



Whole Life Stewardship: The Cheerful Giver

Working with Jesus

iFOLLOW

The iFollow Discipleship Series

About the iFollow Discipleship Series Pastor's Edition

Categories

The iFollow Discipleship Series is designed to be used in congregations to assist people in their pursuit of God. This assumes that individuals are in unique places in their journey and there is no perfect set of lessons that everyone must complete to become a disciple—in fact discipleship is an eternal journey. Therefore the iFollow curriculum is a menu of milestones that an individual, small group, or even an entire church can choose from. The lessons can be placed in three general categories: **Meeting with Jesus** (does not assume a commitment to Jesus Christ); **Walking with Jesus** (assumes an acceptance of Jesus Christ); and **Working with Jesus** (assumes a desire to serve Jesus Christ).

Components

Each lesson has a presenter's manuscript which can be read word for word, but will be stronger if the presenter puts it in his/her own words and uses personal illustrations. The graphic slides can be played directly from the Pastor's DVD or customized and played from a computer. There are also several group activities and discussion questions to choose from as well as printable student handouts.

Usage

The lessons are designed to be used in small groups, pastor's Bible classes, prayer meetings, seminars, retreats, training sessions, discussion groups, and some lessons may be appropriate sermon outlines.

Credits

Curriculum Development: The iFollow Discipleship Series Pastor's Edition curriculum development was lead by the **Center for Creative Ministry**. **General Editor:** Monte Sahlin; **Assistant Editor:** Debbonnaire Kovacs; **Directional Advisory:** Brad Forbes, Carole Kilcher, Ceri Myers, Cesar Gonzalez, Clayton Kinney, Curtis Rittenour, Dave Osborne, Dave VanDenburgh, Gerry Chudleigh, Jane Thayer, Jerry Thomas, John Appel, Jose Rojas, Kim Johnson, Nicole Chao, Paul Richardson, Rich DuBose, Shasta Nelson, William Sutton; **Pastoral Advisory:** Claudio Consuegra, Collette Pekar, Dave Hutman, Don Driver, Fredrick Russell, Jerry Nelson, Jesse Wilson, Leslie Bumgardner, Loren Fenton, Rebecca Brillhart; **Unit Authors:** Alberto Valenzuela, Althea Pineda, Corienne Hay, Debbonnaire Kovacs, Ed Dickerson, Gianluca Bruno, Gil Bahnsen, Greg Nelson, Jack Calkins, James Whibberding, Karen Collum, Monte Sahlin, Norma Sahlin, Pam Splawinski, Patty Ntihuka, Reinder Bruinsma, Ryan Bell; **Additional contribution** by Maria Ovando-Gibson; **Additional editing:** Dave Gemmell, Meredith Carter; **Graphic Design:** Mind Over Media; **Layout:** Paul D. Young; **Web Development:** Narrow Gate Media.

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www.ifollowdiscipleship.org

Whole Life Stewardship: The Cheerful Giver

This presentation is designed for people who desire to serve Jesus Christ and help lead others to Him.

Learning Objectives

1. Reflect on an experience when someone cheerfully gave to you
2. Understand the Scripture principle of giving and receiving
3. Consider ways cheerful giving might influence your financial attitudes
4. Develop a growth plan for cheerful giving

Content Outline

1. Introduction and ground rules
2. Giving attitudes
3. Cheerful giving begins with cheerful receiving
4. A string of giving pearls (Proverbs 11:24-28)
5. Finding new attitudes about giving

Background Material for the Presenter

How we choose to manage our resources and finances as Christians is a personal topic. This presentation operates with a very simple rule. **No participant is obligated at any time to reveal any personal details about their finances, income, or giving patterns.** We are accountable only to God for our choices in managing our money. This presentation focuses on the “why” of giving more than the “what.”

In this session, we will look at the concept of cheerful generosity. We gladly give because we have first received from God, who gives with greater joy than a parent gives to their children. After looking at this concept, we’ll creatively think of ways to apply it to our own lives.

