads.

Finally, as a group, consider this question: If members of this group were to significantly

increase their levels of giving, where would the money go? To the church budget? If so, how would the unexpected increase be handled? What ministry of your congregation is under-funded, or needs to be initiated? In all of this, consider as well the “powers” you identified in your group last session. What talents, connections, and skills can be infused with financial support and thus become a genuine force for good?

Closing

Share remaining questions, anxieties, or stirrings of vision. Then bring these to God, asking that God’s Spirit would comfort where comfort is needed, convict where conviction is needed, and energize where vision is stirring.

Prayer:

Generous God,
you gave us life;
now we give our lives back to you.

We present ourselves:
our work and play,
our joys and sorrows,
our thoughts and deeds,
our gifts and resources,
to be used by you
for the sake of all people
everywhere,
through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen

(HWB 751, used with permission)



Session 3

Competition and Power

Competition can be a source of energy, but relationship and blessing are more powerful.

Opening worship

Choral reading: Philippians 2:1-5

Leader: If then there is any encouragement
in Christ, any consolation from love,

Group 1: any sharing in the Spirit,

Group 2: any compassion and sympathy,

Leader: make my joy complete:

All: be of the same mind, having the same
love, being in full accord
and of one mind.

Leader: Do nothing from selfish ambition or
conceit,

Group 1: but in humility regard others as
better than yourselves.

Leader: Let each of you look not to your own
interests,

Leader: Tips for
leading the sessions
are given on page 45.

Group 2: but to the interests of others.

All: Let this same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.

Song: "Will You Let Me Be Your Servant" (HWB 307).

Exploring the topic

What is it with guys and sports? Wives complain that men who have trouble remembering the date of their wedding anniversary can rattle off the names of all four Baltimore Orioles pitchers who won at least twenty games in 1968, or the NFL team who drafted John Elway, or the last year the Toronto Maple Leafs won the Stanley Cup. The same man who won't give her two complete sentences about how his day went can give a hole-by-hole description of his last round of golf. Obscure lingo peppers our talk: "triple-double," "hat-trick," "double-bogey."

I was a part of one animated sports discussion recently, where statistics, facts, and historical trivia flew thick and fast. One member of the group suddenly stopped us, paused, and said in a voice full of awe, "Guys, do you realize how many of our perfectly good brain cells are devoted to storing this stuff?"

There are several possible explanations for this obsession among many males. Our society programs males for competition, some would say. Men have a biological affinity for physical challenges. Guys like numbers. We admire athletes who may be less gifted than their peers, but who are great competitors who hate to lose. And we admire competence. We enjoy watching those

who do some of the same things we do, but do it with twice the grace, power, speed, and skill.

We're all familiar with the dark side of competition as well: the win-at-all-costs idolatry, the macho posturing, the chemical and physical shortcuts that threaten health, the quick-shrinking of maturity and perspective that can make even a friendly game turn ugly. The Bible has plenty to say in support of excellence and effort—but it comes down hard on brute competition that goes awry.

Read aloud 1 Samuel 24:1-7

A brief review of this section of 1 Samuel, beginning with 18:6, reminds us of the growth of King Saul's resentment toward the amazingly gifted shepherd boy from Bethlehem. David's growing popularity, fueled by his exploits in battle, is an increasing source of pain to the jealous king. Saul spins out plan after plan to rid himself of David, even giving his daughter to him in marriage, but one after the other the plans backfire.

Sending David against the Philistines in hopes of getting him killed in battle only showcases the best in the young warrior, and his fame spreads throughout Israel. Even Jonathan, the king's son and apparent heir to the throne, recognizes the inevitability of David's kingship. In the end, Saul gives up on subtlety and openly seeks David's life. David becomes a fugitive, a Robin Hood-like figure with a band of loyal warriors darting in and out of hiding.

The drama of chapter 24 begins in the dark of a cave. The exact location of the Rocks of the Wild Goats isn't known, but ibexes are still common

in the wilderness of Engedi. Here Saul and his handpicked posse of three thousand stop to rest. To the delight of David's men, Saul himself chooses the very cave in which they are hiding to relieve himself (the Hebrew puts it delicately: ". . . . to cover his feet"). They point out to David what a great chance this is, quoting a prophecy from Yahweh (24:4) to strengthen their case. David is horror-struck at the sacrilege involved in harming "the Lord's anointed." Instead, he sneaks up as the king is busy and cuts a piece from Saul's outer garment.

Read aloud 1 Samuel 24:8-15

When Saul leaves, David calls out to him, using every manner of respectful address and posture. He shows Saul the piece he cut from his clothing as proof of his loyalty and of his unwillingness to do the king harm. A dog had very low regard in the culture of the time: a "dead dog" would have less than none. Even this isn't low enough for David's self-characterization. He is nothing but a flea in the fur of a dead dog. David invites Saul there and then into a virtual courtroom, with the Lord as judge.

Read aloud 1 Samuel 24:16-22

David's speech and demonstration of loyalty have a devastating impact on Saul. The king bursts into loud weeping, calling David "my son." He confesses that David is more righteous than he and, remarkably, admits that David is destined by God to be king. Saul's request is that, contrary to the custom of the time, David not kill off all of the descendants of his predecessor, wiping away every trace of Saul's lineage. David readily agrees, and the two part.

