

MY GENEROUS LIFE  
FOR CONNECT GROUPS  
WEEK 1



# THOMPSON STATION CHURCH

MATTHEW 25:14-30; LUKE 21:1-4

WEEK 1

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## PREPARATION

- > Spend the week reading through and studying Matthew 25:14-30 and Luke 21:1-4. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools (such as a concordance or Bible dictionary) to enhance your preparation.
- > Determine which discussion points and questions will work best with your group.
- > Pray for our pastor, the upcoming group meeting, your teaching, your group members, and their receptivity to the study.

## HIGHLIGHTS

**BIBLICAL EMPHASIS:** God has given us much, and He expects us to steward His gifts well.

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**TEACHING AIM:** The generosity of God calls us to live generous lives.

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**MEMORY VERSE:** His master said to him, “Well done, good and faithful slave! You were faithful over a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Share your master’s joy!” – Matthew 25:23

## GENEROUS ATTRIBUTES

**Cause Giver.** A person who is faithful to respond to a need when God calls.

**Consistent Giver.** A person who is faithful by giving monthly.

**Committed Giver.** A person who is faithful in their generosity by tithing to their home church.

**Courageous Giver.** A person who is faithful by giving beyond the tithe.

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## INTRODUCTION

*As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.*

- 1 What is something you want to improve in, or get better at doing? Why?
  
- 2 What are some steps that would help you get better at the thing you just mentioned?

“Practice makes perfect,” or so the saying goes. This means that if you work hard at something, in most cases you will get better at it. Eventually it will not be a burden to you, but a joy. Before someone runs a marathon, he or she has to run a mile. Many of us would like to be better at giving, but we never actually practice giving. To help us grow in that area, we will spend the next five weeks considering what the Bible teaches us about giving and see how the Lord has called the church to be a generous people.

## UNDERSTANDING

*Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.*

There are many ways to give, and there are many levels at which one might give. Additionally, giving can be relative. For example, a \$1000 gift for one might be 10% of one’s weekly income, while that same amount might represent months of savings. Regardless of where we are with regard to your generosity, the goal in these studies is to help us learn how we progress toward a total freedom in heart that enables us to live truly generous lives with all our resources God has given us.

- Would you describe your parents as generous people? Were they generous with the finances?

- What impact did your parents' attitude toward giving have on you?
- When was the first time you remember giving to someone else with your own money? What led you to give?

Notes:

Like anything else, giving is a learned behavior. Most people are not naturally generous people. People learn through the example of parents or close friends. Those who grew up in a home where giving was a regularly practiced discipline probably feel more comfortable giving, as well as talking about giving. For followers of Jesus, the desire to give grows in our heart as we learn to love the Lord and walk in obedience with Him.

- Think about the places you have given to in the past (charity, a church, political campaign, an animal shelter, a friend in need, etc). What did that giving reveal about what you value?
- Read Matthew 6:21. How does where we spend our money show what is going on in our hearts?
- How does preparing your heart to give allow you to be responsive to God?

Jesus taught that where we spend our money is a direct reflection of the state of our hearts. Giving, then, is a spiritual matter because you give in accordance to what you value. If you value friendship, you will help a friend in need (financially or otherwise). If you love animals, you may give to a shelter that cares for animals. If you love security,

you may give your money to some type of investment like real estate or a hedge fund. Our spending and giving leaves a trail that leads to our hearts. For this reason, we have decided to embark on a series to help us think about what it means to live in a generous culture. Being generous models the life of Jesus. In His earthly ministry Jesus frequently used parables to explain deep spiritual truths.

Notes:

> Have a volunteer read Matthew 25:14-30.

To help His followers understand God's perspective on generosity, Jesus told a parable about a man who was about to go on a trip. He needed to be sure his property was cared for while he was gone, so he entrusted it to three servants. This parable teaches us to be faithful stewards of everything God has entrusted to us by investing it all in His kingdom.

- What do the master's actions in verses 14-15 teach us about God and how He interacts with us?
- What do the talents represent in this parable?
- How did each of the servants handle the talents the master gave to them? What would it look like for you to "bury" the things God has given you?

This parable isn't just about money, although money is a gift God wants us to use well to advance His kingdom. Jesus was talking about every resource God has delegated to us—our possessions, abilities, and opportunities. Giving is about far more than our money. We can be generous with our time, abilities, resources, friendship, and any number of things. The point Jesus is making is that those who love Him will give themselves to Him.

**ULTIMATELY, GIVING IS A HEART ISSUE.**

- How were the servants rewarded for their faithfulness? What do these rewards teach us about faithfulness and generosity?

Notes:

- What mistakes did the third servant make? What are the implications for our own giving?