“For everyone who asks, receives; s/he who seeks finds; and to s/he who knocks, the door will be opened. Which



of you, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask!" (Matthew 7:7-11)

We begin by defining a key word: What is Stewardship? The Seventh-day Adventist Church Stewardship Department website provides this definition: "Stewardship is the life-style of one who has a living relationship with Jesus Christ, accepts His lordship and walks in partnership with God, and acts as His agent to manage His affairs on earth."

Giving Attitudes

How would you assess your own experience? What are your personal attitudes related to giving? This "balancing the books" does not focus on literal bank statements or spreadsheets. It looks at your thinking about your resources and finances.

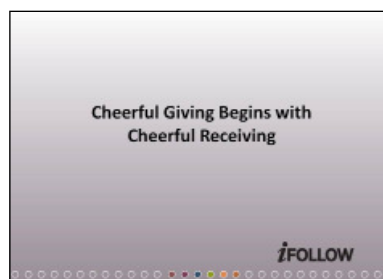


There are many ways to give gifts—reluctantly, grudgingly, or with joy and pleasure—cheerfully. The attitude with which the gift is given has a great impact on the attitude with which it will be received. Have you ever received a gift? Think about a time you received a present from someone who gave it to you with great joy. Then think about a time when you received a present that you knew was given grudgingly, or just because it was expected for a certain season or event. Which gift do you most treasure? Would you rather receive something you really want, given grudgingly, or something you don't really want, given with joy.

How does God feel about such things? Does God want grudging gifts, or cheerful ones? We don't have to guess. In 2 Corinthians 9:7, we are invited to be cheerful givers. Interestingly, God first demonstrated what it means to be a cheerful giver by providing us with many good gifts. Joyful giving attitudes are deeply tied to receiving gifts given by our loving God. And when we joyfully give our resources to the body of Christ, we will receive far more than we could ever give. But just how does this work?

Cheerful Giving Begins with Cheerful Receiving

Cheerful giving is a two-way process. We receive in order that we may give, which in turn becomes an opportunity to receive more. We may block the blessings of God by with-



holding our resources. One way to think about the concept of cheerful giving and receiving is through the illustration of the church as a human body. Paul tells us in Romans 12 that we are the “body” of Christ. And when we study how bodies function, we can more clearly understand the power of cheerfully giving and receiving.

A body is an interdependent set of systems that harmoniously work together for the good of the entire body. Each system has unique tasks, but all these jobs make the body strong and healthy. If each system, like the digestive system, decided to function by itself, the body would die. But systems work interdependently, like a team.

A barrier to cheerful giving in the body of Christ can happen when we function dependently or independently, rather than as an interdependent team. Think of it as growing through various stages of life. When we were first born, we were very dependent on our parents for life and nurture. But as we matured we came to realize that we were unique individuals apart from our parents. So we became independent.

Though we value independence in our culture, this is not the highest level of living according to the Bible. God has created the body of Christ to be interconnected in its relationship toward each person in the body. Just as our physical bodies have “systems” that function together, so the spiritual body of Christ is built up when we affirm that we are all important to the function of the church.

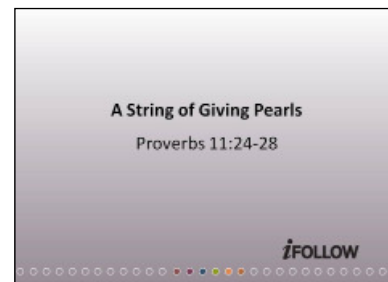
Notice how Paul in Ephesians describes interdependence: “From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.” (Ephesians 4:16) That means we grow when we grow **together in love**. Each of us has a role to play. Understanding our unique roles, the places we fit in the body, will lead to more enthusiastic generosity because we become a part of the body when we do this.