By defusing their rivalry, David frees both of them—and all the resources available to them—to return to the service of Israel and Israel's God. Unfortunately, Saul's "conversion" was short-lived, leading to an almost identical incident recorded in chapter 26.

Talking it through

After the opening worship, piece together as much as you can remember about the background of Saul's relationship with David. It may be helpful to skim the action that precedes 1 Samuel 24, beginning with 18:6. After reading chapter 24 as outlined in the lesson, discuss the following:

Food for thought 1: Sharing power in the congregation

Recently my name was included on a slate of members appointed by our church board to carry out an important task. I like church work, and even though I already had several other offices and responsibilities, this committee's task interested me, and so I consented to being appointed.

When the slate was presented, however, one board member sent an e-mail to the rest of the board expressing several concerns. Included in the message was this sentence: "Is Leonard going to be appointed to yet another committee?"

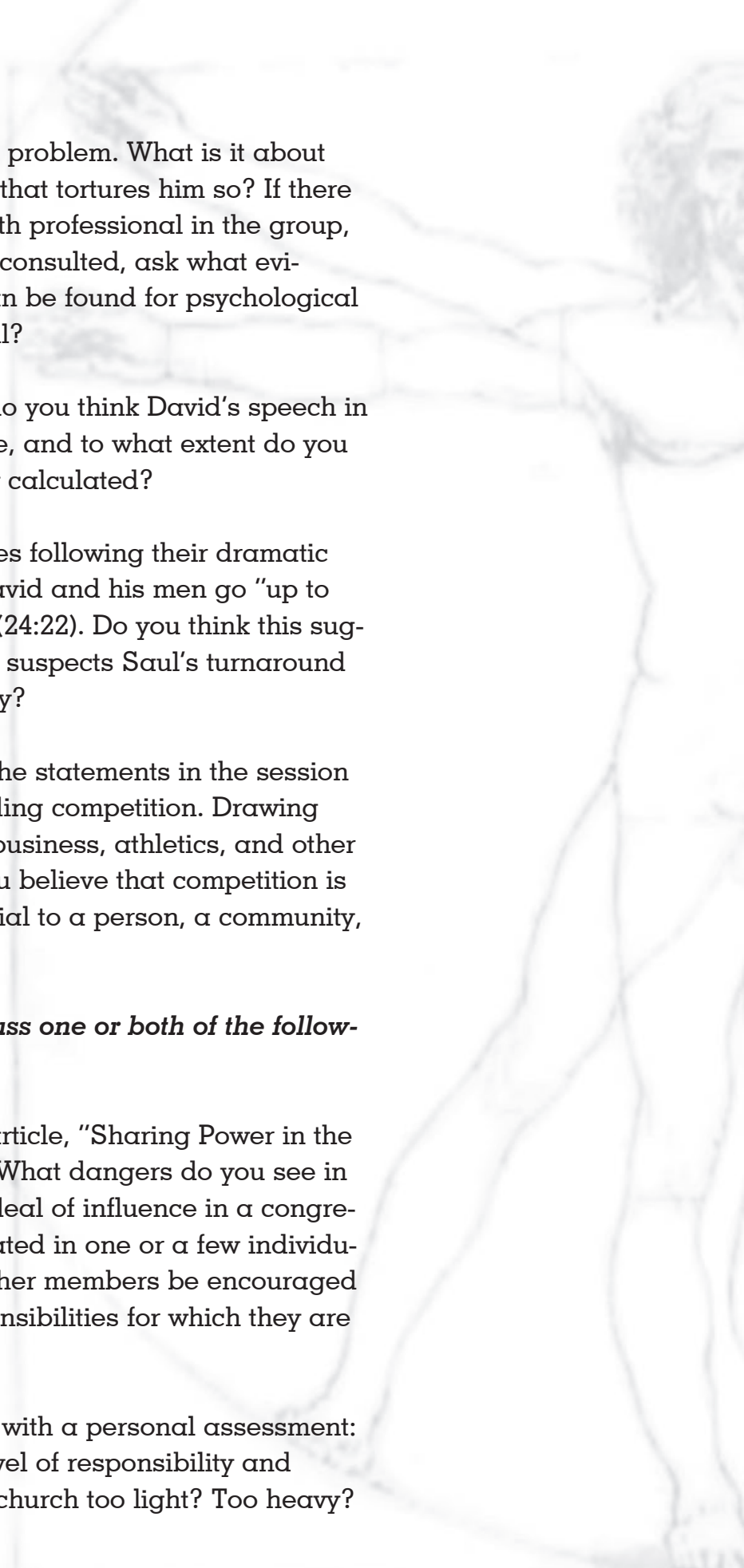
Since this is a person whose thinking I highly respect, I invited her to meet me at a local coffee shop to talk. I naturally assumed that her question stemmed from a concern about me—becoming stressed or overextended. I was wrong. She was concerned about the church.

"Congregational life and decision making can become distorted when

one person has too many arenas for influencing things," she said. "And besides," she added as I was digesting this idea, "whenever you take on a job, that's a job that won't be done by someone else, someone who might be very capable and needing a chance to become active."