Note their threefold reward (vv. 21,23). The faithful servants received their master's praise, greater responsibility, and an invitation to share their master's joy. This could mean that they were invited to join in a feast given at the master's return, or that they shared with him the joy over a job well done. When we are convinced that God is good and giving, we will be all the more willing to invest everything for the sake of His kingdom. It is important to remember, though, that in God's eyes our level of sacrifice is tied to what He has given us. In this sense, all giving is proportional. While many do not give because they feel as though they aren't able, the next story from the Gospel of Luke helps us see that isn't quite the case.

> Have a volunteer read Luke 21:1-4.

- How did Jesus commend the widow's giving? What reason did He give?
- What is the difference between contributing out of abundance and out of poverty?
- Why should we not feel pleased with ourselves based on the amount of our gift? What is a better indicator of our heart?

The widow did not give very much based on human standards, but according to her means, she gave everything she had. In God's eyes,

our giving is always seen in proportion to our income. When we get more, we should not look at how much we can spend but how much we can give. Thus, all people are free to give. God does not judge our giving by the amount but by the degree of sacrifice. Some members of our church might be exceptionally wealthy, while others are having a hard time. Both are able to give sacrificially because giving is not tied to a number, but to an attitude of our hearts.

Notes:

## APPLICATION

*Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.*

- 1 Over the next five weeks, how do you hope to be encouraged or challenged in your own relationship with generosity?
- 2 Think together as a group about all the different ways you can be generous. List them out.
- 3 How does giving support the work of God in the world? Why do you think God designed His church and His mission to be supported by the generosity of His people?

## PRAY

Thank you, Lord, for blessing me in all ways, at all times, with more than I need. Lead me to live faithfully, give generously, share joyfully, and look expectantly toward my future.

## MATTHEW 25:14-30

25:14-15. This parable begins immediately with the word again. This is another parable teaching something about the kingdom of heaven. A man (representing Jesus) was about to set out on a journey (representing the time before Jesus' return; cf. 21:33). While he was gone, he needed to be sure that his property was well cared for, so he called his servants and entrusted (paradidomi, "hand over") his possessions to them before leaving.

Notes:

Every Christian is entrusted with some responsibility for the kingdom. Some will take this seriously and invest their lives wisely, and others will squander this responsibility. The part of the kingdom entrusted to each of us is precious to the Lord. He is hurt by the mishandling of a lifetime of opportunity; but he rejoices over a lifetime well spent. He has placed in our hands what is his own. This is a sobering thought—to be stewards of kingdom resources.

One unique element in this parable is the different property entrusted to each servant—five talents to one, two talents to the second, and one talent to the third, each according to his ability. The Lord knows us, and he knows the full potential of each person for serving the kingdom. He designed that potential into each of us when he created us. No one is entrusted with more than he can handle, but neither is he entrusted with less than he can handle.

The person entrusted with little will be required to do all he can with the little he has been given. All of us are to live up to our full potential, by God's strength, with his wisdom, for his kingdom. This stewardship is comprehensive. It includes time, talents, spiritual gifts, energies, personality, experiences, attitudes, and material resources.

25:16-18. The phrase At once implied prompt obedience on the part of the first servant (as well as the second; note so also in 25:17). These two servants did not miss a single opportunity to bring their master a return on his investment. They put his money to work, meaning they invested for a profit. Each doubled the amount entrusted to him during his master's absence. There



was no doubt that the first two servants worked hard for the master.

Investing resources (e.g., money, energy, abilities) has always been a risky business. Even the wisest investor risks losing increases if something happens at the wrong time (e.g., a famine, a war). Implied in the two faithful servants' actions here was a certain amount of risk. But it was obedient risk. They were expected to do what was prudent—what would normally turn a profit, based on their wisdom drawn from life experience.

Notes:

Believers also are required to obey Jesus in all things, even when risk is involved, even when we do not see the end results. This is not the same as foolish extravagance or taking risks to test the Lord, without the likelihood of a return on the investment. It does not mean taking chances without thinking ahead. But it implies a life lived on the edge of faith. Such a consistently obedient, faith-filled life pleases the Lord and accomplishes his kingdom purposes.

In contrast, the third servant—who had received one talent—played it safe by burying his talent and waiting for his master's return. His life failed to realize any impact or gain for his master. He demonstrated an appalling lack of understanding of his master. He clearly did not know him very well. Too many so-called "believers" fail to believe the Lord enough to obey him, revealing a lack of faith through passive spirituality and failure to step out in "risky" obedience.

25:19-23. The phrase after a long time was Jesus' acknowledgment that there would be quite a time gap before his final coming. It also implied significant opportunity for kingdom gain by those he has entrusted with kingdom resources. Now it was time to settle their accounts, and the servants brought the master's property to him.

Jesus used the threefold pattern of story telling, which was so common in that age. The first two repetitions established a pattern, and the third became a contrasting departure from this pattern. The first two servants brought the original quantity he had given them, plus a 100 percent profit. Between the two of them, they had turned seven talents into fourteen. The master

gave the identical response to each of the first two servants. Even though the second servant had earned only two talents, in contrast to the five of the first, each had lived up to 100 percent of his potential.