How does this happen? First, you need to discover your unique role to play in the body of Christ. This means reflecting on the resources, talents, gifts, and time you have. Understanding your uniqueness allows you to joyfully give to the body in very specific ways. And secondly, you need to affirm the uniqueness of others in the body of Christ. If you rely on others to share their uniqueness with you, but you don’t understand your own uniqueness, then you become **dependent** on others for who you are in the church. On the other end of the spectrum, if you understand your own uniqueness but do not affirm others, thinking to yourself, “I can do things better myself,” then you become **independent** of the body. Neither leads to cheerful generosity.

Discovering how God has gifted me (financially, with talents, gifts, a unique personality, and time-wise) allows me to find a special place of service within the body of Christ. Affirming the uniqueness of others in the body provides doorways to interdependence—that is, serving together as a team. When we serve collaboratively, cheerful generosity will flow, for we will come to recognize that in a trusting relationship with each other, we are far better off than we are alone. Cheerful giving is interdependent with cheerful receiving.

A String of Giving Pearls (Proverbs 11:24-28)

Let's shift now to trying out these ideas about attitudes. Proverbs 11 contains a lineup of verses that are like a string of pearls. All of them deal with concepts that lead us to cheerful generosity. Let's look them up together. The string begins in verse 24.



1. "One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty." (Proverbs 11:24) How can this lead to cheerful giving? Well, some people would say that a beginning motive for doing the right thing is what is known as "enlightened self interest." It's not a good reason, but it's a start. This text seems to say that if you "give freely," you will "gain even more, but that if you are selfish ("withholding unduly"), you will lose what you have. "Don't be afraid," God assures us. "Giving will not lead you to poverty." If you examine it, you'll see that the underlying attitude beneath this reason for being unwilling to give is fear. And fear is an even worse reason for doing or not doing something. But surely the Bible doesn't mean to teach that we should give only to get!

2. "A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed." (Verse 25) On the face of it, this seems to say the same thing, or at least the first half of it does. "Be generous, and you'll prosper." But the second half brings in a new concept: refreshment. When we give, not in order to gain, but to refresh another, what is our reward? Everyone knows how great it feels to have a chance to be a blessing to another. This doesn't even sound like it's talking about money anymore. Which makes us look back at verse 24. Where does it say money?

In our society, (and in plenty of others, including biblical ones) "giving" is automatically tied to giving things—or the symbol of things in a capitalistic society, money. But it isn't really there. One who gives anything at all will gain; will prosper; and will be refreshed. Hasn't it been true in your own experience?

3. "People curse the man who hoards grain, but blessing crowns him who is willing to sell." (Verse 26) Now, here's an interesting twist! This verse isn't even addressing giving, per se, but selling! Under what kind of circumstances would someone hoard grain and refuse to sell it? The lands of the middle east were and are subject to drought. And in an agricultural society, money wasn't what was important—survival was. Food, clothing, and shelter were all that money was good for. Unless you were rich. Then you could hang it on yourself for decoration, or spend it on fancy cloth and spices and all kinds of unnecessary things.

So why would a person hoard grain? Why not sell it and get money, or trade goods? Sounds like fear again. If I sell my grain, what good will money do me, if the drought continues and there is no grain to buy? My family might die. (Never mind the others who are dying now. ...) This person is cursed, says the text, by the people who are dying outside

his door. The one who is willing to sell is not just blessed, but is “crowned” with blessing. Yet, wouldn’t it be even more generous to just give away the grain? After all, this person must be rich.

There is another factor, always at work among human beings, but especially in fearful survival situations, and that is self respect. A person in need wants to feel able to meet his needs. Remember, we learned about interdependence, not dependence. And not too much independence. Sometimes, selling is kinder than giving. Sometimes, what the rich person is giving away is dignity and compassion.

4. “He who seeks good finds good will, but evil comes to him who searches for it.” (Verse 27) Interesting. Why is this strange gem in the middle of our pearls? What does it have to do with giving, let alone with cheerful giving?