This was a new idea to me. Always before, when asked to do a job, my only consideration was whether I had the time and energy for it. Now I was being asked to consider how my combination of responsibilities was affecting the distribution of power and participation in the congregation.

We didn't agree about everything that we talked about that day, but there was undeniable wisdom in the thrust of her counsel. The jolt I felt was that my thinking was being permanently altered.

- 
1. Diagnose Saul's problem. What is it about David's success that tortures him so? If there is a mental health professional in the group, or if one can be consulted, ask what evidence, if any, can be found for psychological disorders in Saul?
 2. To what extent do you think David's speech in 24:8-15 is sincere, and to what extent do you think it is merely calculated?
 3. When Saul leaves following their dramatic conversation, David and his men go "up to the stronghold" (24:22). Do you think this suggests that David suspects Saul's turnaround is only temporary?

After this, discuss the statements in the session introduction regarding competition. Drawing on experiences in business, athletics, and other areas of life, do you believe that competition is in any way beneficial to a person, a community, or to the world?

Then in twos, discuss one or both of the following:

1. Read the short article, "Sharing Power in the Congregation." What dangers do you see in having a great deal of influence in a congregation concentrated in one or a few individuals? How can other members be encouraged to assume responsibilities for which they are capable?

Help each other with a personal assessment: Is my present level of responsibility and influence in the church too light? Too heavy?

About right? Whose talents and energies are currently not being used in the mission of our congregation? What needs to happen for these energies to be released? Agree on a specific plan of action for this week.

2. Consider together situations in your lives where rivalry or competition is negative or destructive. What specific actions can you take to defuse the competition and/or release the energy that's currently devoted to, and convert it into more positive directions? Agree to check back next time on how you have been able to fulfill your intentions.

Closing

Reassemble as a larger group. Some may wish to share with the group the intentions they made in the dyads. Spend time in prayer, silent or spoken, asking the Spirit to be present with each group member as he carries out the task to which he has committed.

Repeat the choral reading of Philippians 2.

Food for thought 2: What about church sports?

Women make up between sixty and sixty-six percent of church attendees in the United States. (The figures are likely similar in Canada.) How do you get men, especially young men, in the pews? To address this problem, some congregations have turned to competitive athletic activities. Sports teams—typically softball and basketball—have become a significant force for drawing and keeping young men in church, and for promoting camaraderie and relationships.

If your congregation fields athletic teams, have you held discussions about how your church's values are reflected in the teams' patterns of participation, conduct on the field or court, dress, and conceptions of "success"?

Session 4

What We Can Take with Us



At some point in our lives most of us are ready to move from acquisition of things that perish to investment in legacies that last.

Opening worship

Song: "God Whose Giving" (HWB 383).

Prayer: The following responsive prayer is adapted from Menno Simons' 16th Century "Meditation on the Twenty-Fifth Psalm."

Leader: O Lord of hosts, this is the final reward for those who know you:

Group 1: Their souls shall inherit that which is good in the paradise of their God.

Group 2: They are delivered from sin and death and serve before you in peace and joy of heart all their days.

Group 1: They sleep without fear, for you are their strength and shield.

Group 2: They rest under the shadow of your wings, for they are yours.

Leader: Tips for leading the sessions are given on page 45.

Group 1: They fear not, for you warm them
with the rays of your love.

Group 2: They hunger not, for you feed them
with the bread of life.

Group 1: They thirst not, for you give them to
drink of the waters of your Holy Spirit.

Group 2: They want not, for you are their
treasure and wealth.

All: They dwell in the house of your peace.

(From *Praying with the Anabaptists*, by Marlene Kropf
and Eddy Hall. Newton, Kan.: Faith & Life Press, 1994.
Used with permission.)

Exploring the topic

As I was growing up, my father would sometimes launch into the story of a local celebrity, someone who had clearly made it in life. He would describe in detail his rise to power and wealth, the vast empire he eventually controlled, the properties and businesses that revolved in his orbit. At the end of the story, there would be a reflective pause, and Dad would add matter-of-factly, "But he died."

These accounts always made me wonder what was supposed to be most instructive to me, the man's remarkable life or his very unremarkable death. Now I think it's the combination of the two that has the most to teach us. Many Christian teachers throughout the centuries have believed that it is spiritually healthy for us to contemplate our own death.

Brothers in one monastic community used to greet each other with the admonition, "Remember that you will die." Not the cheeriest of greetings. But the aim was not obsession with death, but perspective on life. How does the way we are occupying our time and managing our possessions stack up against the temporal nature of it all? Jesus made use of this very perspective in the parable of the rich fool: "God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'" (Luke 12:20).

I haven't found that middle age has made me preoccupied with death. But I do tear open the envelope that tells me how much higher my cholesterol has crept. My Achilles tendons won't let me run the distances I used to. And every class reunion we remember another classmate with a moment of silence. In the Middle Ages such times were called *memento morii*: reminders of death.

The question isn't how or when we're going to die, or how our will is structured, or how much our estate is worth. The question is how do we invest our lives now, daily, this moment? How do we become "rich toward God" (Luke 12:21)? Abraham, in his generosity toward his nephew Lot, demonstrated an investment in relationships rather than in mere acquisition of property.