Notes:

The master's well done was the greatest reward a loyal servant could have hoped for. He called each of them a good and faithful servant. The two adjectives together describe a person who is reliable because of his loyalty and good character, as evidenced by the investment of his ability. In addition to verbal praise, the master rewarded each of the first two servants with even greater responsibility (cf. 24:47). They had been faithful with a few things, so he would entrust them with even more (many things). And finally, he invited them both to share your master's happiness.

The point is clear. When the king returns, he will require an accounting from all of us. Those who have consistently invested their lives obediently and wisely, according to heaven's priorities will have a return to offer the king. This return may include personal growth and maturity, souls brought into the kingdom, spiritual infants who have been raised to maturity, needs compassionately ministered to, wounds healed, conflicts reconciled, truth lovingly told. The investment we will have made for this return will be all we have been entrusted with in this life: our time, wealth, opportunities, relationships, natural talents and spiritual gifts, a mind and a conscience, as well as God's Word, God's Spirit, and God's church.

The well done awaiting such a servant is the music of eternity—full reward for the person who has been truly loyal to the master. But much more awaits the good and faithful servant of the Messiah. The faithful servant will have even more privilege and responsibility as well as a share in the master's happiness. By living their lives fully vested in kingdom interests and growth, they had gained an entrance into the kingdom (cf. 2 Pet. 1:5-11).

25:24-25. Finally, the third servant came to answer to the master for the opportunity he had received. Presenting the master's one talent to him—no more, no less—the servant explained that he kept the talent safe out of fear— fear of the master's hardness, expecting return where he had made no investment

(harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed). The servant feared the master's wrath if he should lose the master's talent, so he buried it safely to return what was his. He toiled to "keep his nose clean," so to speak. This servant did not know the heart of his king. He did not contribute to the kingdom's advancement.

Notes:

The first two servants acted out of loving loyalty, but the third acted out of selfish fear. The first two were motivated by the hope of pleasing the master; the third by fear of displeasing him. The two motives sound the same, but the end result is quite different. A certain "fear of the Lord" is critical to holy, faithful living (Prov. 1:7; 1 Pet. 1:17). But this is not paralyzing fear. Healthy fear is accompanied by a knowledge of the love of God, while paralyzing fear knows nothing of God's love. This man wasted his investment and failed to advance the kingdom.

25:26-28. The master's response to the third servant revealed that the servant's motive was actually evil, disloyal, and unloving. You wicked, lazy servant stands in dramatic contrast to "good and faithful servant" (25:21,23), implying that the servant's laziness was not because of a lack of ability or opportunity. The servant's "safe" behavior and apparent desire not to displease the master were smokescreens for his self-serving and disobedient heart. In reality, he refused to take any risks or do any work. He did not spend himself in the kingdom's interest. He was selfish, lazy, and arrogant.

The master used this servant's own words against him. He explained that his demanding character should have challenged the servant all the more to invest the talent. This was obviously the master's will—to gain some return. Even a small return from interest would show some degree of loyal obedience.

The master commanded that the third servant's small amount of responsibility be taken from him and given to the first servant, who had shown great responsibility. Our God is a God of high standards, demanding much from his servants. But he never demands more than we can produce because we are empowered by his love, wisdom, and power.

This servant's limited knowledge of his master—he knew only the man's stern side but not his love—was his excuse to handle his master's wealth irresponsibly. Many believers today know only a God of rules and wrath, so they float passively and attempt to excuse their sins of omission. God has given them ample opportunity to learn of his love (11:29), but their own undisciplined hearts make them blindly foolish, and they squander their lifetimes. They call themselves Christians, but they are biding their time, trying to “stay out of trouble,” awaiting glory in heaven. Perhaps Jesus sensed this behind the disciples' question (24:3).

Notes:

25:29-30. Before proclaiming the evil servant's recompense, Jesus put into the master's mouth the central point of the parable. Everyone who has implies faithfulness with what has been entrusted to them. This will be rewarded with even greater trust—privileged responsibility and reward— from God. Such faithful servants will have an abundance. Every need and desire will be met, and more.

But whoever does not have implies self-centered unfaithfulness with what was entrusted. This will be recompensed with the removal of all that has been entrusted to him, since he had proven untrustworthy. It is clear that this servant will not share in the rewards of the king (8:12; 22:13). He had squandered his lifetime of opportunity.

## LUKE 21:1-4

There were 13 coffers shaped like inverted trumpets in the court of women in the temple and a treasury room nearby where supplicants could deposit their offerings. The poor widow did not have much to give, unlike the rich who made a great show of their offerings. Tiny copper coins called mites were the smallest Jewish currency at that time. Jesus commended the widow for giving sacrificially.