Have you ever heard the story of the old man sitting outside the city gate? A traveler comes and asks what kind of city it is. He’s thinking of moving in. The man asks, “What kind of city did you leave?”

“Oh, it was terrible!” the traveler replies. “People were mean and selfish. I couldn’t wait to get away!”

“This city is just the same,” the man tells him, and with a gesture of annoyance, the traveler moves on.

Another traveler comes by. “What kind of city is this? I’m thinking of moving here.”

Again the man replies with the same question: “What kind of city did you leave?”

The traveler’s eyes grow soft. “It was wonderful! I had so many friends. Everyone was so kind. I hated to leave.”

“This city is just the same,” the man tells him, and joyfully, the traveler enters the city.

A young man sitting nearby is confused. He goes up to the old man and asks, “How could you tell those people completely opposite things?”

“Whatever you’re looking for, you’ll find,” the old man tells him.

That seems to be the lesson of this verse in Proverbs. You find what you look for. What is the giving principle here? Could it be that people who believe all those on welfare are lazy bums who don’t deserve any better will meet only the frauds who bear out their beliefs? That those who give lovingly to inner city panhandlers are the ones who meet the desperate poor, down on their luck and not knowing where to turn?

Which would you rather be? A compassionate person who trusts too much and is sometimes taken advantage of. A shrewd person who never gives without checking all the facts, who sometimes misses out on helping someone who really needed it?

Here comes the final pearl in our string, the one that puts it all together with a sterling silver fastener:

5. “Whoever trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will thrive like a green leaf.” (Verse 28) Ah. Now we can see for certain that the beginning didn’t mean to give in order to get, or to be generous so that people will like you and you’ll be blessed. It’s possible to have even your generosity wrapped up in trust in your own riches (whether of worldly goods or self-righteousness). Truly cheerful givers, givers who have first received cheerfully and gratefully all that God has given them, give because they are righteous (straight with God). They give because they are already thriving in His hands, and their cheerful, compassionate liberality makes the thriving continue in an unbroken line.

Creatively Applying New Attitudes about Giving

We want to dream about new possibilities, to press the edges, to envision new ways of practicing stewardship. We will synthesize and adapt the workshop material creatively into a plan that fits each of us. Here are some creative ideas to help us think in new ways about how to apply the concept of cheerful giving to our lives.



First, let’s think about all the ways we possibly can, that God blesses us. Stewardship programs tend to concentrate on money or things. But that’s the last of the many ways in which God blesses us. What are some others? What are some of the physical ways God blesses the earth and all who live on it?

Suggestions to start with: Rain, sun, seeds, plants, land and oceans, the animals and the ways we and they interact to create a living ecosystem, children, amazing diversity in people, herbs, flowers, butterflies, snowflakes. . . Stars and planets, the moon, wind. Can you think of more?

What are some of the intangible blessings God sends, the mental, emotional, and social blessings?

Suggestions to start with: intellect, creativity, technology, poetry, music, art, children, community, education, painting, dance, written and spoken word, or language itself (talk about amazing!), happiness, sadness, joy, love, forgiveness, marriage, friendship. . . Can you think of more?

Next, think of all the ways we can possibly give generously, besides money. No financial thinking allowed!

Some suggestions to start with: cooking, gardening, speaking, singing, hugging, visiting,

encouraging, teaching, listening, learning, praying, walking with someone, touch, reading, making something (from crochet to wood to metal to you name it!), arranging, decorating, snow shoveling, cleaning. . . Can you think of more?

Now think about monetary giving. It takes its place in the scheme of things, much lower than we thought! In this session, we've looked at the principle of cheerful generosity. We learned that the giving and receiving principle outlined in the Bible teaches us the importance of joyfully exchanging our resources in the body of Christ. We can creatively develop ways to apply this concept to our own lives.