Read aloud Genesis 13:1-7

Next to Moses, Abraham is the Old Testament character who is most often mentioned in the New Testament. A model of faith and a father of nations, he is viewed as a patriarch by three world religions: Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. As recorded in Genesis 12, Abram's travels

from “Ur of the Chaldeans” in Mesopotamia to Haran, then south through Canaan into Egypt, follow migratory patterns of the early second millennium B.C. Abram’s wanderings, however, are not merely a search of food or grazing land, but rather for “a land that [God] will show you” (12:1)—a place of promise and destiny.

At the beginning of chapter 13, Abraham reenters the land of Canaan after an unfortunate sojourn in Egypt. His traveling party is impressive, for he is “very rich” in livestock, silver, and gold. With him travels his nephew Lot, who also possesses “flocks and herds and tents.” The text reports that “their possessions were so great that they could not live together,” as their herders bickered over grazing land.

Read aloud Genesis 13:8-13

It is clear that Abram and Lot will have to separate. How will they divide up the land? As head of the clan, Abraham is clearly in a position to call the shots. In addition, God has already shown him the land that is to belong to him and his offspring. Nevertheless, Abram makes a generous and risky offer. Standing with Lot on a high place, he offers his nephew his choice of homeland. It is hardly a choice at all. The plain east of the Jordan is level and “well watered everywhere, like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt.” Both of them have just traveled through the dry hill country that would be left to Abram.

Does Abram know that the view alone would attract Lot—never an admirable character—and fuel his desire for acquisition? Is the reference to Eden and Egypt a literary wink to the reader—a

hint of the dangers and temptations that lay in Lot's choice of an area already populated by cities? However we answer these questions, the story leaves us with portraits of two characters: Abram's generosity and Lot's shortsightedness.

Read aloud Genesis 13:14-18

With Lot out of the picture, God speaks again to Abram, inviting him to cast his eyes in all directions. This is one more step in the progressive revelation of God's promise of "a land," from "a land that I will show you" (12:1) to "this land" (12:7), to "all the land that you see" (13:15). The "offspring" are still a dream, bittersweet and distant to a man over seventy-five. His faith in that promise will be tested for another

Food for thought 1: You can't serve your Master and Mastercard

In April 2001, Mt. Carmel Baptist Church in Norfolk, Virginia, began holding "debt liquidation services." The pastor, Bishop Vernie Russell, would select a family, and after he had announced their names, the congregation would begin giving toward the relief of their debt. The family would come forward, cut up their credit cards, and place the pieces in a glass case at the front of the sanctuary. Later, the family would receive a check for the total amount of their current credit card debt.

"As of today, we have gotten 53 families completely out of debt, and the monies total slightly over \$300,000," said Bishop Russell. "We have cut up more than 500 credit cards." Bishop Russell adds that the church has not deviated from their budget. Rather, if they are able, members give beyond their commitments to the budget in order to help free others from debt.

After having their debt liquidated, members are not allowed to make any non-essential new purchases for seven months, and must attend financial workshops and seminars. From then on, cash-only purchases are strongly recommended.

As more and more members became debt-free, opportunities for outreach increased. "Once we became freed up from debt, we were able to give more freely than to help other people out of debt," said one member.

Bishop Russell's goal is to continue his "debt revival" services until the entire membership of Mt. Carmel is debt-free.

—Brian Conner, *"The Weight of Debt and the Things of This World,"* CBN News, Aug. 12, 2002, www.cbn.com

twenty-five years. But centuries later, when his offspring return from their own sad sojourn in Egypt, it will be the area of Hebron—where Abram their father built his altar—that they will recognize as home.

Talking it through

Read together the “Food for thought 1: You can’t serve your Master and Mastercard!” What is your reaction to this church’s ministry of “debt liquidation”? If you would picture such a program being put into place in your congregation, what would be your fears and reservations?

Discuss briefly the legacies of Abraham, Bishop Russell, and other faith heroes we admire. What is their relationship with material things? What do they want to be best known for?

Food for thought 2: An African fable

Two billy goats met each other in the middle of a log that was used to bridge a deep, narrow ravine. The younger goat saw the elder approaching and immediately lowered his head as if to charge the other.

“Stop!” cried the elder. “Why are you preparing to fight?”

“Because,” said the other, “there is no room for us to pass each other on this bridge. One of us must either step off or be knocked off.”

The older goat seemed puzzled. “Can one of us not go back to the end of the bridge, step aside and let the other pass?”

“Of course not,” the younger goat sneered. “If you turned around or walked backward (I know *I* would not) you would lose your balance.”

“Well, then,” said the elder, “the solution is simple.” Without speaking, he carefully lay down on the log, looked up at the other, and motioned him to walk across on his body.

The younger goat sniffed, trod on the body of the older goat, then went on his way.

In twos, do the following:

1. Take turns listing ways that the generation older than you has helped you—through advice, support, mentoring, and/or financial help.
2. In light of your discussion, describe the legacy that you would like to leave to the generation younger than you. What kinds of help do the best job of creating and releasing energy, gifts, and service? Write down a statement of intent, then exchange it with your partner. If possible, set a time to review it at a later point, reviewing your progress in fulfilling it.

In the larger group, collect and discuss some ideas generated in the dyads. If the group is intrigued by one or two ideas, record them for later discussion and action, or ask two or three group members to do further thinking before the next session.

Closing

Offer prayers of thanks for the generation older than you and the generation younger than you—naming their resources and their ways of blessing your community. Ask God to empower you to carry out your intentions to leave a legacy of blessing among the younger generation.



Session 5

Gearing Up for Change

When Jesus "comes to our house" bringing unconditional love, our life's focus may make a radical shift from success to significance.

Opening worship

Song: "God Whose Giving" (HWB 383).

Prayer: The following "Prayer of the Week on the Sunday of Zacchaeus" is from the Orthodox tradition.

Leader: Let us pray to the Lord.

All: Lord have mercy.

Leader: Lord, we are all short.

Group 1: In one way or another we have not lived up to what you have called us to be.

Group 2: To compensate for this, we express pride and arrogance.

Group 1: We love ourselves over you and show it by the way we accumulate things.

Group 2: At the expense of the poor we satisfy our passions.

Leader: Tips for leading the sessions are given on page 45.

All: In our distress we call out to you.

Group 1: As you saw Zacchaeus in the tree and brought him salvation, so we ask you to see us.


Group 2: Help us to follow Zacchaeus' example and give of our wealth generously to the poor and to your mission.

All: We pray in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Exploring the topic

Bob Buford is a Christian and successful businessman. In his book *Halftime* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), he argues that the first half of life is a quest for success, and the second is a quest for significance. As the title implies, Buford suggests that middle age is a time to stop the game, go into the locker room, and consider how the second half of life is going to be lived.

Sometimes a good halftime "chewing-out" by the coach helps to clarify things. For Buford the "coach" was a prominent business consultant—an atheist—who asked Buford a simple question: "What's in the box?" In business and in life, only one thing can be in the box, only one thing can be the central, driving force. After listening to Buford talk for a couple of hours, the consultant told him that he would need to put either money or Christ in the box. Once he chose, the consultant could tell him the strategic planning implications of his choice. Until he did, he would be confused and wavering.



I was sitting at a restaurant recently with two longtime friends. As they talked, it dawned on me that during the last year, both had made career changes around the age of fifty. Both had been in middle-to-upper management, and both had left those jobs to take positions in church and para-church service agencies. They discussed their feeling of vulnerability in making the move. Salary, insurance, retirement goals, their children's college expenses, a sense of confidence and competence—all were less secure. Yet both talked about a sense of moving in the direction of their life mission—and of the exhilaration of venturing into something new.

For Bob Buford, putting Christ in the box did not mean leaving his “first-half” life behind. It did mean that he drastically reduced his direct management of his businesses. It also meant that he began to devote his time, entrepreneurial skills, and capital to helping churches and service organizations get good things done.

For Zacchæus, wealthy and despised, it meant nothing short of salvation for himself and his whole household.

Read aloud Luke 19:1-2

The story of Zacchæus' encounter with Jesus has a special place in Luke's Gospel. It is the last story in Luke's long section on Jesus' journey to Jerusalem, which runs from 9:51 (“When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem”) all the way to 19:27. The final sequence of stories includes the rich ruler (18:18-25), the blind beggar (18:35-43), and Zacchæus (19:1-10). These stories are united by the theme of salvation, and they are

interspersed with parables that illustrate and expand the lessons of the stories.

Jericho is Jesus' last stop before Jerusalem. It is a small city, but it is a trading crossroads—well worth the money Zacchaeus paid Rome for his franchise as the town's chief tax collector. Farmers paid to allow their goods to enter the city; and merchants paid to sell the goods in the streets. Rome allowed Zaccheus to pad the tax bills for his own profit. No wonder he was hated. His taxes kept the farmers and merchants poor, his wealth set him apart from ordinary Jews, and contrary to the meaning of his name ("innocent" or "clean"), his position made him ritually unclean, tainted by his dealings with Gentiles.

Read aloud Luke 19:3-7

As children we could relate to Zacchaeus climbing up a tree in order to see above a crowd of bigger people. As adults we may see Zacchaeus' ambition as compensating behavior: Somehow, he was going to stand above the crowd. Jesus sees a tax collector who wants so badly to see him that he's willing to risk his dignity. That's enough for Jesus. It is for outsiders with an open heart that Jesus has come. He abruptly invites himself over. The word "must" in Luke usually implies divine necessity: Zacchaeus doesn't know it, but he has a date with destiny. God's grace is about to reach out.

This, of course, is too much for the crowd. To be a guest in someone's home was a more serious matter than it is in our culture. By entering another's home, by reclining at table and breaking bread with them, one shared their identity, became part of their family. To be "the

***Food for thought 1:
Vocation***

Neither the hair shirt
nor the soft berth will
do. The place God
calls you is where
your deep gladness
and the world's deep
hunger meet.

— *Frederick Buechner*
*in Wishful Thinking:
A Seeker's ABC*

guest of one who is a sinner" is to share publicly in their sin.