God loves a cheerful giver because God is a cheerful giver! God gave first, and gives all day and all night 24/7/365. God's children look a lot like that, too.

Handout in this Package

1. The Cheerful Giver



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Additional Resources

- Jamal, Azim and McKinnon, Harvey (2008). *The Power of Giving: How Giving Back Enriches Us All*. London: Tarcher.
- Lee, Harold (n.d.). *Giving Through Shared Vision, 2 volumes; Presenter's Guide and Participant's Guide*. (Seminar kit) Lincoln, NE: AdventSource.
- Lee, Harold and Richardson, Paul (n.d.). *Partners in Mission and Ministry*. Lincoln, NE: Center for Creative Ministry.
- Manspeaker, Barbara (various dates). Stewardship Education Program for Children: *God's Special Gift—Me!* (Beginners), *Sense-ational Stewards* (Primary), *Partners with Jesus* (Kindergarten), *Earth Stewards* (Juniors), and Children's Tithe Envelope. Lincoln, NE: AdventSource.
- Ortberg, John, et al. (2000). *Giving: Unlocking the Heart of Good Stewardship*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- Rees, Mel and Crane, Don (n.d.). *Life Principles*. Silver Spring, MD: General Conference Stewardship Department. (Distributed by AdventSource.)
- Rodriguez, Angel (n.d.). *Tithing in the New Testament and the Christian Church*. Silver Spring, MD: General Conference Stewardship Department. (Distributed by AdventSource.)
- Sealy, Christopher (2003). *Understanding the Spirituality of True Stewardship*. Lincoln, NE: AdventSource.
- Stewardship Department (2009). *Steps to Discipleship Stewardship Education Package*. Lincoln, NE: AdventSource. (Includes materials for eight sermons and seven weeks of daily devotionals and small group Bible studies—Pastor's Manual, Small Group Leader's Guide, Study Guide, promotional materials and PowerPoint slides for sermons.)
- Stewardship Department (n.d.). *Stewardship Brochures*, 12 titles including *What is Equal Sacrifice?*, *What is Stewardship?*, *What is a Steward?* and *Why Should We Tithe?* Lincoln, NE: AdventSource.
- Watts, Wayne (1982). *The Gift of Giving*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.
- Whitney, Donald S. (1991). *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress Publishing Group.

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Articles

Fowler, James A. (n.d.). "Christian Giving: A study of Christian giving emphasizing that the indwelling Spirit of Christ is the Divine Giver within the Christian." Available on line at: www.christinyou.net/pages/xngiving.html

Video and DVDs

Maxson, Ben (2000). *Let God Be God: Biblical Stewardship Foundations*. Silver Spring, MD: General Conference Stewardship Department. (18 video presentations available in VHS and DVD; distributed by AdventSource)

Websites

Empty Tomb is the website published by John and Sylvia Ronsvalle, who have developed the most complete research on the actual giving patterns of churches and Christian believers in the United States. It includes a lot of information, including on how donated funds are actually used: www.emptytomb.com

Generous Giving is a website developed by a group of Christian laity from various denominations who believe in generosity as a Bible teaching. It contains downloadable resource materials, such as Giving Champion's Equipping Guide and video stories (testimonies) of how believers have been blessed by daring to give generously. www.generousgiving.org

Maximum Giving is the website of Brian Kluth, a speaker on giving and related stewardship topics who was until 2009 the senior pastor at First Evangelical Free Church in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Since the fall of 2009 he has been involved full time in speaking, teaching, writing and research. This website includes Bible studies, sermons (print and CD) and many other resource materials on stewardship, giving and financial management. It includes an entire section for finance committees: www.kluth.org/1media.htm

Personal Giving Plan produced by the NAD Stewardship Department is an interactive website with tons of resources including a giving calculator, five different giving options, and guides for young givers: www.personalgivingplan.com