Read aloud Luke 19:8-10

I would love to know what conversation took place in the interval between Jesus' invitation and Zacchaeus' great announcement. We're told only that Zacchaeus "stood there" and declared that half his wealth would go to the poor. To any that he had defrauded, he announces a fourfold payback. This is restitution that goes beyond the minimum requirements of the law; it is voluntary generosity, prompted by Zacchaeus' encounter with the grace of God in the person of Jesus. Jesus' announcement in response is just as remarkable: "Today salvation has come to this house." Zacchaeus has demonstrated that, in responding to God's generosity to him, he is truly a "son of Abraham," a bona fide member of the household of faith.

Talking it through

Read the Zacchaeus story again, this time dramatically, with different people reading the parts of narrator, Jesus, a member of the crowd, and Zacchaeus. Then hold a "press conference" in which those with speaking parts role play their characters and are interviewed by the rest of the group. The questions should probe the interviewees on their thoughts, feelings, and reactions in different parts of the story.

Then discuss these questions:

1. In the previous chapter of Luke, Jesus had told the rich ruler to sell all that he owned (18:18-25). Why does Jesus declare that salvation has come to Zacchaeus when he

promises only half of his wealth, plus restitution for any he had defrauded? Is Zacchæus getting off easy? Why does Jesus treat them differently?

2. Jesus' pronouncement of Zacchæus' salvation (v. 9) follows the tax collector's promises of generosity and restitution. Is Zacchæus saved by his works? By his repentance? A combination? Will Zacchæus continue to be a tax collector?

In twos, discuss:

1. Read Frederick Buechner's definition of vocation in "Food for thought 1." Do you agree that God's will for our lives is connected to the things that give us the deepest satisfaction and joy? Take turns discussing what those things are in each of your lives.

Food for thought 2: Prayers for transformation

From the cowardice that dares not
face new truth
From the laziness that is contented
with half truth
From the arrogance that thinks it
knows all truth
Good Lord, deliver me.—*Kenya*

Like Lazarus, I arose. But, O my
Father, the grave clothes bind me
still. Old habits that I cannot throw
off, old customs that are so much a
part of my life that I am helpless to
live the new life that Christ calls me
to live. Give me strength, O Father, to
break the bonds; give me courage to
live a new life in thee; give me faith,
to believe that with thy help I cannot
fail.—*Taiwan*

Help each one of us, gracious Father,
to live in such magnanimity and
restraint that the Head of the Church
may never have cause to say to any
one of us, This is my body, broken by
you.—*China*

Lord, to those who hunger, give
bread. And to those who have bread,
give the hunger for justice.—*Latin
America*

*The three prayers from Kenya, Taiwan, and
China are from The Oxford Book of Prayer,
edited by George Appleton. (New York:
Oxford University Press, 1985). The prayer
from Latin America is from Extending the
Table, edited by Joetta Handrich Schlabach
(Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1991). Used
with Permission.*

2. Consider the present moment as a “halftime” break, a time to stop and reflect on your life’s direction. To what extent do your career and priorities—as measured by your use of time, money, and attention—reflect your deepest-held values? What changes, small or large, would be necessary to bring you closer to living out your life mission? What keeps you from making those changes?

Closing

Guided prayer: Sit in your most relaxed posture, shut out any distractions around you, and take a few moments for prayerful silence. Then, take some time to dwell on the following scenarios: Imagine yourself sitting high up in a tree. Imagine Jesus looking up at you, addressing you by name, as telling you to come down, because he wants to come to your house. Go with Jesus to your house. Imagine the conversation there. What issues in your life do you discuss? At the end of your conversation, what changes do you imagine yourself announcing? To close, ask Jesus to help you carry out these changes. Ask his forgiveness for what you fail to do, and thank him for the love that brought him to your home.

Leader's Guide



How to use this booklet

One of the aims of the *Closer Than a Brother* series is to encourage men to find “spiritual companions.” Some of this work may already have been done, and the men in your group may already have a partner with whom to pair up when dyads are called for. If you have not yet dealt with this issue, you may wish to review pages 10 to 12 in the first booklet of the series, *What Really Matters: Conversation Starters for Men* by J. Lorne Peachey and Everett J. Thomas. If your group, or members in it, have not been exposed to that study, you may wish to start with it, or at least use its suggestions for starting spiritual companionships.

Notes for individual sessions

Session 1: Wielding Power, Giving Power

As in any discussion setting, it's important to know the group you're working with and make appropriate decisions about activities. For example, if you feel that your group wouldn't be comfortable with the physical drama suggested for the Philippians passage, adapt it in some other way. The group could listen to the passage with eyes closed, visualizing its downward and upward movement.

Before your session, be ready to supply everyone with paper and pencil for the listing of “powers” that will take place in twos.

For the closing prayer time, be sensitive to the style of your group. You may wish to have an open time for spontaneous prayers from the group, or you may wish to lead in a spoken or read prayer.

Session 2: Wealth: the Power to Blind, the Power to Bless

Watch the time carefully in this session. The group discussion of the passages and questions needs to be closed early enough to allow significant time in the dyads or smaller groups. Encourage group members to share as specifically as they are comfortable regarding their “giving autobiography.” Remind them that you are not asking them to make their giving public, but to share with a brother about an issue with spiritual and practical dimensions.

In the group discussion at the end, find a way to “hold on” to ideas that are generated. You may want to use a chalkboard, flipchart, or some other means of recording and keeping your list of ideas. If one or two ideas seem to be generating special interest, consider building in some time at the beginning of the next session to see if there has been further thinking. Be good stewards of the genuine interest and energy that emerges, since it could well be the stirring of the Spirit in your group.

If your group wants to pursue the issue of giving further, The Giving Project initiative of the Mennonite Church has some excellent

resources, including the two books by Mark Vincent listed on page 51.

Session 3: Competition and Power

Before this session, review the relationship of Saul and David, beginning with 1 Samuel 18:6 and continuing up to the passage for today. Then when you come to the story in the session, you may wish to allow the men to tell as much of the story as they can remember, with you filling in as necessary.

If you decide to take the suggestion about seeking the input of a mental health professional (question 1 in Talking it through), this should be arranged beforehand.

Especially in this session, you will need to sense where the group's interest is heading. There will be several possible directions, since the text and discussion both raise a number of issues, any of which may be followed fruitfully. Some groups will wish to discuss the issue of competition in sports or business. Some may want to pursue the distribution of power and responsibility in the church.

Notice that part of the task of the dyad segment of the session is to work at some level of accountability. Emphasize this as your group enters that segment. At the closing, one or two of the dyads may even wish to share the "assignment" they have taken on for next week as a result of their discussion.

Alternate activity: If sports is big in your group, you may wish to focus your discussion on that issue, paying special attention to the

introductory comments in "Exploring the topic" and "Food for thought 2: What about church sports?" What are the benefits and dangers of involvement of Christian men in sports? What, if anything, does the story of David and Saul say to the spirit of competition in sports?

If planned carefully, a debate could be meaningful for your group. The resolution could be: "Competitive sports is a useful tool for church outreach to men." The "con" side (even if it includes men role-playing those they do not agree with) would argue that competition tends to militate against values of servanthood and equality, and that male competitiveness is actually a problem to be confronted, rather than simply Christianized. If this option is chosen, establish clear guidelines about equal time for each side to speak without interruption.

Session 4: What We Can Take with Us

Before the session, review Genesis chapter 12. You may wish to offer a brief review of Abraham's call and travels up to the episode under study in chapter 13. If a map of the region is available, tracing Abraham's "wanderings" up to his resettlement in Canaan may be a useful visual help. Reviewing the events that follow Genesis 13 can also throw light on the actions of both Abraham and Lot in today's story.

The dyad segment of this session may be another occasion when ideas for group action are generated. You or your planning group will need to discern which of the action plans developed during this series are actually carried through. Bringing one plan into action would be a desirable outcome.

Session 5: Gearing Up for Change

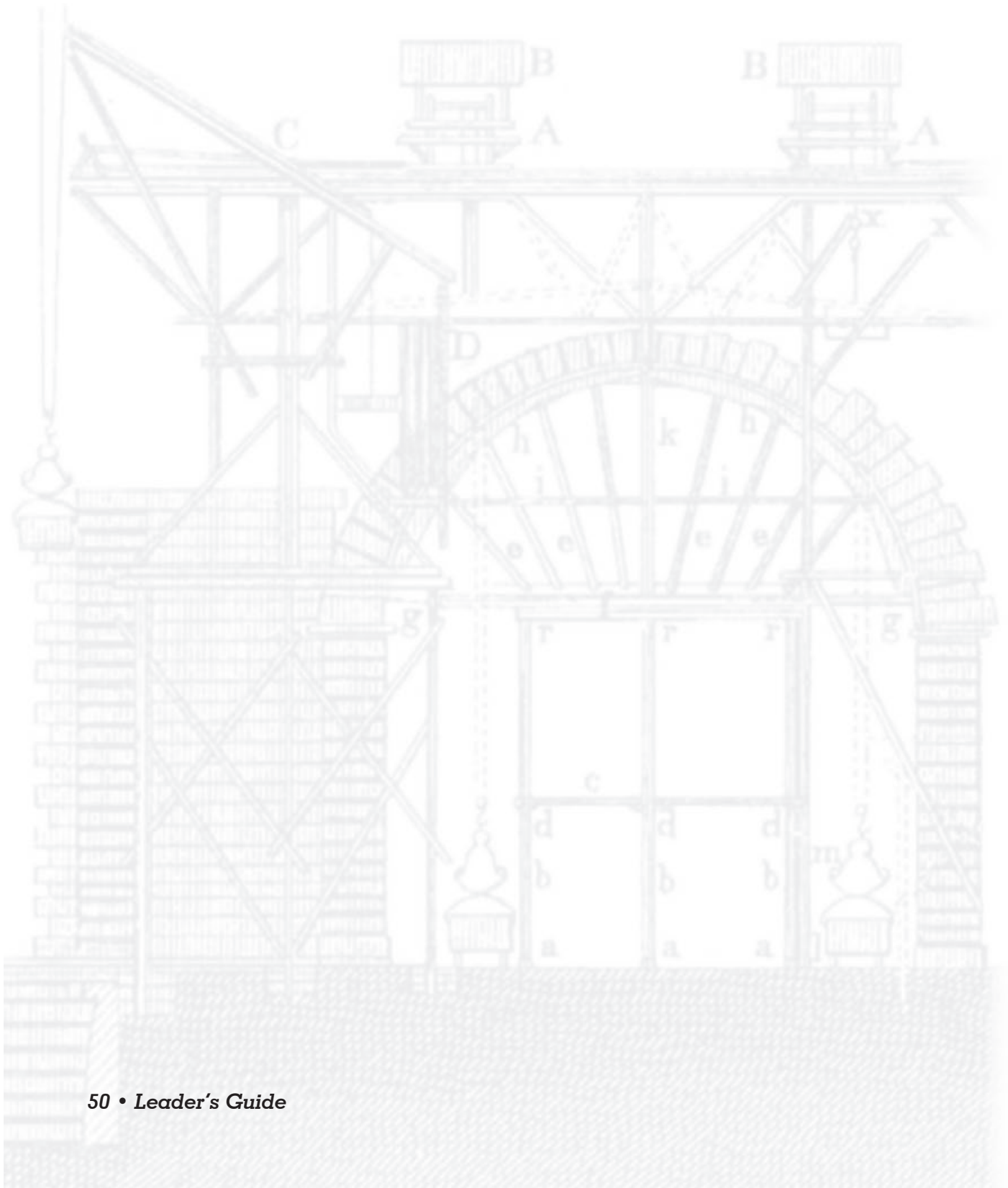
Take some time before the session to review the story of the rich ruler (only Matthew refers to him as “young”) in Luke 18:18-27. This episode is referred to in the study questions, and your familiarity with it may be helpful. Give some thought also to the men in your group who will read the speaking roles in the story of Zacchaeus. They will not only read, but also interpret their character’s feelings and motivations.