The Stewardship Department of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church maintains an excellent website with many downloadable, free resources that can be used in teaching stewardship principles and answering practical questions about the tithe and offering system of the denomination. This includes print materials and PowerPoint slides: www.adventiststewardship.com

Discussion Questions

1. Share a time when someone gave you a gift with joy. What was it? How did their attitude in giving affect your attitude in receiving?
2. Without too much detail, share a time when someone gave you a grudging gift. What was it? How did their attitude in giving affect your attitude in receiving?
3. Think about times in your life when you gave cheerfully and times when you gave grudgingly. What do you think makes the difference? What can you do?
4. What are some of the other ways you can give to the church besides giving money?
5. What do you think your church needs most, besides money?

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Group Activity

Purpose: To broaden attitudes toward giving, from money to other ways to give, and to find creative ways to consider generosity.

Preparation: You will need three tables, or if that isn't enough for as many small groups of four to six as you will need, then more than one of each of the three. One table or set of tables will be provided with large paper or poster board, crayons, paints, glue, glitter, scissors, and magazines. The second and third table or set of tables will only need writing materials.

Assignment: Explain that there are three options for thinking creatively about giving. Read the three sets of instructions to the group and have each person go to a table that appeals to him or her.

Option 1: At table(s) with art supplies, each person will draw a picture of a field or garden. Use crayons, pencil, paint, cut out pictures, etc. Illustrate a picture of yourself sowing (generously returning) the blessings of God back into the earth. What are those blessings? What is the earth? Where is the seed falling? Where would you like it to fall? What type of crop is coming up? Illustrate cheerful giving and receiving in your picture.

Option 2: Two members of your church are debating the idea that God financially blesses those who are generous toward the church with their material goods. One person believes that "God says this, I believe it." The other takes the viewpoint that "life doesn't always work out that way." At table(s), the group will work together to craft a one-paragraph response to this discussion to illustrate how we may joyfully experience God's abundance when we cheerfully give.

Option 3: At table(s), the group will develop a list of 10 ways people in your congregation might cheerfully exercise the "giving and receiving" principle in their own lives. Be very specific. Be sure to go beyond money (i.e. other material goods, time, talent, etc.).

Debrief: Share some highlights of insights gained, or artwork from the first table(s).

Time: Allow five minutes for giving instructions and getting to the tables, 15 minutes for work at the tables, and another 15 minutes for sharing.

Handout 1

The Cheerful Giver

“Stewardship is the lifestyle of one who has a living relationship with Jesus Christ, accepts His lordship and walks in partnership with God, and acts as His agent to manage His affairs on earth.” (Stewardship Department website)

Scripture Focus: “For everyone who asks, receives; s/he who seeks finds; and to s/he who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your God in heaven give good gifts to those who ask!” (Matthew 7:7-11)

A Fundamental Financial Attitude: We realize that cheerful giving begins with cheerful receiving.

Giving Attitudes: Look over your attitudes toward giving. Are they cheerful? Grudging? What can you do to encourage generosity and discourage selfishness? What is the difference between giving until it hurts and giving until it feels good?

Cheerful Giving Begins with Cheerful Receiving: The church as a human body: Dependent vs. Independent vs. Interdependent. Which are you? In what ways are you all three? Are there changes you would like to make?

“From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.” (Ephesians 4:16) Discover your unique role—what is it? Affirm the uniqueness of others—how can you do this?

A String of Cheerful Giving Pearls: Proverbs 22:24-28 Look up these texts and make your own prayerful notes on insights you gain.

Creatively Applying New Attitudes about Giving: What are the blessings of God that you are most grateful for? What are the gifts you have to give back to God? List five new ways you would like to give:

For Further Bible Study

Psalm 112:9
Proverbs 11:24-28; 19:17

Jeremiah 17:7, 8
Matthew 7:7-11
Luke 6:38; 15:11-32
Acts 20:35
2 Corinthians 9:6-8

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