Since this is the last session, consider how to bring closure to this study. The guided prayer suggested in the text is one possibility, and will require some preparation on your part. If the physical actions suggested in session 1 for use with the Philippians 2 text were meaningful in your group, the same exercise may make a good “bookend” here. When you guide the prayer exercise, be sure to allow enough silent spaces for participants to immerse themselves in the imagined scenarios.

Finally, give some thought to any ideas for action that may have been generated throughout the sessions. Take care that these aren’t allowed to die for lack of follow-through. Select members of the group to do further thinking or planning, write ideas on poster board for display in the room, etc. You may even wish to take an extra session to work with the study’s practical outcomes.

If you have used the dyad exercises in this series to try out “spiritual companion” relationships, consider whether the same dyads might be used in your next study. If some combinations

aren't working well, encourage participants to address the problem directly and move into other partnerships. If combinations are working well, encourage them to meet outside of class to explore the relationship further.



Resources

Buford, Bob. *Halftime: Changing Your Game Plan from Success to Significance*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994.

Conway, Jim. *Men in Midlife Crisis*. Elgin, Ill.: David C. Cook, 1978.

Dalbey, Gordon. *Healing the Masculine Soul*. Dallas: Word Publishing, 1988.

Gardner, Richard B. *Matthew*. Believers Church Bible Commentary. Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1991.

Halteman, James. *The Clashing Worlds of Economics and Faith*. Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1995.

Redekop, Benjamin and Calvin W. Redekop, eds. *Power, Authority, and the Anabaptist Tradition*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001.

Stokes, Kenneth. *Faith Is a Verb: The Dynamics of Adult Faith Development*. Mystic, Conn.: Twenty-Third Publications, 1998.

Sider, Ronald J. *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*. 2nd edition. Downer's Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1984.

Vincent, Mark. *A Christian View of Money: Celebrating God's Generosity*. Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1997.

The Giving Project

Congregations that want to give serious attention to beliefs and practices in regard to money should consider contacting The Giving Project, a stewardship initiative of the Mennonite Church. Two books, *A Christian View of Money* by Mark Vincent, and

its companion manual *Teaching a Christian View of Money* are available through Herald Press or by contacting The Giving Project by phone (1-888-406-9773) or through e-mail (GivingProject@Prodigy.net). These books have served as a resource in this series, but those who want to increase their understanding and action will benefit from the ideas and processes this initiative has put together.

Many Christian men today are looking for opportunities to walk with peers as they ponder key life issues. Macho talk in the locker room or political discussions at lunch just aren't nurturing their souls. The study series, *Closer Than a Brother*, helps men go deeper in their life with God through men's groups and accountable relationships in the church family.

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Despite changes in gender roles, men must still grapple with how to manage the money they earn and the power they have in their homes, churches, and workplaces. Like sex, wealth and power can be abused. Or it can be used responsibly and in a God-honoring way. This five-session study will explore the biblical call to share power and wealth, the place of competition in the lives of Christian men, the importance of the legacies we nurture for future generations, and finally, the tension between significance and success in our value systems.

Leonard Beechy teaches high school English in Middlebury, Indiana, and is an adjunct professor of English at Goshen (Ind.) College. He is a member of Eighth Street Mennonite Church in Goshen, where he and his wife Sharon live. They have two grown daughters.

Faith & Life
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